

Planning statement for change of use application for 22 Abbotsbury Road from C1 (Hotel) to C2 (Residential Institutions)

How people would use the building

The Weymouth Recovery Hub would provide:

- A programme of group therapy to help people committed to no longer using alcohol or other drugs maintain their recovery
- Support for people in recovery to return to their community and take part in education, voluntary work or paid employment
- Safe, secure and convenient overnight accommodation for people who have stable housing to return to, are assessed as low-risk, and who may wish to access these courses and/or complete the final days of physical withdrawal from alcohol and other drugs in a sympathetic and encouraging environment. These stays would generally last for up to a week.

Dorset County Council, in its capacity as a commissioner of healthcare, was successful in an application for capital funding from Public Health England to develop a Recovery Hub, which would be a facility for Dorset County Council residents only. The bid was in line with evidence and national good practice, and was developed specifically to address an existing service gap in Weymouth.

This project would address two particular challenges within the local treatment system:

- there is a growing proportion of Weymouth & Portland residents who have been engaged in treatment for long periods of time without achieving full recovery - the Hub would offer support, including offering overnight accommodation where needed for people to access the level of support they need to move forward with their recovery
- there are people with alcohol dependence in Weymouth who cannot access a community detoxification as they do not have the necessary overnight support from friends or family to make sure that they stay safe during the detoxification period.

These services would be provided in partnership by staff from the NHS and local charities. The Hub would be for Dorset residents only, and would not accept referrals from elsewhere in the country in the way that private facilities do. The majority of people using the facility would do so as an outpatient, and most would already live in Weymouth and Portland. As a clinically-led treatment service, the Hub would only cater for those who have a booked appointment, and would not be a drop-in centre.

This project would therefore provide the type of support currently offered in other locations both in Weymouth and wider Dorset, but in a more efficient and effective way. We would not intend or expect the number of people accessing this kind of service to increase.

While the majority of the people accessing the facility would do so during the day, there would be up to five beds available for service users to stay overnight. These stays would be for no more than 7-10 days, with the level of occupancy varying from week to week, dependent on local need. These bedrooms would only be used for people who already have secure accommodation to return to (i.e. homeless people would not be able to stay there).

Group sessions would potentially be offered both morning and afternoon with about 10 clients in each group. Any clients resident at the Hub at that time would be included in these numbers and would attend both morning and afternoon groups. The numbers of people moving in and out of the

property should therefore be no more than the existing footfall for a guest house with nine bedrooms.

Everyone attending the Hub would be expected to conform to clear standards of behaviour – there would be a strict daily routine including mealtimes (and waking and bedtimes for anyone resident overnight), as well as restrictions on leaving the property. Use of alcohol or any other drug by service users would not be tolerated, either inside or outside the property.

Why Weymouth?

The development of a recovery hub would help address Weymouth's longstanding issues with alcohol and other drugs. We are able to invest over £0.5million in Weymouth, for the benefit of Weymouth residents, at a time when other local and national funding available for substance misuse services is being reduced.

Within Dorset, Weymouth and Portland has the highest density of people with dependency on either alcohol or other drugs, and over 40% of those who currently access treatment live in Weymouth. The rates of drug use in Weymouth are double that in the county as a whole: 11.9 people per 1000 are estimated to use opiates in Weymouth and Portland, compared to 5.6 people per 1000 population on average across Dorset.¹

To achieve recovery in the long-term, people need to be able to sustain progress in the local community where they live. There is strong evidence, both locally and nationally, that, for the majority of clients, treating people where they live works and is a cost-effective use of public money, rather than using residential rehabilitation.² Particularly in an urban area, the reality is that many of us live in places where both alcohol and other drugs are easily accessible, and therefore people need to learn to stay well in their local community.

The very reason for siting the hub in Weymouth is to ensure the facilities are in the location where the need is greatest– if we site it away from Weymouth, then Weymouth residents and the community will benefit less as they will not be able to get there easily.

