

<u>APPLICATION NO:</u>	24/00430/FUL	<u>CASE OFFICER:</u>	Miss Kim Vo
<u>WARD:</u>	Prescot North	<u>PARISH:</u>	Knowsley Parish Council
<u>LOCATION:</u>	Millbrook Manor, Knowsley Lane, Knowsley		
<u>PROPOSAL:</u>	CHANGE OF USE FROM RESTAURANT (CLASS E(b)) TO 10NO. BEDROOM CHILDREN'S HOME (CLASS C2), EXTERNAL ALTERATIONS INCLUDING INSTALLATION OF WINDOWS/DOORS AND ERECTION OF GATES/POSTS (PART-RETROSPECTIVE)		

Site Description

The application site relates to a large, detached property at Millbrook Manor, Knowsley Lane. Millbrook Manor was originally built as a girl's school in 1845 and was later used as a restaurant and function room. The site comprises various later additions in the form of extensions to the north and to the rear. There is a Grade II Listed Knowsley War Memorial (List Entry Number: 1463967) located to the west.

The application site is located within a Primarily Residential Area, as shown on the Policies Map and defined by Saved Policy H5 of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (Adopted June 2006). The site is also within the Knowsley Village Conservation Area, as defined by Policy CS20 of the Knowsley Local Plan: Core Strategy (Adopted January 2016) and Saved Policy DQ5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP.

The application site received planning approval (ref: 16/00328/FUL) for a change of use from a restaurant to a dwellinghouse in 2016. However, many pre-commencement conditions attached to the decision notice have not been discharged. The site has also not been occupied as a dwelling. As such, the Local Planning Authority considers that the site's last lawful use was for a restaurant and not for a dwelling and the description of the development has been amended to reflect this.

Since submission, the application has also been amended to reduce the number of children/bedrooms within the home from 12no. to 10no. and to include the erection of the entrance gates/posts which has been installed without planning permission. Additional supporting information has also been provided.

Proposal

The proposal seeks permission for a change of use from a restaurant (Class E(b)) to a 10no. bedroom children's home (Class C2). The care home will be for 10no. children aged 5 to 17 years, with the home prioritising admission for children aged between 5 and 12 years. The home will specialise in therapeutic care, focusing on children who have recently come into care. It will be registered with OFSTED, with a staffing ratio of 3no. staff per 5no. children per shift and 26no. full-time staff overall. In addition to this, there will be 1no. Registered Manager, 2no. Deputy Managers, 1no. therapist and 1no. Director (who will be a qualified Social Worker).

The children's home will include 10no. bedrooms; a games room; lounge rooms; dining area; cinema room; therapy/music rooms; kitchen/breakfast room; utility rooms; a study; meeting rooms; leisure room; quiet room; and bathrooms/en-suites.

The external alterations proposed include the replacement of 2no. garage doors with 2no. windows and a door access to the north facing, front elevation. 2no. windows and a door access are also proposed to the south facing, rear elevation.

Retrospective permission is being applied for the unauthorised entrance gates and posts which have been installed. They have a total height of 2.9m and total width of 5m. The posts are finished in stone with a render finish and timber gates.

Consultations

Merseyside Police HQ: Unsupportive of the proposal as if planning permission were granted, there would be a significant increase in demand on local authority and policing resources, as the location has the potential to be a generator for crime. The proposal would undermine the safety and security of existing residents, future residents (namely children who are not familiar with the area), other establishments in the area and would be a crime generator for Knowsley Village. The Missing Persons Unit are also not satisfied that the 10-bedroom therapeutic placement will address concerns. Concerns have also been raised by the County Lines Task Force.

Safer Communities: The lack of amenities in the area for young people is of concern. This may see an increase in anti-social behaviour due to the location and lack of diversionary activity. Another concern is the close proximity to Knowsley's main arterial routes such as M57, East Lancashire Road etc. which may result in a potential increase in young people missing from home and possible exploitation.

Children's Regulatory Services (Knowsley Council): There is currently no significant demand for children's residential placement. The priority of searches is for Foster Care or for residential placements that can cater for multiple and complex behaviours, in small residential homes for children between 14 - 17 years. Additionally, the OFSTED registration process can take 6-8 months. Matching is also a crucial part of the admissions process, requiring time and careful consideration to ensure that homes best meet a child's individual needs. The more bedrooms per home, the difficulty increases with the matching process.

