



DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Application to change the use of a C3a dwelling as a children's home for a maximum of four children, with up to three carers, two of whom will sleep overnight, working on a rota basis (C2)

**Elm Tree House
Land Adjacent to 188 Ribblers Lane
Kirkby,
Knowsley,
L32 7RB**

1. Background

1.1. I am writing on behalf of my client, Acorns to Oaks Children's Care and Support Ltd , who is seeking planning permission to use the land at 118 Ribblers Lane, Kirkby, Knowsley, L32 7RB which will be a purpose built small specialist care home for four children with Learning Difficulties (LD) and emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, (EBD) which falls within use class C2 of the Use Classes Order.

1.2. Acorns to Oaks Children's Care & Support Ltd currently has two homes registered with Ofsted in Wirral (Rated 'Good' in areas) and Preston and one home, Winsford, going through registration with Ofsted. Their head office is located at Suite 3, 125-129 Witton Street, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 5DY.

1.3. The home will be registered as a Learning Disabilities (LD) / Emotional and Behavioural Home, children will undergo stringent impact risk assessment to ensure they integrate with the local community. This considers the home, the environment, the community, plus peers groups and assesses against each child as an individual prior to admission into the home. The children will live at the property long term, hopefully for many years. This is not a halfway house or emergency housing for children.

2. The Proposal

2.1. The proposal does not involve any alterations to the exterior or interior of the property.



2.2. Under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, local authorities have a statutory responsibility to take steps, as reasonably practicable, that ensure children in care are provided with accommodation that '(a) is within the authority's area; and (b) meets the needs of those children.' Three reports were published in 2020 by the Children's Commissioner: 'The 'Children who no-one knows what to do with'; 'Private provision in children's social care' and 'Stability index 2020', which point out the failings of local government to meet this responsibility.

2.3. The papers summarise the findings of three years of work by the Children's Commissioner's Office and explain the failure of both national and local government to adequately meet the needs of these children. The report (page 15) states: *'Local authorities are highly reliant on the independent sector, particularly for children's residential care. Costs are increasing but it's unclear why. Given this reliance, it is imperative the market works well and that commissioning and procurement are improved to ensure no child is placed in unsuitable care settings. Recommendations: The Government should consider the barriers to creating more residential care placements to increase supply'.*

2.4. The applicant has had regular discussions with the local Social Services Department, who have confirmed the urgent local need for such care homes.

2.5. The proposed children's home seeks to replicate as closely as possible a normal family environment. This type of provision, which government policy is promoting, is to help children who often, through no fault of



their own, have not had good parenting in their early years. These are not children with special needs, who would come under Use Class C2a.

- 2.6. The proposal is to register the property as a registered children's home for a maximum of four children aged from 8 to 18 years. They would be looked after by a maximum three carers, two of whom will sleep overnight, working on a rota basis.
- 2.7. Under the requirements of OFSTED, such care homes must be run as closely as possible to a typical family household, while accepting staff are employed on a rota basis to provide the parental support to the children so many have missed in their early years. The only physical requirements specified by OFSTED are security cameras (although not essential and not materially different from a system found in many households), emergency lighting (no external visual distinction from normal lighting) and locks on bedroom doors for the privacy of each child (not a material issue for planning).
- 2.8. In terms of fire regulations for care homes, the only physical requirement is to have fire doors on those leading to the kitchen. The physical appearance of such doors is not materially different from normal doors and has no material impact on the character of the property.
- 2.9. The application is to ensure that the property acquired will meet the necessary planning requirements, necessary to achieve Ofsted registration.
- 2.10. The property is a five bedroomed detached house, with a garage and space for parking an additional three cars. It is the company policy to

encourage staff to use public transport and not to allow on street parking. An electric/ hybrid vehicle will be available to transport the children when necessary to school or for other visits.

2.11. Up to four children would live at the house, with two carers working on a rota basis sleeping overnight. Six carers would operate on a shift pattern of 48 hours on, 60 hours off. Other than changeover times, there will no more than three carers on the premises at any one time. There would be one changeover of the overnight care staff per day, usually 8am each morning, which lasts for around ten minutes.

2.12. A manager, also a carer, would usually visit the site at some point each day between 9am and 5pm. These comings and goings are set out in the table below.

2.13. The purpose of the home would be to support the children to build their confidence, help them in developing life skills and prepare them for life when they leave the home to fend for themselves. This type of support has been found to be most effective in helping these children to have normal lives and not experience problems in later life.

2.14. During the day it is expected that the children would engage in various activities, plus attend a mainstream school. In some cases, the child may receive some home schooling but only while they settle in. Clearly this is no different from a family choosing to have home tutoring.

2.15. With regards to schooling, it is often the case that when young people come into care, they have missed an extensive proportion of their

education or are affected in a way that they could not work effectively in a large classroom environment. Given this, they would be tutored from home initially. This is all achieved online without any tutors having to come to the house. They may then progress to a specialist unit (smaller class sizes) then hopefully onto mainstream. In cases where children may have a home tutor, this is no different from an ordinary family who chooses to have their children educated at home. It makes no difference to the planning status of the use.

