Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

8 BIRCH GROVE
FORSBROOK

SEPTEMBER 2023

Site Address:
8 Birch Grove, Forsbrook, Staffordshire, ST11 9PT

Applicant:
Serenity Care Children's Homes Ltd.

Proposal:
Change of use from dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to care home for children (Use Class C2)

Planning Statement:
Date Issued: 13th September 2023
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Report Prepared By:
Rob Duncan BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd

Contact Details:
Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd
28 Ferndale Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 7DJ
Email: rob78duncan@gmail.com
Tel. 07779 783521

1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Miss. L. Fresson of Serenity Care Children's Homes to submit a full application for the change of use of 8 Birch Grove, Forsbrook from its existing use as a dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to a care home for children (Use Class C2).

1.2 Serenity Care is a registered care provider whose aims and objectives are to find what works best for the individual, tailor the support they offer, and ensure that the young people they care for are well equipped and prepared for the real world after they leave care. The company also believes strongly in offering support post care to ensure that they support young people in their transition from residential care into mainstream society.

1.3 The submitted proposal will provide a care home facility for up to two children / young people (Use Class C2), with each child / young person living there as their permanent residence. The premises will be regulated by Ofsted. The children occupying the premises will range between 6 and 18 years of age and have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There will be a minimum of two staff on site at any given time, operating in a shift pattern typically involving two days on and four days off. During daytime hours (typically between the hours of 09:30 – 10:30) there may also be a deputy manager and manager on the site in addition to those two members of staff.

1.4 The application proposes only modest alterations to the existing dwelling encompassing internal alterations to form a first floor office and staff bedroom. No changes to the external appearance of the dwelling are proposed. The frontage of the property will be utilised to provide off-street parking for 4no. vehicles.

2 Site Description

2.1 The application site is located within an established residential area within the defined settlement boundary of Forsbrook. The property comprises a semi-detached, two storey dwelling located towards the head of a cul-de-sac. The property is finished in red brickwork and has a gambrel style roof finished in Staffordshire blue tiles.

2.2 The site is enclosed by residential development to its southwest (no.6 Birch Grove) and its northeast (no.10 Birch Grove) with further residential development located to the northwest on the opposite side of the cul-de-sac. To the rear (east) of the site lies a public footpath (Forsbrook 16) beyond which lies a brook. An open field extends to the east beyond that.

2.3 The land beyond the eastern site boundary, inclusive of the area occupied by the footpath, the brook and the agricultural field, is located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt. The site does not lie within a Conservation Area, nor are there any statutorily listed buildings located within close proximity if the site.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- a mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes, to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities

- quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers

- easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community; increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce

- a healthy, safe, attractive, active, well-designed and well-maintained environment

- development which maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings

- development that is undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas, including the Peak District National Park, both now and for future generations

- support development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions

3.3 Policy SS8 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Larger Villages Area Strategy' and defined Blythe Bridge and Forsbrook as one such larger village. The policy confirms that these settlements shall retain and enhance their role as rural service centres, providing for the bulk of the housing requirement of the rural areas and also for employment needs of a scale and type appropriate to each settlement having regard to infrastructure capacity and character. This will be achieved via a number of actions, including:

- Increasing the range of available and affordable house types, including for first time buyers and families;

3.4 Policy H1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Housing Development' and states that new housing development should provide for a mix of housing sizes, types and tenure including a proportion of affordable housing as set out in Policy H3, and where appropriate housing for special groups, to meet the needs and aspirations of the current and future population having regard to

the Area Strategies. It goes on to state that the housing for special groups, particularly for older people and others as identified in the SHMA or successor document should be of a scale and in a location which is appropriate to its needs.

3.5 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. In particular, new development should (amongst other requirements):

- be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area

- be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance

- protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution

- provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use

- ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community

3.6 Policy T1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and accommodates residual development traffic in line with the Integrated Transport Strategy. This will be achieved (amongst other requirements) by:

- Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.

- Considering appropriate parking provision on a case by case basis with recourse to the parking guidance set out in Appendix 2.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development, and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of delivering new housing to meet the needs of specific groups, securing high quality design, and ensuring highway safety. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Local Plan Car Parking Standards

4.2 The adopted parking standards for a C2 use require that one parking space be provided per resident staff member, plus 1 space per non-resident present at peak working times. In addition, there should be one space per 3 bed spaces for visitors. An ambulance space should also be provided in a position which would not impede site access but located as close as possible to the main entrance of the establishment. The content of the car parking standards has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 Paragraph 93 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that to provide the services that the community needs, planning decisions should take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community. The proposed change of use of the existing dwelling to a care home for children will meet a pressing need within the wider Staffordshire area for such facilities.

