

Asylum seekers update for PPC 6 March 2024

Noke closure – The Noke hotel is closing on 28 March. The 70+ asylum seekers still living there will be dispersed, but they don't know where to yet. They are very anxious as they could be moved to the Bibby Stockholm barge in Dorset, Wethersfield Airfield site in Braintree, or anywhere in the country. We need large zipped laundry bags for them, as they are only allowed to take 2 cases each.

Home Office interviews – The Home Office is speeding up asylum decisions after 2nd interviews. Those asylum seekers given Leave to Remain have 28 days to find other accommodation, open a bank account and apply for Universal Credit.

Refugees – We are supporting a few refugees to find accommodation, but SADC will not provide social housing for single men. We are looking at Hatfield, where accommodation is cheaper, although we suggest that if refugees have friends or relatives elsewhere in the UK, they should try to find housing there.

Refugees at Home – We encourage all refugees to apply for short term accommodation through Refugees at Home <https://refugeesathome.org/about-us/> and we are looking for hosts in the St Albans area.

St Albans Cathedral – We are working ecumenically with the Cathedral to try to support refugees locally. We had a stall at the Cathedral on Sunday to explain about Refugees at Home and asked parishioners to consider being hosts. I would like to do this again after Masses in St Barts in the next week or so.

St Albans District Council – The Council have recently employed a Refugee Resettlement Support Officer who has been to our group, and the Cathedral, and other organisations who work with asylum seekers and refugees. Sadly, she cannot offer direct support, but is working towards the Council becoming a Council of Sanctuary.

YMCA – I took a new refugee to an interview at the YMCA in Hatfield. He has been accepted as a potential resident there, but needs to wait for a vacancy.

Homelessness in St Albans – Open Door is a night shelter for the homeless in St Albans, but only has 12 beds. I expect an increase in homelessness among the refugees from the Noke when the hotel closes.

College courses – Many asylum seekers are in the middle of English courses at Oaklands College or West Herts College. We hope they will be able to find courses near their new addresses when they move.

Bikes – We have delivered over 50 bikes to asylum seekers at the Noke. We have said that if the asylum seekers are moved within 30 miles of St Albans, we will deliver their bikes to them. Otherwise we will collect and re-distribute the bikes to other hotels in Herts.

Leaving meal – We organised a leaving meal for our group of asylum seekers on 29 February. They really enjoyed the variety of different foods, and the opportunity to all eat together.