

Questions and answers about Bowfell Court



Following consultation events at Urmston Neighbourhood Forum and Urmston Leisure Centre, Manchester Methodist Housing Association has compiled answers to questions asked by local people. We present them here in written format to clarify what is being proposed. If there is anything else you would like to ask, please get in touch with us directly. You will see contact details at the end of this document.

Who is proposing the development?

Manchester Methodist Housing Association, part of Great Places Housing Group, is proposing to build the development and would own and manage it, if it went ahead.

Who would live at the scheme?

It would house single, homeless men and women from Trafford, aged 16 upwards. Residents would come from a variety of different backgrounds, having found themselves homeless for many reasons. These could include family breakdown, divorce and people leaving the armed forces with nowhere to go. People becoming homeless don't always have a network of family and friends to support them. We aim to provide accommodation with support to allow them to get back on their feet and find a permanent place to live.

We might accept residents who are former users of Class A drugs, and people on drug treatment programmes, but NOT people who currently use Class A drugs. We work with Trafford Drug Agencies to ensure that we are provided with drug tests to prove this. We will not tolerate any illegal drug use on our premises and anyone found taking illegal drugs will be asked to leave.

We may accept residents who have mental health issues or past criminal convictions. We would undertake a full risk assessment in conjunction with relevant professionals and we would NOT accept anyone who could pose a risk to the community.

Who would be excluded from the scheme?

Our exclusion policy means that the following people would not be allowed to live at the scheme:

- Class A drug users.
- People with a history of violence
- Arsonists
- Schedule 1 offenders (this refers to sex offences and other offences against children)
- Any other risks that cannot be managed by the scheme

How will the scheme support residents to prepare for independent living?

Each resident would have a support plan to look at targets and goals they need to achieve in order to prepare for independent living. This may include areas such as managing a budget, accessing training and education, completing forms and applying for housing.

In addition, the scheme would also run activities in house to increase residents' self esteem and help them achieve. At Alex House, another homeless scheme in Trafford, a Bike Club was established and cyclists are turning an old shed into a workshop. They recently successfully bid for £1,500 from the Prince's Trust to purchase bikes and tools.

Other residents are at college and some are working part-time. We would accept 16-year-olds and we would work closely with Trafford's Children and Young People's Services, Connexions and the Youth Service to ensure they have the support that they need to move forward towards independent living. We do this successfully in many of our Supported Housing schemes across the North West.

What type of accommodation will be provided?

The scheme would provide accommodation for 22 people who can live independently with support. This means that each resident will have a self-contained one-bedroom flat with their own kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living-dining area. Each resident would have their own front door, around a central courtyard, with the aim of providing a sense of independence within a supportive environment.

Residents could live at the scheme for a maximum of two years. During this time they would be expected to engage with a support worker and sign a support agreement as a condition of their stay. Many residents would move on in between three and 12 months.

Why do you want to build this for homeless people?

Tackling homelessness and its root causes is a priority for Trafford Council. It is important for the council, therefore, that schemes of this nature are provided in the borough.

How are residents assessed before being offered accommodation?

All would-be residents would undertake a thorough application process before they could be accepted. This would include following up references from previous land-

lords and other agencies. A risk assessment would be carried out to make sure that they pose no risk to staff, residents or to the local community.

The risk assessment would be carried out by staff who would take into account all background information gathered about the applicant. We would work in conjunction with professionals from other organisations such as health and social services when carrying out risk assessments.

How would you manage residents' behaviour?

Residents would sign a licence agreement which is a type of occupancy agreement and sets out how they should behave. They also have to abide by house rules. If house rules or the terms of the licence are breached then action will be taken against the resident which could mean them being made to leave the project. In the instance of a serious incident, a resident can be asked to leave the scheme immediately. In our experience however, serious incidents are rare.

Would residents and their visitors hang around outside the scheme?

No. We wouldn't allow groups of people to hang around outside the scheme. As with our other projects, residents would have their own flat and other communal areas that they can use inside the building. Residents hanging around outside has not been an issue at our other schemes. We would also run activities and training sessions in the scheme and many residents would attend college, training or work.

Would there be an office at the scheme manned by the police?

No. We would not house anyone we feel would be a risk to other residents, our staff, or the local community. There would be no need for the police to have a constant presence at the scheme.

Would there be a 6ft high wall around the site?

It is standard for all modern property developments, whether for general needs, supported or shared ownership to be surrounded by a perimeter fence or wall.

We have a standard height for boundaries, rear between 1.8m and 2.1m, dividing is 1.5m and the front 0.9 to 1m. Although we have these standards we appreciate that every site is different and therefore we revise these heights to what is suitable or existing. For example if an adjoining property has an existing boundary, and the owner agrees for us to share this, then we would of course do this.

As the proposed scheme is in a residential area we decided to use brick walls in place of timber fencing or metal railings, to fit in with the surrounding buildings and also to offer higher levels of privacy to the surrounding residents.

Why would there be a need for Closed Circuit TV?

CCTV would be in place at the scheme so that staff can see all areas of the property all the time to prevent unwanted people from entering the scheme. We have no concerns

about our residents climbing over walls as they would be free to come and go as they wish through the front entrance.