Conservation & Design Officer: The proposed external alterations are broadly acceptable and would not additionally harm the character of the building. While the reclaimed stone pier capping to the gate posts is acceptable, the height is wholly disproportionate, and the plain rendered piers and large solid timber gates are atypical of primary entrances in the conservation area. As currently designed, these do not preserve or enhance the conservation area. The design does not relate well to the existing low iron railings which partially surround the site.

Environmental Health: No objections.

Highway Authority: No highway objections. Whilst the plans show that sufficient parking spaces will be provided, no detail is shown in terms of how the spaces will be allocated, nor if they would meet the recommended parking bay dimensions. A condition is therefore requested for a parking scheme to be provided.

Knowsley Parish Council - No comments received.

Representations

This application has been publicised by neighbour notification letters sent on 25.10.2024, 07.11.2024 and 27.01.2025. It has also been advertised by Site Notice and a Press Notice.

There have been 79no. letters of objection from 59no. individuals (with 11no.

duplicate letters) and the material planning considerations raised are summarised as follows:

- The site/application property are unsuitable and inappropriate for the proposal;
- There are alternative uses more appropriate for the site and building;
- There is no proven need for the proposed children's home;
- A number of supported accommodations already exists in the area;
- Proposed alterations will appear out of place with the Conservation Area and the proposed use will negatively impact the historic significance of the building;
- The proposal will negatively impact the rural character of the village;
- There is a lack of amenities, education provisions and poor public transport in the area to serve the proposed children's home;
- Existing social infrastructure and public services cannot cope with any increased demands or additional strain on resources;
- The proposal will result in a harmful impact upon residential amenities due to increased comings and goings and noise/disturbance;
- The proposal will result in increased crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Concerns regarding the proposal reducing public safety which will impact community cohesion and local resident's quality of life/well-being;
- History of issues relating to already existing nearby children's homes;
- Vulnerable children will be at risk of being exploited due to the site's location;
- The children's home will not be secure due to its open-door policy, raising concerns over safety;
- Internal rooms not suitable for vulnerable children;
- Concerns regarding the impacts of housing numerous vulnerable children of varying age ranges, with mix of genders in one large home;
- Research has shown that smaller children's home provide better outcomes, with the government setting out its preference for smaller children's homes;
- Concern over the need for the proposal to have close connections with police and the implications of this;
- Concerns over the staff to children ratio;
- Concerns regarding the types of vulnerable children to be accommodated who may have a criminal history, mental health or behavioural issues;
- Meeting with residents and applicant on 07.11.2024 has raised further concern with the operation of the proposed children's home, as well as doubts over the professional integrity and lack of experience of the management/owners;
- Ownership of the children's home (following approval) can be sold to another company who may have a poor reputation;
- It will be difficult to replicate a 'family' dynamic within a large building which also makes it problematic for staff to monitor children;
- Concerns raised over the matching and placements of children for the home;
- Concerns regarding increased traffic and congestion, pedestrian safety and lack of parking provision;
- Concerns regarding ecological impact of the proposal and from the removal of any habitats to facilitate additional parking;
- There are inaccuracies within the application form and the supporting information is misleading;
- Inadequate information has been submitted;
- No neighbour notification letters were sent to neighbouring properties;
- Discrepancies with the application alone raise further questions on suitability of the applicant in operating a children's home;

Councillor Frances Wynn (13.11.2024): Objects to the proposal as there is an increasing number of children's home operating within Knowsley and that there is a history of issues with some of these homes.

Planning History

The application site and building have numerous previous planning applications and the most relevant to this application are:

21/00972/FUL - Erection of dwelling and associated works. Granted, 05.04.2024.

16/00328/FUL - Partial demolition, change of use and external alterations and erection of first floor extension, provision of mezzanine floor in roof space of former restaurant/function room to create 1no. residential dwelling (Use Class C3) with existing first floor residential annexe to be retained together with external works including reinstatement of vehicular access off Knowsley Lane and associated landscaping and parking provision. Granted, 07.09.2016.

15/00719/TCA - Felling of 15no. trees & remedial pruning to 16no. trees. Granted, 08.12.2015.

95/00315/APP - Amendments to approved porch roof to residential accommodation. Granted, 02.08.1995.

