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Planning and Sustainable Development Consultants

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Nic Thomas
Director of Planning, Economy and Regeneration
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
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Dear Mr Thomas

Change of use from a C3 dwelling house to a C2 residential care home for up to 2no children at Ebble Cottage, Romsey Road, Whiteparish, Salisbury SP5 2SD

Introduction

Please find enclosed an application for full planning permission for the change of use of Ebble Cottage in Whiteparish from a C3 dwelling house to a C2 residential care home for up to 2no children.

The application site has been privately leased by the applicant, Horizon Care and Education Group Ltd (hereafter referred to as 'Horizon'), being a provider of children's care homes in Wiltshire, and will be the owner of the Ofsted registration.

Horizon are working with Wiltshire Council and the application site is the last of four new community-based children's homes being set up in the County. The first of the new homes, Phoenix Grove opened in Melksham and provides placements for up to four young people as can be seen covered within the BBC news article here: [First of four Wiltshire community children's homes to open - BBC News](#). The other homes are in Sandridge Road Melksham and Vale Road, Woodfalls which were both granted planning permission in the Spring of last year with the respective application references PL/2025/00283 and PL/2024/11252 respectively.

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In totality, the new homes will help provide places for up to 12 children and young people, helping them to stay in the locality and near local schools, friends and support networks. Wiltshire Council is creating the homes as part of a 10-year partnership with Horizon.

The Site and its Surroundings

The application site is located within an established residential area in Whiteparish, and the subject building, known as Ebble Cottage, is a red brick 4 bedroom 1 ½ storey house that was most recently extended to the rear following the grant of planning permission 19/06466/FUL in 2019.



It is set back from the road behind relatively high front boundary treatment comprising close-boarded fencing between brick piers, and a recessed gateway which is bounded by brick walls to either side which lead to a pair of electric wooden gates. One will also note that a detached garage has been built within the frontage, pursuant to planning permission 18/02929/FUL.



The plot is generous in its extent, with mature hedging to its rear garden boundaries. Detached houses known as Cartref and Tregarthen are located to the east and west respectively, with open countryside to the south.



The village enjoys a range of community services and facilities, including a Primary School, GP surgery, community centre, sports and recreational facilities, along with bus services (X7, X7R & B5 to The Burgate School) that run along Romsey Road (A27).

The Proposal

As set out above, planning permission is sought for the change of use of Ebble Cottage from a C3 dwelling house to a C2 residential care home for up to 2 no children. Once operational, the site will be known as Aurora House by Horizon and its residents.

Submitted with the planning application is a Statement of Purpose produced by Horizon and which provides detailed information on the aims and objectives of the scheme, and how it will operate in the local community.

In summary, the future residents will be local young people from Wiltshire, and preferably local within the area of Wiltshire, as the contract that Horizon have with the local authority is to ensure the young people who need homes like this have availability within their own County. There was an increasing trend nationally for young people Nationally in care to move outside of their County due to a shortage of suitable homes, which the contract between Horizon and Wiltshire Council is looking to resolve.

Locations of schools the young people will attend have not been arranged yet, as that is personalised for each individual, however each school will need to be local so they can travel there easily each day.

The number of colleagues working in a home at any one time are dependent upon the needs of the young people, however Aurora House will generally work on a 3:2 ratio, 1:1 for each young person and an additional staff member to support where necessary. There will be 1-2 no members of staff present overnight (one sleeping on the first floor in the staff bedroom, the second if necessary on a sofa bed type arrangement in the staff office), on a rota basis.

In order to allay concerns raised by third parties during the determination of the application at Timbermill in Woodfalls, Horizon provided additional information which is pertinent to the case in hand:

As applicant, they would like to reassure local residents that they will do their utmost to be good neighbours, in respect of Highways, Noise and other issues.

Highways

- Social worker visits take place once every six weeks during working hours and regularly take place outside of the home in local restaurants/coffee shops etc.
- A quality assurance visit will take place once every 6-8 weeks. This is normally one person and lasts a few hours.
- Staff handover will be every 48 hours and the change over time will be 10.00 am and there will be a half hour overlap at this time. This will be staggered to ensure that they do not have lots of vehicles on site during changeover, and that they will stagger the changeover so only one will occur at the same time. The staffing ratio could be three plus the manager. However, the manager will not be there every day.
- There will be no more than 4 staff who will be on site at one time, but it is more than likely to be less than that and they do not anticipate any additional on street parking to occur. Further staff could travel by public transport, car share or even cycle to work if they live close enough; and not all staff will be travelling long distances and some may be non-drivers.
- There may be the odd Amazon or Supermarket delivery to the home, which will be no different to any other home on the street, however staff normally go out to the supermarket for the weekly shop.
- At their other homes the cars are normally out doing errands or transporting the children so there will not always be 4 staff cars parked on the driveway at any one time.

Noise

- The noise of the home will be minimal, including to the houses on each side.
- There will be a new fence that will be erected within the rear garden where gaps in the hedges are found, ensuring complete privacy for the neighbours.

Planning Policy and Assessment

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF stipulates that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development which itself has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways, namely economic, social and environmental.

NPPF paragraph 8 describes these overarching objectives in the following ways:

- a) An Economic Objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improve productivity;
- b) Social Objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places; and
- c) Environmental Objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land improving bio-diversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

In respect of decision making, paragraph 39 of the NPPF, stipulates that decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

The NPPF also seeks to promote sustainable transport, but recognises in paragraph 110 that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas.

It does, however, state in paragraphs 116 and 117 that whilst development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative effects on the road network would be severe; that applications should give priority first to pedestrians, cycle movements; second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport whilst addressing the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport allowing for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.