Planning Policy Context

A. *Policy for new or improved local community buildings and structures (COM2)*

The West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (adopted in October 2015) provides the relevant statutory planning policy framework for the area. The local plan recognises the value of community infrastructure, stating that 'the provision of community facilities is important for the social wellbeing of the community' (para. 6.3.1). The relevant part of **Policy COM2** states that 'proposals for new, replaced or improved local community buildings will be permitted providing the proposal is within or adjoining an existing settlement ... provided that:

- The proposal would be well-located to be accessible to its main catchment population and would not generate significant additional single purpose trips by private transport; and
- The proposal would not undermine the commercial viability of nearby community facilities which may be better placed to service the needs of the surrounding community'

¹ Source: Public Health England (See <http://fingertipsreports.phe.org.uk/health-profiles/2015/e07000053.pdf> and <http://fingertipsreports.phe.org.uk/health-profiles/2015/e10000009.pdf>)

² See, for example, Department for Work and Pensions (2015) [Understanding the costs and savings to public service of different treatment pathways for clients dependent on opiates.](#)

The current proposal meets both of these criteria. As noted above, and evidenced in the technical appendix, the location is accessible for the target group without requiring additional private transport trips, and there is currently no comparable or commercial facility that is not linked into ongoing broader service development work co-ordinated by Public Health Dorset.

It is important to note that if the facility were located outside of Westham or Melcombe Regis, where the need for the service is highest, the first of these criteria would not be met.

B. Policy for built tourist accommodation (ECON6)

The local plan makes specific reference to the importance of retaining viable tourism accommodation. Paragraph 4.5.15 states that the loss of stock needs to be carefully considered, particularly with regard to the hotels and larger guesthouses in the area, but recognises that 'changes in the market will mean that some types of built tourist accommodation may become less attractive to visitors, and if the offer cannot be improved, falling profits would result in poorly maintained and ultimately failing accommodation, neither of which is a desirable outcome'. It therefore advocates 'a flexible approach'.

This is reflected in **Policy ECON6**, which therefore states: 'Proposals that would result in the permanent loss or reduction in size of hotels and larger guesthouses will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that their tourist function is no longer viable and there is no market for the business as a going concern'.

In order to guide any decision on this basis, the local plan advises that any relevant application should 'demonstrate that real effort has been made to retain the tourist accommodation', and evidence should include:

- Reasons why there is no longer a market for the premises in its tourist function;
- Details of how the property has been marketed, the length of time that the marketing was active and any changes during this period, the asking price, the level of interest generated and any offers received;
- In the case of a reduction in size, the economic impact on the ongoing viability of the business.

The last of these three criteria is not applicable to this proposal, and we are able to demonstrate that the other two criteria have been met. The current owners are not able to run the business as solely tourist accommodation, and have received no offers from potential buyers interested in maintaining its current use, despite the property being on the market for an extended period of time, and the asking price being reduced on several occasions.

The experience of the current owners is that in recent years the demand for traditional 'bed and breakfast' accommodation in this area has dwindled rapidly, as evidenced by their perception that nearby properties and businesses have become increasingly mixed in nature.

The lack of a market for tourist accommodation of this type, in this location, is evidenced by the current use of this specific property. The current owners have confirmed that over 50% of their business comes not from tourists but short-term occupants seeking longer-term affordable housing.

The lack of demand for this kind of facility in this area is also evidenced by the market response to this specific property. The property has been marketed subject to its existing use for over two and a half years, with a reduction in the asking price of £95,000 in this period, and only nine viewings in total.

The estate agent has advised that most of those enquiring about and/or viewing the property have been interested in converting the property back to a single dwelling or flats. Only two parties have

expressed any interest in retaining the property as a guest house, and neither of these translated into an offer for the property.

This suggests that, where there is a market for tourist accommodation of this nature and this size in Weymouth, it may lie elsewhere in the town, for example in the more traditional seafront locations, making Westham a preferred location for the Recovery Hub proposal, ahead of Melcombe Regis.

The property was originally on the market for £420,000, with the price dropping substantially over the marketing period due to the lack of interest. The final two reductions in the asking price were to £350,000 in March 2015 and £325,000 in December 2015. The agents have advised that no acceptable offers have been received for the property, aside from that from Dorset County Council.

Why 22 Abbotsbury Road?