94/00638/APP - Erection of extension to rear of premises providing store area. Granted, 06.01.1995.

74/14428/HIST - Infilling of rear courtyard area to provide restaurant extension. Granted, 02.04.1993.

74/14320/HIST - Erection of ground floor garage and store extension to rear and erection of flat above existing premises comprising 2 number bedrooms dining room kitchen lounge and bathroom. Granted, 18.02.1993.

74/14042/HIST - Proposed erection of extension to existing restaurant. Granted, 27.04.1992.

74/08254/HIST - Refurbishment of former school and external amendments to form restaurant and private functions room etc approval of details. Granted, 03.05.1984.

74/06979/HIST – Change of use from school to restaurant. Refused 10.11.1982. Appeal Withdrawn, 12.12.83.

74/06918/HIST – Conversion of existing school premises to 3no. residential units. Granted, 15.09.1982.

Relevant Policy

Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or where the development plan is absent, silent or out of date planning permission should be granted unless the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF clarifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan, permission should not normally be granted. Local planning

authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

The development plan in Knowsley comprises the Saved Policies of the Replacement UDP, the Core Strategy Local Plan and the Joint Waste Local Plan. The following policies are relevant to the determination of this application.

Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy (January 2016)

Policy CS1: Spatial Strategy for Knowsley

Policy CS2: Development Principles

Policy CS7: Transport Networks

Policy CS16: Specialist and Supported Accommodation

Policy CS19: Design Quality and Accessibility in New Development

Policy CS20: Managing the Borough's Historic Environment

Policy CS26: Waste Management

Saved Policies - Knowsley Replacement UDP (June 2006)

Policy H5: Development within Primarily Residential Areas

Policy H7: Provision of Flats, Nursing and Residential Homes, Hostels, and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Policy ENV2: Noise and Vibration

Policy DQ5: Development in Conservation Areas

Merseyside and Halton Joint Waste Local Plan

Policy WM9: Sustainable Waste Management Design & Layout for New Development

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Ensuring a Choice of Travel (September 2010)

Design Quality in New Development (January 2016)

National Policies

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

The National Planning Policy for Waste

Other Material Considerations

Knowsley Village Conservation Area Appraisal (2005)

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Knowsley Children's Social Care Sufficiency Position Statement 2022 - 2025

Article 35 Statement

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern with the proposal and discussing those with the applicant. However, the issues are so fundamental to the proposal that it has not been possible to negotiate a satisfactory way forward and due to the harm which has been clearly identified within the reason for the refusal, approval has not been possible.

Assessment

The main considerations for this application are:

- Principle of Development;
- Design and Visual Amenity / Impact upon Heritage Assets;
- Neighbouring Amenity;

- Access, Highway Safety and Parking;
- Waste;
- Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Other Matters Raised in Neighbouring Representations.

Principle of Development

Primarily Residential Areas

Saved Policy H5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that new development within the Primarily Residential Areas will be permitted provided that the development would not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers or adversely affect the character or street scene of the area.

The application site is located within a Primarily Residential Area and proposes a change of use to a residential children's home. As such, the proposed use is considered to be broadly compatible with the surrounding residential area, provided that it does not have an unacceptable impact upon residential amenities, or upon the character or street scene, in accordance with Saved Policy H5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP. A full assessment of these matters will be further discussed later in the report.

Need for Proposed Children Homes – Policy Context

Policy CS16 of the Local Plan sets out the criteria for proposals seeking to provide specialist and supported accommodation. In particular, criterion 1c) seeks to develop integrated social well-being, housing and planning strategies which seek to holistically address specialist housing needs and demands. Criterion 2c) seeks to facilitate opportunities to align residential facilities with health and social care services.

Paragraph 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, amongst others, looked after children.

Need for Proposed Children Homes – Assessment

Many neighbouring objections have stated that there is no proven need for the proposed children's home and that a few supported accommodations already exist in the area. Concerns are also expressed regarding the impacts of housing numerous vulnerable children of varying age ranges, with a mix of genders in one large home.

The submitted supporting information states that the proposal will provide a unique service, bridging a current gap within the sector for children who are in, or coming into care, with research evidencing the benefits of living in a larger home. It goes on to explain that it will offer a provision whereby children have somewhere safe, stable and suited to their needs, whilst allowing a period of comprehensive assessment, intervention and thorough matching for long term planning.

