

PLANNING REF : 251396
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 62 Ryhill Way
: Reading, Berkshire
: RG6 4AZ
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Colin Wood
DATE SUBMITTED : 30/06/2025

COMMENTS:

I am writing to object to Planning Application 251396 for the conversion of the garages at 60 Ryhill Way into additional HMO space to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (UASCs). My objection is based on issues of both principle and of practice - in short, this planning application is incompatible with the character of the local community, lacks transparency, misuses public funds, and risks damaging both community confidence and the wellbeing of its intended residents.

Incompatible with Neighbourhood Character

Ryhill Way and its adjoining streets is part of a well-established, low-density estate of private, single-family homes. An HMO of any kind would be out of character in such an area and would raise objections. Accommodating multiple residents in a high-density, semi-institutional setting is even more out of character, and represents an inappropriate intensification of use. Furthermore, the transient nature of occupancy, with residents turning 18 and being required to move on, implies high-turnover in the home which further departs from the long-term residential stability of the area.

Impact on Local Property Values and Confidence

Regardless of actual market movements, the perception of risk to house prices is real and widespread. Confidence in an area is a central determinant of property value and community health. A high-turnover HMO of this nature, introduced without notice or consultation, with no track record of being able to contain potential issues, such as noise, loitering or anti-social behaviour, and which is now seeking to maximise housing capacity, erodes that confidence and introduces material uncertainty to the housing market. I am aware of one house sale that has fallen through as a direct result of the buyer becoming aware of this HMO.

For many local residents, their home is their primary investment and place of safety. The idea that this investment - and their way of life - can be materially altered without consultation, due process, or accountability has been understandably experienced as deeply unjust.

Lack of Consultation and Process Transparency

No consultation was undertaken with residents in the local community or, according to early correspondence, even with relevant council departments. Neither planning nor children's services were initially informed of the property's intended use. The Home Affairs Committee's 2024-2025 inquiry into asylum accommodation explicitly condemned such practices, noting that lack of consultation with residents and local authorities has contributed to community tension, safeguarding failures, and operational breakdowns. This lack of transparency has been keenly felt by the community and

has undermined trust in the council, the homeowner, the applicant and the planning process.

Contradiction with Local Planning Policy

The proposed development stands in tension with key provisions of Wokingham Borough Council's Local Plan Update (2023-2040), which emphasises preserving and maintaining neighbourhood character, appropriate density, and high-quality design. This application would not be compatible with those objectives and should therefore be rejected on the basis of local planning principles alone.

Financial Incoherence and Policy Contradiction

The property in question is valued at approximately 850,000 - more than three times the average, and in the top 3% of all UK house prices. This raises serious questions of accountability and fiscal responsibility. While the government has stated its intention to reduce costs by withdrawing from hotel use, this alternative - placing asylum seekers in high-value properties in affluent areas - is incoherent and contradictory.

There is no defensible public value case for selecting such an asset for public use. If benchmarked against available alternatives - such as more cost-effective dispersed housing or purpose-built temporary accommodation - this model would be among the least efficient uses of public funds and should not be entertained by public officials at any level.

The Home Affairs Committee's inquiry has been damning of the opportunism and wastefulness of such practices, including widely reported overspend, profiteering and wastefulness at the expense of the public purse. The National Audit Office and others have catalogued similar issues. Seen against the current climate of rising costs, when many households can't afford their basics, there is no justification for this kind of practice.

Conclusion

This proposal fails across every relevant axis: it is out of keeping with the local context, fiscally reckless, procedurally opaque, and socially destabilising. More importantly, it is emblematic of the very failings identified by Parliament, the NAO and others, in the asylum accommodation system - widely and rightly criticised. This should not be perpetuated at the local level, making the council complicit.

The Council has both the hard evidence of past failings and the grounds of present objections, reiterated by many affected residents, to refuse this application outright, in line with its stated values, planning objectives, and fiscal and social duty. I urge you to do so.