The search for suitable properties in Weymouth in terms of location, size and affordability has been limited by the market of available properties. The majority of those identified have been either in Melcombe Regis or Westham, which are the areas of Weymouth where analysis shows need for this service is greatest, as outlined in the Technical Appendix.

As noted above, these areas can demonstrate a good match with local need, consistent with the aims of Policy COM2, while the market evidence would indicate that Westham (and 22 Abbotsbury Road in particular) is a better fit based on Policy ECON6.

In addition, Dorset County Council has received advice from Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and the broader Melcombe Regis Task Group, that while they are supportive of the project they would recommend that the facility should not be sited in the Park District.

In identifying properties, Dorset County Council drew together an expert group of local professionals, service users, charities, the Police and partner organisations. The criteria for identifying potential properties were:

- Location – accessibility from the centre of Weymouth. Many service users do not have access to private transport and so are dependent on public transport.
- Private outdoor space to reduce the need for service users to congregate outside the property.
- Adequate space to accommodate 1:1 consulting space, group therapy space, dining area and kitchen, bedrooms and office space.
- Affordability – ability to buy and refurbish the property to a high standard within the available budget

After extensive research of available properties, plus viewing in person more than 10 commercial and residential properties across the area (including Upwey, Chickerell, Westham and Melcombe Regis), the final recommendation on a preferred property was made after consultation with our expert group. The decision was based on identifying the property which offered the best balance between location, meeting service needs, affordability and deliverability.

22 Abbotsbury Road offers the right package of space to meet the specific needs of a hub, with a combination of short-term residential rooms and communal space. In addition, it is well located in a mixed-use area. As well as other guest houses and privately-owned houses, there is also a hairdresser, pharmacy, cycle shop, GP surgery, charity shop and insurance broker. We do not believe that the Hub would materially alter the character of the area.

Accessibility

Abbotsbury Road is easily accessed by public transport. It is on a bus route and is within walking distance of other local bus routes and the train station. Its location would work well in terms of serving the target community and it would comply with Policy COM 2 of the adopted local plan.

Staffing

When treatment is being provided in the Hub there is likely to be an average of two members of staff on site. There would also be 24/7 cover when any service users are staying overnight. This is comparable to the staffing levels in the current guesthouse.

Parking

We expect and would encourage the majority of service users attending the Hub to use public transport. Staff parking (three spaces) is allocated within the site at present and would remain unchanged, given the continuity of staffing levels. Overall, as there would be fewer people staying in this facility overnight than the current nine-room guest house, we would expect our proposal to reduce local traffic and parking pressure. This would be in accordance with the adopted local plan.

Internal configuration

We are acutely aware of the need to ensure that the proposed Hub would not impact on the next-door property so, for example, within the refurbishment budget there would be funding to improve sound-proofing if required (although we anticipate that noise from this facility should be less than from the existing guesthouse given the type and level of use, and the behaviour rules that would be in place in the facility, as outlined above).

We would look to refurbish the interior of the property, including some minor alterations to the layout and use of rooms, as outlined in the floorplans submitted with this application.

External appearance

22 Abbotsbury Road is a semi-detached property of Victorian/Edwardian character which is residential in scale and appearance.

The external appearance of 22 Abbotsbury Road would be broadly unchanged.

- The current front garden space would be kept as a garden.
- There would be discreet signage next to the front door, similar to the signage on the door of Turning Point (Drug Intervention Project), next to Bluebird Coaches on the Esplanade in Weymouth.
- The project could fund the installation of CCTV which would address the crime and antisocial behaviour that the neighbours report in and around Holland Road.
- The small enclosed courtyard at the back of the property would be kept, to provide sufficient outdoor space for service users to relax.
- Minor internal alternations to the room layout on the first floor would require us to install a window, adjacent to the existing first-floor window on the Holland Road elevation. This is needed to provide daylight and ventilation. The new window opening would match the current one.

A community benefit and resource

This site has been identified following a comprehensive search locally for suitable alternatives. The proposed use would have significant economic and social benefits to the community.

This change of use would provide employment directly related to the premises at least equivalent to that of the current guesthouse, and would increase the economic and social potential of the wider community. The proposed use would encourage recovery in the local community, which has been shown to increase employment rates and community volunteering, at the same time as reducing costs to local healthcare services and the criminal justice system.