- 2.16. The applicant has confirmed that the proposed use is to provide a stable home environment for the occupants as their main and sole residence and that the length of stay is generally more than temporary or passing. It would not be a 'halfway' house or provide overnight emergency lodgings for example.
- 2.17. The company's business model aims to provide accommodation for children (7-17) with a range of learning difficulties and other needs and challenges.
- 2.18. The children's home model is to create a warm and nurturing family style environment for the medium to long-term care of a small number of children. This type of provision is operated in the same manner as a regular family home with two primary carers, to provide consistency and stability to the children who live there (similar to a fostering model).
- 2.19. Care is provided in small sized family units where residential carers help to develop the social and life skills needed when the children no longer live within an institution. Without such homes and positive interventions, these children when they leave the controlled

environment of care homes will often end up in adult institutions, suffering from long term health problems.

3. Planning Assessment

2.1. The planning policy framework is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (March 2022)..

2.2. The relevant sections of the NPPF are:

Paragraph 2 of the NPPF is highly relevant as it states that applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraph 60 makes clear that in order to “support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes.....the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed”.

Paragraph 61 makes clear how housing need in an area should be assessed and understood, and paragraph 62 advocates that planning policies should reflect the housing needs for different groups in the community.

Paragraph 109 is specifically relevant which advises that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Section 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities emphasises the need to make appropriate provision for the special needs of young people.

- 2.3. The Knowsley Delivery and Allocations Local Plan has no specific policy relating to children's homes. However, general principles do apply to the assessment of the application.
- 2.4. Policies on sustainable development ensure housing provision meets the needs of all sections of the community and facilitate the provision of strategic and local infrastructure and services. This application addresses a special need for a particular type of housing.
- 2.5. Policies supports development that promotes the health and well-being of local communities and which helps to maximise opportunities to improve quality of life and to make it easier for people in Halton to lead healthy, active lifestyles. The provision of accommodation for these children makes a significant contribution to the well-being of the community.
- 2.6. New development is to be compatible with adjacent existing or proposed uses and must not lead to significant adverse effects on health, amenity, safety and the operation of surrounding uses and for occupants or users of the development.
- 2.7. New development is also required to respect the character of the area and is an appropriate form of development for the surroundings. The policy sets out how development should achieve good design and not result in unacceptable adverse impact on the amenity of occupants and surround nearby properties. The impact of the development is considered further below.

Principle of Use

- 2.8. As the proposed use will remain residential in nature, the principle of the use in a residential area is not considered to be in conflict with policy.

Location of Specialist Housing

- 2.9. OFSTED will require a local risk assessment before approving the property as a care home. Planning is therefore not the only form of regulation which controls the suitability of the location. A basic principle in assessing a planning application is whether there is other legislation which is more appropriate to regulate the proposed development. In the case of children's care homes, the relevant powers are set out in:

Care Standards Act 2000

The Care Standards Act 2000 (Registration)(England) Regulations 2010

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015

Children's Homes and Looked after Children (Miscellaneous Amendments)
(England) Regulations 2013

Parking

- 2.10. Policy seeks to ensure there is adequate off street parking space available. There is provision for five (5) off street parking spaces. This is considered to be more than adequate to meet the anticipated need for parking.

2.11. There will be a company car on the premises to take the children to school and on other visits like a normal family. The daily change over with the overnight carer rarely involves a car. However, on the occasions they do arrive by car there will be a parking space available. Of the five (5) spaces, one is for the company car, one is for the manager, with two others available for the carers or other visitors.

2.12. It is also the company policy to encourage staff to use public transport or cycle to work and not to allow on street parking.

Neighbouring Amenity

2.13. It is not considered the comings and goings will have an adverse impact on the amenity of neighbours.

2.14. The comings and goings, whether by car or other means, are considered to be similar to a typical family dwelling. The home manager, also a carer, would arrive most weekdays in the morning and leave each evening. In terms of the other two staff on the premises, they would normally work on a 48-hour shift basis, so there would be no more than one change each day.

2.15. An elderly person or someone with special needs living in a dwelling with four carers arriving throughout the day does not have a material impact on the amenity of neighbours, hence nor would the proposed movements.

2.16. Full details of comings and goings are set out below.

2.17. All household chores such as cleaning, cooking and gardening involve the children and no additional staff are employed at the premises.



2.18. These children would not require regular visits from social workers and clinicians, with most of these meetings actually taking place away from the home. They would mostly walk to school, although in some cases would be taken in the company car.

2.19. Family or other visits are not encouraged as they can upset the other children. If they do occur, they take place away from the home.

Schedule 1- Current Use (estimate based upon current use)

Activity	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Travelling to work		2	2	2	2	2	
School Run		4	4	4	4	4	
Shopping/ Social/recreational outings	4	2	2	2	2	2	4
Other visitors	4			4			4
Total Movements (in and out)	8	8	8	12	8	8	8

Schedule 2 – Proposed use (based upon experience of other homes)

Activity	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Home Manager / daily carer		2	2	2	2	2	
Care workers starting and finishing shift	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
School run		4	4	4	4	4	
Shopping/ Social/recreational outings	4			2			4
Other visitors	2						2
Total Movements (in and out)	8	8	8	10	8	8	8

Impact of the presence of staff

2.20. Visually, the property would look no different to the adjacent houses. During the day there could be three members of staff in the property at any one time, but this would have no impact on the amenity of the area.

