

COMPASS CHILDREN'S HOMES

NAB HILL HOUSE, NAB HILL AVENUE, LEEK CHANGE OF USE FROM DWELLING TO RESIDENTIAL CARE HOME

LPA REFERENCE: SMD/2021/0290

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT – JULY 2021

Introduction

This Supplementary Statement has been prepared in connection with an application submitted on behalf of Compass Children's Homes seeking planning permission for the change of use of Nab Hill House, Nab Hill Avenue, Leek from a dwelling house to a residential care home for up to six young persons.

The application has been the subject of a number of comments from third parties, some of which are misleading and/or inaccurate. Comments made include potential anti-social behaviour, the suitability of the location for the proposed use, potential noise and disturbance, and traffic and car parking considerations. This statement provides a response to such matters.

Some of the objections have come from third parties that do not live in very close proximity to the site. Furthermore, some of the comments raised are not material planning considerations.

Basis for Determining Application

Whilst this matter is already covered in the initial submission, it is a significant material consideration that the site can already be used as a care home for up to six adult residents living together as a single household without the need for planning permission. Such use falls within Class C3. This substantial property could also be occupied by a very large family, with all of the associated day-to-day comings and goings. This fall back position is paramount in assessing the current proposals which, in any case, do not give rise to any adverse planning impacts.

Anti-Social Behaviour

As confirmed in the original application submission, the proposal is for a small, private children's home which will provide for young people (primarily aged 7-17 years) requiring care and therapies to enable them to develop family living, independence and other social skills. They will be educated at one of the applicant's schools, where suitable education and training can be provided.

The daily routine for the children will be similar to that of any child living in a family home – on weekdays they will attend full time education, complete homework, help clean or cook, attend after school clubs etc. At weekends they will engage in activities both at home and away from home (e.g. sports, visiting the cinema, shopping), with the objective of creating a stable and shared family living environment.

In effect, the daily operation of the home will be no different to that of a large dwelling house with the children coming and going for education purposes and the adults coming and going for work purposes.

Typically children will have experienced poor quality or no effective parenting or home life, possibly neglect or abuse and have been starved of love and care. The 'challenges' associated with this are generally related to their belief that, despite the actions of others, they consider it to be their fault, and as a result have low self-esteem and low self-image. A core objective of the service will be to give the children opportunities to learn to value themselves as members of a home and in society.

The child-centred focus allows for tailoring the programme to the young person's individual needs. This home will cater for children who have suffered at the hands of others, sometimes their parents, and as a consequence are both vulnerable and, without help and care, unable to enjoy life in the way that others of their age, in more supportive family environments take for granted.

If it is felt that a child is able to manage free time appropriately then they are allowed to have this. This will be done on an individual basis and based on the child demonstrating they are able to manage such time, and to respect the requirements of polite society.

It is all too easy, and actually unfair, to demonise such children – and please note the word ‘children’ – and suggest they may be drug users, offenders and the like without any evidence or reason. This is not the case and does not reflect the nature of children that the applicant looks after.

This is also not a mental health facility regulated by the CQC; it is a facility regulated by OFSTED and, for example, medication would be of the type found in a typical family home, rather than a hospital.

The therapies involved are generally occupational and talking therapy supervised by qualified staff. The concept of the home is to provide a stable home environment for children who have not so far had the benefit of that, with individual care to support each child with their needs. Staff are trained to care for and provide support to the children at the home, all of whom are carefully assessed to ensure that they are suitable for a home style environment and that they will be able to live with other children in a family style environment.

OFSTED has an important role here, as the relevant regulatory body for children’s homes. It inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages and also inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

To bring the home into the proposed use, the applicant will first need it to be registered as a children’s home with OFSTED. Such registration can only be achieved if OFSTED is satisfied that an appropriate environment and management regime will be in place for the children to be cared for.

Location of Site

Some correspondents have queried whether the site is in a suitable location for the proposed use. However, the applicant would not be proposing to purchase the property for its intended use if it was not satisfied that it was in a suitable location.

Compass Children's Homes have extensive experience up and down the country of providing care for young persons who have a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties and are, therefore, best placed to know whether an individual site and its location are an appropriate environment for the young persons that will be in its care.

Furthermore, and as noted above, OFSTED are the regulator of these uses and would need to be satisfied that the site met its stringent regulation requirements. If OFSTED registration is not secured, the proposed use cannot be brought forward irrespective of whether planning permission has been granted.

The young persons living at the site will not be in any different position than would be the case for children of a traditional family unit if they were living here.

The applicant contends that third parties would not be raising the concerns about locational suitability if a large family with many children occupied the property. Rather these comments appear to be unduly influenced by misplaced views on the nature of the young persons that will reside at the property.

Again, the fallback position is relevant to the consideration of this matter – i.e. the site can already be used as a care home within Class C3 without the need for planning permission.

Traffic & Parking

In terms of vehicular activity, the small scale and low-key nature of the proposed use means that vehicular movements will not be significant and when compared to the existing lawful use will be similar.

The relatively limited number of members of staff will come and go similarly to a parent travelling to and from work daily, and the children will have daily routines just like children living in more traditional family settings. The children will travel to and from school in two vehicles, with up to three in each vehicle.

Furthermore, and as noted above, the site can already be used as a care home for up to six residents without the need for planning permission.

Whilst the site plan indicates parking for up to eight cars, it is not anticipated that all spaces will be occupied. Indeed, there will be times, particularly during the school day, when there will be few people at the site.

The proposed use will not give rise to any traffic or parking effects beyond those which could be generated by the current lawful use of the property – i.e. occupation by a large family or as a care home within Class C3.

Noise & Disturbance

The activity levels arising from the proposed use will be low-key and the existing lawful use as large family dwelling house or, indeed, a care home within Class C3 has the potential to generate the same level of activity (or more) as that from the proposed use. Whilst the application seeks permission for up to six residents, it is likely that at various times there will be fewer than six residents at the site.

The children will be educated off-site and will be taken to and from school as would occur in a family setting. Therefore, on most days between 8am and 5pm activity levels at the site will be minimal.

Out of school hours, the young persons will not be allowed to explore the local area unsupervised. Rather, those who have gained the requisite independence skills will be taken to and from activities such as a sports centre. All children will have differing levels of independence which is continually assessed. In general, most children are supported most of the time when away from home or school.

Despite the apparent assertions of some objectors, the proposal is for a 'home' for these children. It will be their residence and will be managed no differently than a more traditional family home. It is not an institutional setting but one that will provide a home environment for

a small number of children who require support, set within its own grounds of about one acre.

It is also important to note that the proposed use is residential both in character and in planning terms. Care homes are residential uses by definition and, therefore, compatible in planning terms with other forms of residential use.

Finally on this matter, it is noted that the Council's Environmental Health Officer has not raised any objection relating to potential noise and disturbance from the proposed use.