Why would 24 hour staffing be required?

Although the residents of the scheme would be encouraged to live independently, we appreciate that given their varied support needs, this is not always possible. It is important that our residents understand that there is always someone on hand nearby to help them at any time of the day or night should they need it. There are also health and safety reasons for 24 hour staffing, for example if there was a fire then staff would be responsible for the evacuation of the building.

Would there be a curfew in place at the scheme?

No. Residents are free to come and go at any time. However as our aim is to get our tenants used to living within a community and maintaining their own tenancy, it is important that they live in an environment that is as much like a normal tenancy as possible

What would your policy be on visitors?

Visitors would be allowed but they would need to leave the scheme by 11pm and they would not be allowed to stay overnight.

Would residents of the scheme pay rent?

Yes all residents would pay rent in the same way as any tenants in rented property would. If a resident is claiming benefits, rent could be paid by housing benefit but if a resident is working, they would be responsible for some or all of the rent. Residents would also pay a weekly service charge to cover the communal areas of the site. The total combined rent and service charge would be about £120 per week. All residents would be liable for their own utility bills and council tax.

Why have you chosen this site, given its proximity to a number of local schools and other vulnerable groups?

We have liaised with Trafford Council over the need for a re-provision of the Alexandra House scheme. We worked with a number of partners including the Council, Housing Corporation and Supporting People to find a suitable site.

The search for land for phase two of the redevelopment started in July 2007 and the Bowfell Court site became available in March 2008. Based on various criteria, including proximity to amenities and transport links, as well as the size of the site, we decided to proceed with the proposal for this site.

When we plan our supported housing schemes, we choose residential areas rather than industrial ones because our residents need to be able to access local services such as health and education, as they would do in any ordinary tenancy. As we have already mentioned, we would carry out a risk assessment to make sure would-be residents would not pose a risk to the local community.

Where would the residents park?

There would be six parking spaces provided at the front of the scheme. From our experience of working with homeless people, we know that they are unlikely to own a car. The car parking spaces are therefore mostly for the use of staff at the scheme and any visitors.

Does MMHA currently have any similar schemes that are close to schools or playgroups?

MMHA manages a number of supported schemes across the region. Of those, the following schemes are close to schools:

- Christine Court, a mother and baby scheme in Altrincham is on the same road as a junior school
- Next Step, a supported housing project for men with mental health needs in Gorton is opposite a primary school
- A scheme for homeless men in Bolton which is close to a nursery and playschool
- Alexandra House, the existing scheme in Altrincham, is next-door-but-one to an independent girls' junior school. There is also a playgroup across the road which shares use of the scheme's car park
- Rodney Street, a scheme for homeless women aged 16-54 in the centre of Liverpool is on the same road as a small infants' school. The scheme is also in the middle of the business community in Liverpool
- MMHA manages a heavy drinkers' project in Didsbury which is next door to a private prep school

Would local residents be able to access services in the scheme?

Yes. Services such as the laundry and access to the internet would be available to local residents. We would also offer use of the communal lounge for local residents' meetings.

Have there been any issues with residents at previous schemes?

For all our schemes, it is important that we have a good relationship with local residents and wherever problems do arise we make it a priority to resolve them as best we can.

Despite our rigorous checks there are rare occasions when we may encounter a problem with a resident. There was a recent case which some of you have highlighted about a man at Alex House. Police took the appropriate action.

We have successfully moved 20 people into independent accommodation from Alex House in the last year and this was one case where we were unsuccessful.

We fully appreciate that residents near to a site for a proposed supported scheme may have concerns. We undertake full consultation for all of our supported developments to help local residents understand that we do not believe that such schemes pose a risk to the local community.

How would you obtain this land?

MMHA is a registered social landlord and is governed and funded by The Housing Corporation, which is a government

body and will be providing about 40% funding for the building costs. We would buy the site at open market value.

Why can't the current property in Altrincham be renovated?

The building is no longer fit for the purpose. Refurbishment isn't a possibility as the building could not be converted to provide modern, self-contained flats for residents that we know benefit their efforts to move towards independent living. Demolishing the building and building a new one on the same site would mean residents would have nowhere to live in the meantime. If the Bowfell Court proposal goes ahead, we will work with Trafford Council to look at what they would like us to do with the Altrincham site.

Will the development have a negative impact on house prices in the local area?

In our experience this has never happened around our other schemes, and we do not expect it to happen here.

Why are there people working on site already?

When we consider whether to put in a planning application, a report needs to be prepared to outline what the site is like at the moment and what would need to be done to it. This can involve checking the land for potential issues such as those surrounding contamination from previous use. MMHA is meeting all the costs for this work.

When will a planning application be submitted?

We are currently bringing together all the feedback from our consultation events. We will summarise this and see if any amendments to the proposals are necessary, based on what local residents have told us. We aim to submit a planning application by the end of this year.

Why aren't you having a public meeting?

We had a good turnout at the public consultation events and have received plenty of feedback about our proposal. We feel this question and answer factsheet is the best way to answer questions, so that people can consider the proposal in their own time. We are happy to talk through anything you don't think we have covered.

We hope this fact sheet has answered your questions. For more information please contact:

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