The Council's 'Knowsley Children's Social Care Sufficiency Position Statement 2022 – 2025' sets out that there is a particular demand for children with complex mental health or emotional difficulties, along with challenging behaviours, who require a setting where there is an opportunity to receive individual care in a *small provision* (my emphasis added). Additionally, the Council's Children's Regulatory Services team have confirmed there is currently no significant demand for children's residential placement within the borough, with the priority of searches being for Foster Care, or for residential placements that can cater for multiple and complex behaviours, in small residential homes. The proposed 10no. bedroom children's home is, therefore, deemed to be too large in its size and type and would fail to address current specialist

housing needs and demands for small children's homes.

Furthermore, the Children's Regulatory Services team state that larger residential homes, such as the one proposed, are difficult in terms of matching children. Matching is a crucial part of the admissions process, requiring time and careful consideration to ensure that children/young people are placed in a home that best meets their individual needs. The more bedrooms per home, the more difficult the matching process is. Concern has also been raised from the Missing from Home Co-ordinator at Merseyside Police, who state that a placement of this size and with the age range of children should not be agreed, as a matching process on such a large scale, with a number of different needs and range of expectations required for each child, will be unrealistic and unmanageable. Several neighbouring objections have also raised apprehensions over the matching and placements of children. Notably, such difficulties are acknowledged within the submitted supporting information, where the applicant '*estimate[s] it will take at least 12 months to 3 years to match the right children to our home*'.

On 11th November 2024, the applicant had organised a public meeting to discuss the proposal with the operational team for the proposed children's home, with local residents, as well as two members from Merseyside Police. This meeting was a separate event unconnected with the Local Planning Authority. Notwithstanding this, several objectors were able to view the application building in person and have commented that the internal rooms are not suitable for vulnerable children, and that it would be difficult to replicate a 'family' dynamic within a large building, where it will be problematic for staff to monitor children. The submitted supporting information explains that the home has been renovated to an extremely high standard, with excellent facilities to enable a secure, safe and outstanding environment. The Proposed Floor Plans also demonstrate that majority of the bedrooms will have their own en-suite and wardrobe rooms, with the remainder of the property having large rooms offering a variety of activities. However, the Missing Persons Unit from Merseyside Police have expressed that this could be extremely intimidating for young people and may influence trauma informed care, due to its extravagance and vast size. For example, each room has a walk-in wardrobe, double walk-in shower/stand-alone bath and the roof is vaulted in most rooms.

On this basis, the proposed children's home for up to 10no. children, together with the large scale of the application building, is deemed to be of a size and type that will be substantial and excessive. The Local Planning Authority does not consider that the proposal would offer a size or type of residential facility which would align with current health and social care service requirements, nor would it meet current specialist housing needs and demands for small children's homes within the borough. The proposal therefore fails to accord with criterion 1c) and 2c) of Policy CS16 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 63 of the NPPF.

Inappropriate Location and Crime and Community Safety - Policy Context

Policy CS1 of the Local Plan specifies, amongst others, that development should be focused within existing urban areas and that the existing settlement hierarchy will be maintained, including the role of Knowsley Village as a rural village.

Policy CS16 of the Local Plan sets out the criteria for proposals seeking to provide specialist and supported accommodation. In particular, criterion 1a) states that the provision of specialist and supported accommodation will be supported if they are located in an appropriate environment, near to highways and public transport links and local amenities.

Policy CS19 of the Local Plan seeks, amongst others, to minimise crime, fear of crime

and anti-social behaviour. Paragraph

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Inappropriate Location and Crime and Community Safety - Assessment

Proximity to Transport Links

Many neighbouring objections have expressed that vulnerable children will be at risk of being exploited due to the site's location. The application site has easy access onto the M57 motorway and the A580 East Lancashire Road, with bus stops located directly outside along Knowsley Lane. As such, in broad terms, the application site would be considered as a sustainable location with respect to Policy CS1 of the Local Plan. However, as set out previously, the proposal is deemed to be of a size and type that will be substantial and excessive. Given this, the site's location close to nearby, easily accessible transport links poses significant safeguarding problems for up to 10no. vulnerable children who would occupy the proposed children's home.