The Hub would also provide space for a variety of community organisations to use, such as Job Centre Plus, housing associations, and Citizens Advice, alongside recovery-oriented treatment covering employment, education, training, housing and health, plus mutual aid meetings.

People in recovery are almost twice as likely to volunteer in community groups compared to other members of the public, for example, and it is estimated that achieving recovery makes you more than twice as likely to further your education or training.³

The Sheffield Hallam University study from which these figures are taken surveyed more than 800 people classing themselves as in recovery, recovered, ex-addicts or in medication-assisted recovery and noted:

- **The impact of recovery on families** with marked reductions in children being taken into care and clear net benefits in terms of family reunifications, particularly among those in stable recovery. Twelve per cent of people in recovery had been reunited with children taken into care as a result of a stable recovery, with huge benefits to society in terms of child well-being and reduced costs to society.
- **The impact of recovery on the economy** with 74 per cent of those in recovery reporting that they have remained steadily employed and 70 per cent reporting that they pay taxes - recovery is also associated with debts being paid back and credit ratings restored
- **The impact of recovery on health** with marked reductions on the burden to the health system, through both reduced engagement with chronic and acute healthcare
- **The impact of recovery on people's safety** with rates of domestic violence dropping from 39 per cent in active addiction to less than seven per cent in recovery
- **The impact of recovery on the wider community** with 79.4 per cent of participants reporting that they have volunteered in community or civic groups since the start of their recovery journeys

³ <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/mediacentre/volunteering-and-working-are-central-addiction-recovery>

Supporting statements

Dorset Police have provided the following statement in relation to this project:

On 14 February 2017 a public consultation meeting was organised by EDAS (Essential Drug and Alcohol Services) at the Westham Methodist Church in Newstead Road to discuss community concerns relating to their proposed Recovery Hub at 22 Abbotsbury Road.

The Weymouth and Portland Neighbourhood Inspector, Pete Browning, attended in order to address any questions regarding public safety, crime and disorder. During the meeting residents expressed understandable concerns about the impact of the proposed hub on their neighbourhood. Inspector Browning was able to share experience from other similar projects already operating within the area that seek to tackle the health problems associated with addiction. The proposed model would provide a service to those who are already engaged in the process of rehabilitation and are therefore far less chaotic in their behaviour than people who attend centres before reaching this stage in their recovery. As a consequence there is very little crime associated with these centres as they are staffed and have close contact with their local Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT). Anyone intent on dealing drugs would naturally tend to avoid these areas as they are more likely to be seen by police or medical professionals.

The area around Abbotsbury Road has a variety of uses including housing, guesthouses and some commercial properties and has an experienced NPT that is already engaged with tackling drug dealing within the town. This team will work closely with any proposed recovery hub to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place and regular contact is made to quickly identify areas of concern within the community.

Alan Champion, Addictions Services Manager, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust

I am writing in my capacity as the service manager for Dorset Healthcare substance misuse services. I have been involved in the Weymouth Hub project as part of the task group looking at appropriate accommodation. The property in question is in an ideal location for the majority of the Weymouth service users and will offer a significant additional facility to help local residents towards recovery. This is a great opportunity to improve the range of treatments and interventions on offer in an area that has a significant level of problems and I believe that the impact within the community can only be positive.

In my many years' experience of working in substance misuse services in a variety of settings, I have often been in a position where apprehension has been expressed about facilities for our service users. However, these concerns have never been realised as people who use treatment facilities are those who want to make changes, on the whole they appreciate and respect these facilities and are the first to challenge anyone who abuses them. I would like to offer my full support, and that of the CADAS staff, to the development of the Weymouth Hub and we look forward to being part of the future developments.

Mike Graham, Project Manager, The Lantern Trust

I am writing in my capacity as the Project Manager of the Lantern Trust in Weymouth. We are situated within Melcombe Regis and are central in the support of several client groups, including those with substance misuse issues, in one of the most deprived electoral wards in Dorset. One of the biggest barriers for our client group is access to local treatment for detox, which this facility will offer. One of the biggest advantages of having an accessible service is the element of meeting the needs of the service user when they are showing commitment to recover from substance misuse. A

localised service would also benefit from already established services like the Lantern Trust who would endeavour to assist clients before, during and after their engagement in the proposed treatment centre on Abbotsbury Road. The range of detox services has reduced locally and a Weymouth Hub is essential in assisting people with their recovery. My experience is that when individuals have shown a level of commitment to their recovery they tend to respect their surroundings and challenge abuse of such facilities.