5.2 Children get placed in residential care for a variety of reasons. It could be a short term placement to work with the child therapeutically in attempts to either place them back into foster care or back with their families. Alternatively residential care might be better suited for a young person long term until adulthood due to the young person having emotional and behavioural difficulties, which require support from a larger staff team or more specialist skills. In some cases, residential care may be a preferred placement choice for a young person who does not want to live in a family environment as this can be a trigger point.

5.3 In England, just under 400,000 children (3% of the child population) are in the social care system at any one time, and more than 80,000 of these children are children in care (GOV.UK, 2022). This number is on track to hit almost 100,000 by 2025 – an increase of more than a third within just one decade. Research from the County Councils Network (CCN) shows that based on the average increase rates for the past four years the total will reach 95,000 by the middle of the decade, up from 69,000 in 2015. Some 63% of children who were looked after was found to be due to abuse or neglect in 2018/19 (NSPCC, 2021).

5.4 The continuing increase in children requiring full time care means there is a growing demand for more children's care homes to support and protect these children in need. Staffordshire County Council itself acknowledges that there is a shortage of quality care places for children, noting that it has got to the stage where Councils can be competing against one another to use the most suitable accommodation, which can then result in children being placed many miles from Staffordshire.

5.5 The proposed change of use of the existing dwellinghouse on the site to provide a children's care home is wholly consistent with the objectives of policy SS1 of the Local Plan which seeks to ensure that development contributes positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands, and will make a valuable contribution towards meeting the demand for such care within the Staffordshire Moorlands wider North Staffordshire area. The proposed development is consequently held to be acceptable in principle, in the context of policies SS1, SS8 and H1 of the Local Plan.

Design & Layout

5.6 The application does not propose any alterations to the external appearance of the dwelling, with only minor internal changes being proposed which in themselves do not require planning permission. The building will therefore remain unaltered in appearance from that which exists today. The existing site frontage will be utilised to provide off-street parking for 4no. vehicles and will not appear materially different to the layout / appearance that exists at present. It is consequently concluded that the design and layout of the development will not give rise to harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

5.7 In terms of residential amenity considerations, the site is acknowledged to lie within an established residential area, with neighbouring properties on either side. The children living at the property will do so as their permanent residence, support at all times by a minimum of two members of staff. As with all facilities of this nature it will also be regulated by Ofsted.

5.8 The children and staff will prepare meals together and will live together in a family-style environment, with the children attending school as normal. There would be no element of permanent night shift working by staff residing at the property i.e. no member of staff would have to stay awake whilst the rest of the household are asleep. However, there would be a requirement for waking staff on occasion as the need arises.

5.9 No regular care, i.e. visiting doctors, therapists etc. is to be provided on site, other than that provided by the carers in the execution of their duty of care to the children. There will be no element of nursing care provided beyond normal first aid. As a consequence the development is unlikely to have any greater impact on neighbouring residential amenity than that which could otherwise be expected from its continued use as a dwellinghouse. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1 and DC1 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

5.10 The Local Authority's adopted car parking standards dictate that there should be one parking space provided per resident staff member, plus 1 space per non-resident present at peak working times. In addition, there should be one space per 3 bed spaces for visitors. On top of that is a requirement to accommodate space for the parking of an ambulance.

5.11 The proposed development will have two members of staff present on site during the day and during the night, and there will be up to two additional members of staff on site during the daytime, who would typically be in attendance between the hours of 09:30 – 10:30hrs each day. The rest of the day those spaces would be vacant and available for visitors.

5.12 The submitted plans demonstrate that off-street parking for 4no. vehicles can be accommodated on site. The two tandem spaces will be utilised by the staff members working on shift, with the other spaces available for the visiting manager(s) and visitors. Given the sustainable location of this site within a short walk of the day-to-day services and facilities on offer within the village, this level of parking provision is concluded to be acceptable.

5.13 No ambulance space is to be provided, but this is not a type of use that is expected to command the need for an ambulance as perhaps a large scale residential care home might. Children going to appointments, school etc. will walk, cycle or travel by car like any other child might do. The lack of a parking space for an ambulance is therefore not considered to imperil the proposed development. The submitted proposal is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy T1 of the Local Plan.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Having regard to the considerations set out above, it is submitted that the proposed change of use of the existing dwellinghouse to a care home is acceptable in principle and will not detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding area, or give rise to any adverse impacts to neighbouring amenity or highway safety.

6.2 The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS8, H1, DC1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and guidance set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.