

Dear Resident,

Re: Chestnut Walk – Project Update and Next Steps

We are writing to update you on the future of the former Chestnut Walk care home and to explain how we plan to bring this unused building back into use. The building has remained empty for several years, and this project aims to restore it as a safe, managed property that benefits both its residents and the surrounding community.

The proposal involves refurbishing the existing building to be used as a 12-bedroom Temporary Supported Accommodation (TSA) unit for West Berkshire residents in housing need. There is no new development associated with the proposal, and no extension of the site is planned. All activity relates to refurbishment designed to deliver safe and modern short-term accommodation. The project helps the Council reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, keep families closer to their support networks, and make better use of a currently unused Council-owned asset.

Next Steps:

- The planning application for change of use has been submitted and will be available on the Council's planning portal under reference [26/00555/REG3]
- Should the application be approved, refurbishment work will begin once approvals and contractors are in place.
- Residents and Hungerford Town Council will continue to receive updates at key stages of the project.

We appreciate your engagement and will ensure there is clear communication as the project progresses. We have also shared a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document alongside this letter to provide further information about the project.

Yours faithfully,

West Berkshire Council



Chestnut Walk for Temporary Supported Accommodation Project – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is proposed for Chestnut Walk?

West Berkshire Council has submitted a Change of Use planning application to bring the empty Chestnut Walk care home back into use as temporary supported accommodation for West Berkshire residents who are in housing need. The building has been vacant for several years and the proposal will allow it to be safely re-occupied and actively managed again. This is not newbuild development and does not involve expanding the footprint of the site.

2. Why is this project needed?

The Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for people who are homeless. The project supports the Council's priority to help vulnerable people and tackle homelessness by providing safe, suitable accommodation for residents who need it. Using existing buildings helps meet this need more quickly and responsibly. At present, many households are placed in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation, which is costly, disruptive for families, and often outside the local area.

Repurposing Chestnut Walk will help:

- Reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation
- Keep households closer to places of work, schools, services and support networks
- Make better use of an existing Council owned building

3. Why was Chestnut Walk chosen?

Chestnut Walk is an existing building that has been vacant for a long period. Refurbishing it helps bring an empty property back into productive use, improves security, and avoids the need for new building.

There is a lack of West Berkshire Council-managed accommodation in the West of the locality - almost all Council-managed accommodation is centred around Newbury and Thatcham. Chestnut Walk will keep people closer to their existing workplaces, schools, services and support networks to help maintain stability and support positive outcomes.

4. Who will live at Chestnut Walk?

The accommodation is intended for local households in housing need, which may include:

- Individuals or couples
- Families with children

There will be private bedrooms available for residents to be placed temporarily, while longer term settled housing solutions are found. The property is also being designed so that sections can be partitioned into self-contained, multi-bedroom family units as needed.

5. How long will people stay? Is this permanent housing?

The site will provide short-term accommodation for residents in immediate housing need. They will be provided with housing-related support to move on to more settled accommodation. It is not proposed as long-term or permanent housing.

Lengths of stay will vary depending on individual circumstances, but the accommodation is designed for short to medium term use. The aim is to move households on to suitable permanent, settled housing as quickly as possible.

6. Will the building be managed and supervised?

Yes. The site would be owned, maintained and managed by West Berkshire Council, aiming to create a safe, respectful and well-run environment for both residents and neighbours. The operating plan includes clear management arrangements, covering:

- Day-to-day property management
- Resident support and behaviour
- Security and safety measures, including CCTV in appropriate communal areas, exits and entrances
- WBC will be responsible for all repairs and maintenance aspects of running the property and the associated grounds maintenance for communal space.

These arrangements will form part of the planning and operational approach to ensure residents are supported and that any issues can be addressed promptly.

7. What about antisocial behaviour?

Antisocial behaviour is a common concern raised by local residents, and it has been explicitly considered as part of the project planning. Bringing the building back into use is expected to improve safety and security locally. The site has been empty for several years and has been subject to break-ins and an arson attack. An occupied and managed building helps reduce these risks, through resident presence, on-site staff, security and CCTV.

Other controls include:

- Careful allocation of households
- Clear house rules and tenancy expectations
- On-going management and swift response to issues

The intention is to ensure Chestnut Walk is a well-run, low impact site that integrates responsibly with the surrounding neighbourhood

8. Will this increase traffic or parking pressure?

Chestnut Walk is an existing residential site, and the use proposed is consistent with that character.

While some additional activity is expected, the scale is limited by:

- The size of the existing building
- The short-term nature of stays
- Experience at similar schemes shows residents rely mostly on public transport

Parking, access and highways considerations will be assessed as part of the planning process.

9. Is a planning application required?

Yes. Planning advice has confirmed that a change of use planning application is required to change the property from its current Class C2 (Residential Institution) to Class C1 (Hotel/ Hostel). Full details of the proposal and information on how to comment can be found on the Council's planning portal.

10. What building works are proposed?

Works would be focused on refurbishment and making the building fit for use, not major structural change. This includes:

- Internal refurbishment
- Accessibility improvements, including wet rooms
- Upgrades to building services where required
- Installation of internal doors to enable wings of the property to be sealed off as self-contained multi-bedroom family units when necessary.

The layout will largely remain as it is, avoiding unnecessary disruption.

11. When will building works commence?

If planning permission is granted, building works will commence after the planning process has concluded and all required approvals are in place. At this stage, no start date has been confirmed. Further information on timescales will be shared once the planning application has been determined, contractors are on board, and a detailed programme is agreed.

12. How will safety be ensured during works?

All works would comply with:

- Health and Safety regulations
- Construction management standards
- Council oversight through Property and H&S teams

Site visits and inspections form part of the project governance.

13. Will local residents and the Parish Council be kept informed?

Yes. The Council recognises the importance of clear and ongoing communication.

Updates will be shared through:

- The planning process
- Engagement with Hungerford Parish Council
- Direct communications with residents where appropriate

14. How can questions or concerns be raised?

Once the planning application is submitted, formal comments can be made through the planning portal. For media enquiries, the Communications team can be contacted using the details provided in the press release.

In addition, the Council will provide contact routes for operational concerns once the site is in use, ensuring issues can be raised and addressed promptly.