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Leek
Staffs
ST13 8BZ

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Mr Ben Hurst
Planning Officer
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Stockwell Street
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OBJECTION TO: SMD/2021/0290 Change of use from a dwelling house (class 3) to a residential care home (Class C2) for up to six residents (no external alterations proposed).

Dear Ben

The Compass Children's Home proposal is to conduct a business within a long established residential zone, home to many retired and vulnerable people. The company concerned is not a charity but one of ten linked entities within a large commercial enterprise, Compass Community Limited¹, which employs 600 people and earned £70,000,000 in 2020.

Let me be clear about this proposal to you or anyone reading this objection. I strongly endorse fostering within our community in support of our children. Should a couple foster one or even two children at Nab Hill House, I would have no objection. In fact, one household in our Court has fostered in the past and caused no adverse impact to others.

Fostering works as it's small scale, but this proposal speaks as a business. I would feel the same way if the applicant were an accountancy or mortgage firm, given this is a dense residential area. The scale and scope of the proposed 'fostering' is well outside the impact a residential zone should be expected to embrace, for a business to generate more profits.

Compass Children's Home is a business ultimately owned by a private equity firm, Graphite Capital with a small share by the principals. The application submitted by Tetra Tech Planning suggests a lack of local knowledge with very little evidence. I have myself spoken to all surrounding neighbours, attended the site in the past and even visited a Children's Home in Checkley to understand the impact.

This application is only about placing a new business within my residential neighbourhood and will have a huge impact on the residents. Compass could run a home now for 4 children under existing zoning, but this does not appear to be enough. I shall therefore respond in kind to the assessment of proposals to explain my objection.

¹ Companies House Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 March 2020

4.1.5

‘An effective use of previously developed land’. How is eliminating a large residential property an effective use of developed land? This property has had interest from residential property buyers in the past and is arguably one of the few 8 bedroom properties in Leek. This property will be favourable to consolidated families with multiple generations; a far more common need. Re-assigning its use for ‘commercial’ use now means we lose a home for this purpose, whereas many empty pub sites with large car parks and grounds remain unused within Leek area and surrounds.

4.1.8

The change of use of the site will result in a daily operation which is practically indistinguishable to that of a ‘dwellinghouse’. Tetra does not provide any evidence for this statement. How common is it for a large family to intentionally house 6 young males with severe behavioural issues?

4.1.9

‘Similarly, the staff will come and go as would parents who travel to and from work within a family home’. How can the proposal be likened to a family home when two staff will remain overnight and up to 3 other persons would be visiting at other times?

4.1.10

‘Furthermore, and a key consideration here in assessing the planning merits, the property can already be used as a small care home without the need for planning permission, as Use Class C3 provides for up to six residents living together as a single household and receiving care’. Then why does the applicant not pursue the purchase without this change? Why are 4 young residents not sufficient? The reality is that 6 residents are more viable for income, making this proposed change all about commercial outcomes rather than social ones.

4.1.13

‘The proposed use is for a care home of up to six residents. Furthermore, the site could be used as a six-person care home within Class C3 without the need for planning permission. Again, why must permission be sought for 6 residents, rather than only 4?’

4.1.14

‘The exterior of the building will remain as existing. Therefore, there will be no privacy or overlooking impacts introduced’. The site is surrounded mainly by soft vegetation borders with minimal hard fencing between neighbours. Given the nature of the intended residents, hard borders are more appropriate, but will be a challenge to implement given the topography.

4.1.15

The site actually has pedestrian access also to Kiln Lane, which suggests limited knowledge of the property. ‘The amenity space will be used in no different a manner than if occupied by a large family’. What other large family has 6 male children all with varying levels of social and behavioural problems? Even simpler, what is the average family size in the surrounding area to make such a generalisation?

4.1.16

'On most days between 8am and 5pm activity levels at the site will be minimal'. The proposal ignores movements from staff and support services. 'All children will have differing levels of independence which is continually assessed'. The applicant does not outline the level of supervision. 'At weekends they will engage in activities both at home and away from home (eg sports, visiting the cinema, shopping). This means a large minibus will be used even on weekends which confirms this is a 7 day a week business.

4.1.17

'In light of the above, the proposed change of use will not harm the amenities of adjacent occupiers'. How will a minibus turn in the property? Currently large vehicles attending Nab Hill House must turn around in Nab Hill Court and reverse down the narrow driveway.