Finally, Para. 63 of the NPPF states that the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. These groups should include (but are not limited to) those who require affordable housing; families with children; older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes); students; people with disabilities; service families; travellers; people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes.

The Development Plan

The principal document of the Development Plan which is of prime importance to this proposal is the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) which was adopted in January 2015.

WCS Core Policy 23 states that development in the Southern Wiltshire Community Area should be in accordance with the Settlement Strategy set out in Core Policy 1 and will need to demonstrate how the relevant issues and considerations listed in paragraph 5.126 will be addressed.

Whiteparish is identified as a Large Village in Core Policy 1, defined as a settlement with a limited range of employment, services and facilities. Of particular pertinence is the fifth bulletpoint of paragraph 5.126 which is that consideration should be given to the existing shortage of long-term beds in care homes.

WCS Core Policy 46 is of most relevance to this case which relates to meeting the needs of Wiltshire's vulnerable and older population and seeks to ensure that there is adequate provision of such specialist accommodation within the county. The policy supports the provision of sufficient new accommodation and homes for Wiltshire's older population and vulnerable residents, including young people at risk. The policy in part states:

Provision of homes and accommodation for vulnerable people will be supported, including but not limited to:

iv. people with learning disabilities

v. people with mental health issues

vi. homeless people and rough sleepers

vii. young at risk and care leavers.

Such accommodation should be provided in sustainable locations, where there is an identified need, within settlements identified in Core Policy 1 (normally in the Principal Settlements and Market Towns) where there is good access to services and facilities.

In exceptional circumstances, the provision of specialist accommodation outside but adjacent to the Principal Settlements and Market Towns will be considered, provided that:

viii. a genuine, and evidenced, need is justified

ix. environmental and landscape considerations will not be compromised

x. facilities and services are accessible from the site

xi. its scale and type is appropriate to the nature of the settlement and will respect the character and setting of that settlement.

Clearly the site is located within an identified Market Town, although in any case the policy does not prohibit such proposals in other locations. As was considered by Officers in para. 9.1.4 of their report to Wiltshire's Western Area Planning Committee for the determination of PL/2024/00596 for the change of use of Temple Farm, Upton Scudamore from a C3 dwelling house to a C2 residential care home (approved 10th October 2024), the policy does not restrict such accommodation to only Principal Settlements and Market Towns, with the use of the word 'normally' being applicable. In that case the subject property is located within a small village.

Indeed, in the determination of application ref. PL/2024/11252 for the Change of use from a C3 dwelling house to a C2 residential care home for up to 4no children at Timbermill House, Vale Road, Woodfalls it was concluded that the Council had not identified any substantive material harm or policy conflict with either the adopted Core Strategy or the NPPF.

Each of the above criteria are considered in turn overleaf.

viii. a genuine, and evidenced, need is justified

As was found within the Temple Farm and Timbermill House report to Members of the Planning Committee, there is a genuine, high need in the County for the type of scheme

proposed, with it being reported for the latter (20th March 2025) that there were 45 children and young people living in residential children's homes, of which 11 were out of the County.

In addition, both committee reports stated that Wiltshire Council is part of central government's 'Staying Close' scheme, whereby local authorities bid to apply for grant funding to deliver a Staying Close 'offer' in the County. Wiltshire Council has successfully bid for and has been allocated funding to deliver such a program, which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving residential children's homes, to support them to remain and return to Wiltshire. At the time of writing those reports, the County currently had about 15 children and young people in this project, with the aspiration of bringing them back to Wiltshire; and the Council's Families and Children Commissioning team will provide an update on this in due course.

Clearly the earlier permissions will have removed some of those children/young people from the above lists, but an urgent need still remains, with the Council having a statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation for children looked after. The Children's Act 1989 states that a range of placement options should be considered and Section 22A imposes a duty on the responsible authority when a child is in their care to provide the child with accommodation.

The location was chosen by Wiltshire Council's Families & Children Commissioning team as meeting their criteria to provide new children's homes within the County. The application site is in an ideal location for vulnerable young people and those with additional needs; and there are strong links to local schools and other services, supporting young people to be safe in their community.

Notwithstanding the above, it would be for Ofsted to carry out their own assessment on the suitability of the site as part of the registration process.

ix. environmental and landscape considerations will not be compromised

The proposal does not propose any operational development to the building, with adequate parking space for at least 6no cars to be provided on the existing driveway; and overall the scheme will not compromise the local environment or wider landscape, being within the built-up area of the village. The proposal is therefore in accordance with this criterion of Policy Core Policy 46, as well as WCS Core Policy 57 on matters of design.

x. facilities and services are accessible from the site

As a large village, Whiteparish enjoys a good range of services and facilities. With bus services running past the site it is considered to be in a sustainable location.

xi. its scale and type is appropriate to the nature of the settlement and will respect the character and setting of that settlement.

As expressed by Wiltshire Council's Families & Children Commissioning team in providing a consultation response on the Temple Farm and Timbermill applications residential homes should look and be located in the same area as any other family home. They should not look institutionalised and looked after young people should be able to contribute towards their community in the same way other children do.

No external alterations are proposed and the site will continue to appear as a dwellinghouse. With no more than 2no children residing within the home, it would be akin to a typical size family, and bearing in mind the size of the property, including its generous rear garden area there would be no over-development of the plot.

Therefore, the scale and type of proposal appropriate to the nature of the settlement and will respect the character and setting of Whiteparish.

It is trusted that planning permission will be forthcoming for the proposed development; however, should the Local Planning Authority require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely

Chris Tivey Bsc (Hons), BPI, MRTPI

cc: Mark East, Horizon Care and Education Group Ltd
Matthew Smith & Michelle Stoneham, Landlords