# Lower Beeding wrestles with social tensions as historic hotel becomes asylum seeker accommodation



With its wood-panelled rooms, health club, and picturesque grounds, the Cisswood House Hotel in Lower Beeding was once a cherished venue for weddings and leisurely retreats. Originally established in 1928 as a country home for Harrods' chairman Sir Woodman Burbidge, the hotel was well-loved by local residents who frequented its cozy bar and enjoyed its swimming pool and gym. However, since its closure in January 2022 due to financial pressures intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, the hotel's role has dramatically shifted.

In March 2023, Cisswood House was repurposed to serve as accommodation for approximately 160 asylum seekers, including many children, relocated from urban centres like Tower Hamlets in London. This sudden transition has stirred a divisive response within the small community of Lower Beeding, where the population stands at about 1,000. While some residents advocate for compassion and understanding towards the migrants, others have voiced grievances over the noise, littering, and perceived decline in the area's safety and quality of life.

The Home Office's decision to use the hotel in such a capacity has sparked lively debates among villagers. According to the local parish council, families of various nationalities are now sharing the space, an attempt to utilise the vacant property amidst increasing pressures on the asylum system across the country. Figures from recent reports illustrate the scale of the challenge, with the expected Government bill for asylum accommodation skyrocketing from £4.5 billion to £15.3 billion for the decade beginning in 2019. These staggering costs highlight a broader crisis in the country's approach to managing asylum seekers, evidenced by nearly 400 hotels across the UK currently serving as temporary shelters.

Residents have expressed various concerns, particularly regarding the impact on local amenities and property values. Nick and Becky Illes, who live next to the hotel, described their experiences—complaining of excessive noise from children using the car park as a playground late into the evening and an increase in litter, which they claim often includes unpleasant finds from their dogs. Mr Illes noted a troubling rise in crime since the migrants’ arrival, stating, “We used to leave our cars unlocked because we never had any crime around here, but since the migrants arrived, we have had stuff stolen three times.”

Lewis Hayward, another nearby resident, echoed these sentiments, emphasising the disruption caused by noise and the deterioration of the hotel's grounds, which had once been well-maintained. He remarked, “The management have left the grounds to get completely overgrown… the noise is non-stop and every single night.” Although the hotel’s former purpose as a community hub is long gone, some locals miss the social benefits once generated by its operation.

While several members of the community have shared frustrations, others have taken a more charitable view. Many residents stress the need for empathy towards the newcomers. A local mother expressed her interactions with these families, describing them as kind and appreciative. She noted, “There are no teenagers loitering around at night… when there was a car crash down the road a few months ago, the dads came out and wanted to help.” This perspective reflects a belief that integration could enrich the village rather than detract from it.

The complex dynamics surrounding the hotel’s repurposing highlight the broader theme of societal tension regarding migration in rural areas. Local infrastructure struggles to accommodate the sudden influx, with already limited transport services and school placements facing additional pressure. The government claims that this use of hotels is only a temporary measure, aimed at providing safe and secure accommodation for those seeking asylum. However, the residents' calls for greater support and resources, including improved educational facilities for the children, underscore a growing awareness of the need for thoughtful, sustainable approaches to community integration.

The situation is not unique to Lower Beeding; it reflects a nationwide challenge as the UK’s strategy surrounding asylum has evolved amid rising numbers of individuals seeking refuge. With approximately 166,000 asylum claims currently pending, and many families seeking a place to live, the balance between community development and humanitarian response remains at a tipping point.

Ultimately, the residents of Lower Beeding find themselves grappling with the dual demands of compassion for those in distress and the practical consequences of their immediate circumstances. As this historic hotel transforms from a treasured community spot to a temporary refuge, the discussions surrounding its future will likely shape the character of the village for years to come.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2
2. Paragraphs 3-4
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7. Paragraphs 12-13