Technical Appendix

1. Research on substance misuse treatment

Substance misuse treatment is currently provided within Dorset in line with guidelines provided by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the latest best practice advice from Public Health England (PHE) and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

Alcohol and other drugs cause serious problems not only for the user, but for their family and the community around them. Nationally 27% of serious case reviews mention alcohol misuse, and 29% mention drug use. A typical heroin user spends around £1,400 on drugs each month, but treatment significantly reduces this, and the crime often committed as a result. PHE estimates that for every £1 spent on drug treatment in the UK, £2.50 is delivered in savings to the health service and criminal justice system and wider community.⁴

Research published by the Department for Work and Pensions suggests that treating people in their own community, as most Dorset residents are, and as is proposed in this project, is good practice and cost effective.⁵

The Dorset treatment system currently produces outcomes above the England average for all types of substance use, and this project aims to improve these outcomes further.⁶

2. Local need in Weymouth

As outlined in the main section of this statement, Weymouth has the largest number and highest concentration of individuals with substance misuse issues of any locality in the Dorset County Council area, as shown in the table below:

Area	Number of service users
Weymouth	531
Bridport, Beaminster & Lyme Regis	191
Purbeck	182
East Dorset	180
Dorchester	158
Blandford	142
Shaftesbury & Gillingham	120
Portland	94
Sherborne & Sturminster Newton	88

This table shows the number of service users accessing support over the course of the 2016 calendar year by home address. The localities have been designed to give an accurate and nuanced picture of Dorset, while ensuring service users remain anonymous, even when the data are segmented.

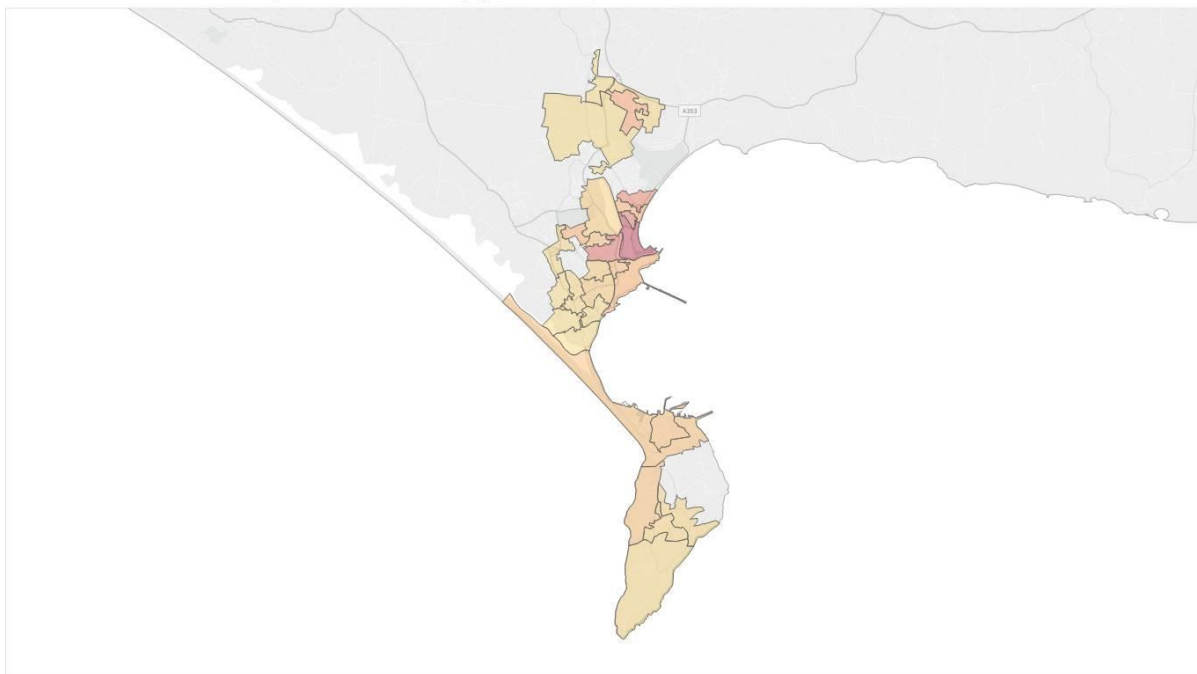
⁴ Source: <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/why-invest-2014-alcohol-and-drugs.pdf>