4.1.18

'In terms of vehicle activity, the small-scale and low key nature of the proposed care home means that vehicular movements at the site will not be significant and, when compared with the existing lawful use, will be very similar'. The site was selected in part because it has a large area for parking off road'.

My research from the Checkley Children's Home, which has 4 children, suggests daily visits from staff, local authorities, catering, laundry and health workers will have 6 to 8 cars at a minimum. The proposal for 6 children would only increase the visits. Where is the evidence that earthworks would not be required to increase the car park footprint to deal with the likely increase? The driveway was not constructed for such frequent traffic, which may require it to be sealed. This will affect drainage to the properties below.

4.1.19

'The 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'. This ignores visits from community services, maintenance, laundry and food deliveries. 'Furthermore, and as noted above, the site can already be used as a care home for up to 6 residents without the need for planning permission'. Again, why must the applicant seek permission for 6 young persons when 4 is currently permissible?

4.1.20

'The site is located within walking distance of Leek town centre which provides many local facilities and services'. The application does not state whether residents will be accompanied. 'Also, within 200 metres proximity of the site to the south-west are bus stops which connect to Macclesfield and Leek Town centre'. The 109 Bus Service from Macclesfield to Leek runs from 8am to 7pm Mon to Fri, 10am to 6pm Saturday and does not run on Sundays. The 96 Bus Service is not in operation, highlighting the lack of knowledge of the area. Also, who will need the buses? Is it the young persons, or the staff working shifts?

4.1.21

The application site drawing does not acknowledge the only access is only via a common driveway with Nab Hill Court. A site visit would raise questions about the right of access and maintenance of the common driveway. Speed bumps in the common driveway will cause aligned neighbours considerably more nuisance. The Checkley Children's Home driveway exits into a main road where traffic does not impact neighbours.

4.1.22

'Given that the proposal will not result in any material change in terms of vehicular activity than the existing lawful use of the property'. That assumes the property is being currently used as a home.

4.1.23

'The application property comprises a vehicle parking area on hardstanding land to the east which provides spaces for 8 vehicles'. This is completely ridiculous. How would an ambulance or fire engine turn with this many vehicles? Has the applicant even visited this site?

4.1.24

'Overall, the proposed development will not give rise to any material transport or parking impacts'. Recently one resident in our Court needed 24 hour care. The support vehicles filled their drive and every other available spot within the Court. The nature of a circular court meant an ambulance and police vehicles could attend without reversing down a long driveway. The proposal does not adequately address parking other than to refer to an existing lawful use. I'd have serious concerns about the likely traffic required in and out of the applicant property with only 4 young persons, never mind 6. The applicant has not demonstrated how this will not occur or be avoided.

4.1.27

'As such, services such as the proposed use provide significant social and community benefits'. Are these children indeed from the local area? How does the Staffordshire Moorlands community benefit if the children are from other areas? The application does not say.

4.1.28

'The proposed use is likely to also provide some limited employment opportunities for local people'. I would assume this is specialised care and workers are difficult to source locally. Can the applicant provide evidence from their 600 strong workforce on how close staff live to their workplaces?

5.1.2

'In summary, the statement concludes that the application proposal is acceptable in land use planning terms'.

'Policy SS2 – Settlement Hierarchy: Identifies Leek as a town and seeks to focus future growth in the largest settlement to strengthen their role as service centres'. That might be a goal but the servicing in this proposal will be done in a residential zone. Are zones not there to keep commercial and residential apart from one another?

Policy SS 5 – Leek Area Strategy: Community facilities such as Kniveden House and Hillesden House would be two great examples to improve shared facilities, not to mention the Travellers Rest in Leekbrook. It would be in Leek's interest for these properties to be redeveloped.

Policy H1 – New Housing Development: The application property is unsuitable for people with learning or physical disabilities given its age and location. A site visit would establish fire vehicles would struggle to attend incidents at the property. More appropriate properties are Kniveden House and Hillesden with existing infrastructure and appropriate zoning.

In summary, this proposal is a commercial venture in an otherwise densely residential area. Other objectors have made good points about safety, but setting that aside, what right does a commercial venture have to install itself and commence operating within such a well established C2 zone? There are more appropriate sites within Leek to address any need.

In light of the above, we trust that the Council will refuse planning permission for this proposal.

Yours sincerely

Dan Collins