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14694779/100-year-old-hotel-Sussex-village-house-migrants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/people/decision-to-house-refugees-at-historic-horsham-hotel-divides-opinions-4082382> - In March 2023, the Home Office began housing asylum seekers at the historic Cisswood House Hotel in Lower Beeding, near Horsham. This decision sparked divided opinions among local residents, with some expressing concerns over the hotel's history and others supporting the initiative to utilize the vacant property for housing refugees. The hotel, originally built in 1928 for the chairman of Harrods, had ceased trading in January 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent uncertainties. The local parish council confirmed the accommodation of several families from different nationalities, who were relocated from Tower Hamlets, London. Discussions were initiated to find new school placements for the children affected by the move. A Home Office spokesperson emphasized the UK's commitment to providing safe and secure accommodation for those seeking asylum, stating that the use of hotels is intended as a short-term measure. The spokesperson also highlighted the importance of considering each asylum application on its individual merits, with the goal of granting refuge to those in genuine need and ensuring the departure of individuals found not to require protection.
* <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/people/hotel-near-horsham-procured-by-the-government-to-house-asylum-seekers-4080725> - In March 2023, the Cisswood House Hotel in Lower Beeding, near Horsham, was procured by the UK government to house asylum seekers. The hotel had been closed to the public since January 2022 when its managing company, Royel Hotels, announced its intention to enter voluntary liquidation due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainties surrounding the Omicron outbreak. The Lower Beeding Parish Council confirmed that several families of different nationalities were being accommodated at the hotel after being moved at short notice from accommodation in Tower Hamlets, London. The families were provided with food, but additional support appeared limited. Discussions were underway to find new school places for the children affected by the relocation. A Home Office spokesperson reiterated the UK's commitment to granting asylum to those in need and emphasized that the use of hotels is intended as a short-term contingency measure. The spokesperson also noted that the cost of using hotel accommodation is borne by individual contractors who make decisions regarding the premises used.
* <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/business/consumer/hotel-near-horsham-announces-sudden-closure-3523478> - In January 2022, the Cisswood House Hotel in Lower Beeding, near Horsham, announced its sudden closure. The hotel's managing company, Royel Hotels, stated that it was taking steps to place the company into voluntary liquidation due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding the Omicron outbreak. A firm of insolvency practitioners was appointed to assist in the process. The hotel, originally built in 1928 for the chairman of Harrods, had been a popular venue for weddings and events. The closure marked the end of its operations as a hospitality establishment, leading to discussions about the future of the property and its potential redevelopment.
* <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/business/consumer/sussex-hotel-announces-sudden-closure-3524321> - In January 2022, the Cisswood House Hotel in Lower Beeding, near Horsham, announced its sudden closure. The hotel's managing company, Royel Hotels, stated that it was taking steps to place the company into voluntary liquidation due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding the Omicron outbreak. A firm of insolvency practitioners was appointed to assist in the process. The hotel, originally built in 1928 for the chairman of Harrods, had been a popular venue for weddings and events. The closure marked the end of its operations as a hospitality establishment, leading to discussions about the future of the property and its potential redevelopment.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/09/migrants-housed-hotels-nearly-english-counties-analysis-shows/> - In March 2023, it was reported that nearly 400 hotels across the UK were being used to house asylum seekers, with the number of migrants in hotels surpassing 50,000—a 20-fold increase in less than three years. This widespread use of hotels for housing asylum seekers led to significant disruptions, including the closure of hotels to the public and the cancellation of events. The Yew Lodge Hotel in Leicestershire, for example, ceased taking reservations after signing an exclusive use contract with the Home Office to house 250 asylum seekers. The surge in hotel accommodations was attributed to the increasing number of small boat arrivals and the backlog of asylum cases, which now amounted to about 166,000 people. The situation prompted concerns about the strain on local services and the impact on communities hosting asylum seekers.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/20/migrants-housed-almost-400-hotels-across-uk//> - In March 2023, it was revealed that nearly 400 hotels across the UK were being used to house asylum seekers, with the number of migrants in hotels exceeding 50,000—a 20-fold increase in less than three years. This widespread use of hotels for housing asylum seekers led to significant disruptions, including the closure of hotels to the public and the cancellation of events. The Yew Lodge Hotel in Leicestershire, for example, ceased taking reservations after signing an exclusive use contract with the Home Office to house 250 asylum seekers. The surge in hotel accommodations was attributed to the increasing number of small boat arrivals and the backlog of asylum cases, which now amounted to about 166,000 people. The situation prompted concerns about the strain on local services and the impact on communities hosting asylum seekers.