⁵ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-costs-and-savings-to-public-services-of-different-treatment-pathways-for-clients-dependent-on-opiates>

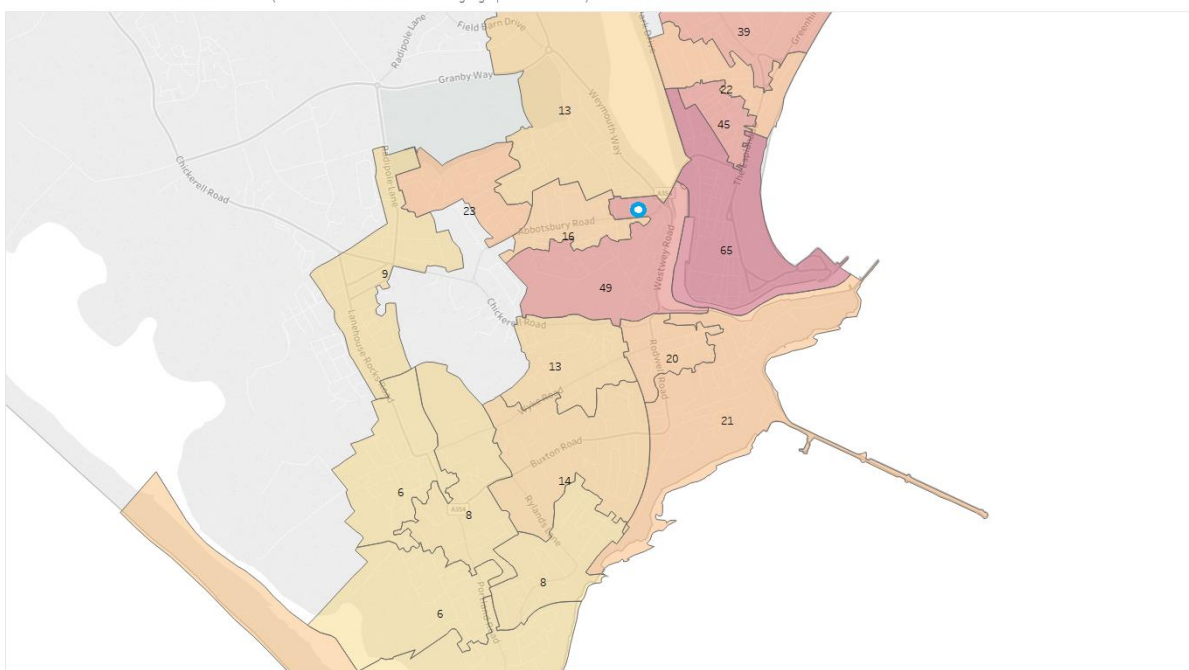
⁶ Source: <http://www.phoutcomes.info/>

When we look at Weymouth in more detail, we can see that Melcombe Regis and Westham are the areas with the highest number of people accessing substance misuse treatment services, as shown by the map below. The spectrum of colour shows the number of clients accessing support, with the areas most in need shown in red. The proposed site of the Hub, illustrated approximately by a blue and white circle on the second map below, is centrally located in the area of highest need for these services.

Clients in Structured Treatment Financial Year 2016-17 by LSOA
 LSOAs with less than 6 individuals are not shown (Note: 19 clients did not have valid geographic information)



Clients in Structured Treatment Financial Year 2016-17 by LSOA
 LSOAs with less than 6 individuals are not shown (Note: 19 clients did not have valid geographic information)



Localities shown are Lower Super Output Areas – government approved units of analysis that typically comprise around 1,500 residents.