2.21. In terms of the nature of the proposed use, paragraph 25 of Circular 05/2010 is relevant. It states that the criteria for determining whether the use of particular premises should be classified within the C3 use class (or similar) include both the manner of the use and the physical condition of the premises. The circular states that the premises can properly be regarded as being used as a single dwelling house where they are:

- *a single, self-contained unit of occupation which can be regarded as being a separate 'planning unit' distinct from any other part of the building containing them.*
- *designed or adapted for residential purposes containing the normal facilities for cooking, eating and sleeping associated with use as a dwelling house.*

2.22. In an appeal in Stockport (Appeal Ref. 2162636) an Inspector noted that although the building would be fitted with an office [and fire alarm], this was not uncommon in many dwelling houses around the country and would not materially alter its basic character as a dwelling house. There are no major modifications required to this property.



Fear of Crime

2.23. The fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is a material planning consideration which might weigh against the granting of planning permission. Given that this is a matter of planning merit and in the absence of any basis to conclude that crime and anti-social behaviour are an inherent part of the character of the proposed use such a fear is not relevant to the determination of this application.

2.24. There can be concern that the use would result in more noise and possibly anti-social behaviour due to the background of the children. A response to such concern is contained in appeal decision (Appeal Ref. 2162636-):

11. The fear of crime is a material consideration in the determination of the appeal. However, the weight that can be attributed to it depends on whether or not the evidence shows that the potential risk of crime is shown or expected to be high and the consequences for the community and individuals are serious. Whilst it is acknowledged that the incidents cited by the local residents would cause upset, they are not altogether unusual occurrences in modern society. Some of the incidents raised issues relating to the running of the home which have the potential to be overcome by changes to the management of the site. None of the evidence suggests that the potential risk from crime is shown or expected to be high or that the consequences for local residents are serious.

12. The evidence therefore leads me to conclude that the effect of the development on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings regarding risk of crime would be low and carries insufficient weight to warrant dismissing the appeal on these grounds.

- 2.25. The nature of the children is not therefore material to the determination of this application. In addition, the level of professional care would also act to minimise any likely disturbance.
- 2.26. There would not be frequent visits by any other care staff or clinicians. The local Social Services would normally send one or two officers each six months to inspect the premises and after the initial inspection, two inspectors from Ofsted would only visit annually. All other professional and clinical appointments with the children take place away from the home, as would any staff reviews and team meetings.
- 2.27. The task must be to compare against that 'baseline' the character of the current land use with what is now proposed. In so many respects the use would operate in a way that is very similar to a normal family home. The property would provide the young people with their sole and main residence, with free and shared access to living, dining, and kitchen facilities, an ability to take shared meals prepared for them or make their own food or drink.
- 2.28. The residents would interact with the property in a way that is very similar to an adult resident, parent or guardian. The residents would eat together and carry out domestic chores. The home seeks to foster lifestyles which would be the same as if the residents were normal children living in a family home.
- 2.29. On this basis it is maintained that the proposed use as detailed in this supporting statement would not be materially different from a typical household. This is supported by the Egerton Appeal (Appeal Ref.3161037) where the Inspector concluded a similar use would not result in significantly more movements to give rise to planning concerns.



2.30. A similar conclusion is drawn in the Dale Road appeal (Appendix 3: APP/P1045/x/20/3263178) : *‘The number of these movements is unlikely to be significantly more than the number that would be undertaken by a family and certainly not enough to result in a level of intensification in the use of the site that gives rise to concerns from a planning point of view. There is insufficient evidence before me to show that the use would be likely to result in greater levels of noise and disturbance than the existing authorised residential use.’*

3. Conclusion

3.1. It is maintained that there is little difference in planning terms between the proposed use and the current use as a C3a dwelling. The carers, working on a rota basis, would effectively live at the dwelling house to provide 24-hour care, as a single household. Facilities such as the bathroom/wc, kitchen and living rooms, would be shared and the living mode would be communal. The comings and goings associated with the use would not be materially different from a typical residential household.

3.2. The proposed use is to provide a stable home environment for the occupants as their main and sole residence and that the length of stay is generally more than temporary or passing. It would not be a ‘halfway’ house or provide overnight emergency lodgings for example. However, in any event, the courts have provided some assistance in determining the significance of there being a commercial factor to a residential use or an arrangement where the occupants have generally only a limited period of stay.

3.3. Following *Gravesham BC v Secretary of State for the Environment* [1982], the court accepted that the distinctive characteristic of a dwelling house was its ability to afford to those who used it the facilities required for day-day private domestic existence. It did not lose that characteristic if it was occupied for only part of the



year, or at infrequent intervals, or by a series of different persons, or if it was under commercial management.

- 3.4. Comings and goings would be no greater than occur at present, hence there would be no undue disturbance to any neighbours. The local authority is therefore respectfully requested to support the application to allow this much needed facility to be established.