Merseyside Police have commented on the risk that Knowsley Lane offers in acting as a thoroughfare between the M57 motorway and the A580 East Lancashire Road. Both locations have recently served as high-demand generators for self-harm and suicide. Whilst it is acknowledged that this particular comment could be prevented by good operational practices, it is important to be mindful of any children who come into care. Particularly those in a time of crisis, who will have easy access to busy, high-speed highway networks located nearby. Furthermore, the County Lines Task Force (CLTF) within Merseyside Police have disclosed that children placed at this address will be in close walking distance to the geographies of Kirkby, Stockbridge Village, and the Hillside Estate in Huyton, all of which are high demand crime generators with links to organised crime groups. These concerns have been repeated by the Council's Safer Communities team, who state that the close proximity to Knowsley's main arterial routes may result in an increase in young people missing from home and possible exploitation.

The applicant has expressed that *'Managers and Directors will work closely with the Police before a child is accepted to ensure there are no issues such as absconding or safeguarding'*. However, Merseyside Police have stated that to satisfy the concerns raised by the CLTF, details of any risk assessment process or evidence of previous experience to ensure that children are safeguarded should be provided. Such information has not been submitted as part of this application and it is, therefore, difficult to understand how a risk assessment process would be undertaken for the proposed children's home and how often these would be reviewed. There is also a lack of information as to how any risks would be processed, escalated and shared with partner agencies, in the event of a serious incident. Given that the principle of the development is not acceptable, this information has not been sought. Notwithstanding this, the Local Planning Authority can condition for these details to be provided. However, any acceptable information provided with regards to risk assessments would not fully overcome the fundamental concerns identified regarding the substantial size and type of the proposed children's home and it failing to meet an identified need. Additionally, it is not considered that risk assessments could fully guarantee the safeguarding of up to 10no. vulnerable children.

Crime and Community Safety

Many objectors have stated that the proposal will result in increased crime and anti-social behaviour, with concerns over the proposal reducing public safety which will impact community cohesion and local resident's quality of life/well-being. Some representations have referred to history of issues relating to existing nearby children's homes. Many objectors have also expressed unease regarding the proposed open-door policy, with questions over the need for the proposal to have close connections with police and the implications of this.

The applicant has not provided any information detailing how the proposal will provide safe and secure accommodation, with the submitted supporting information stating *"the home is not a secure accommodation, there will not be security and access controls on doors. There will be external CCTV."* The Design Out Crime Unit at Merseyside Police have requested that security provisions are included to help create a safe environment to protect children from any external influence. This includes but should not be limited to, the standard of external facing and internal doorsets (including the standard of cylinder), window specifications, intruder alarm specifications and CCTV specifications. However, given that the principle of the proposal is considered unacceptable, these details have not been requested. Notwithstanding this, the Local Planning Authority considers that should the application be approved, details of any security provisions can be secured via a planning condition.

Merseyside Police have explained that Millbrook Manor is situated within the policing hub C3 which covers Knowsley Village, Prescot, Whiston and Halewood. The C3 hub is then divided into 23 beats. Millbrook Manor is in beat C313. Of the 272 burglaries recorded in hub C3 for the previous two years (1st January 2023 – 1st January 2025), a total of 28 burglaries occurred directly within the C313 beat. This figure accounts for more than 10% of the total burglaries across the hub, which is a significant proportion. An in-depth analysis of the C313 beat from 1st January 2023 to 1st January 2025 identified 6 serious violent offences near to Millbrook Manor which included 5 robberies; an incident relating to an organised crime group; a vulnerable male being attacked by a group of males and having his bike stolen; a young male being subjected to a knife-point robbery and having his bike stolen; a young male being attacked by two males on a scooter and having his bike stolen; a female being attacked by four males in balaclavas and having her bike stolen.

Taking account of the above local crime incidents, the location, as well as the substantial size and type of the proposed children's home, this would present further significant safeguarding concerns for up to 10no. vulnerable children who would occupy the home.

Lack of Amenities

Several neighbouring objections have commented that the site and application property are unsuitable and inappropriate for a children's home, with there being a lack of amenities, education provisions and poor public transport in the area. Some objectors also note that existing social infrastructure and public services cannot cope with any increased demands or additional strain on resources.

The submitted supporting information contends that issues regarding lack of amenities is country wide, with less clubs available for children/teenagers. The applicant outlines that the proposed children's home will offer activities within the site

which include: an allotment; gardens; chickens/hens; workshops for woodworking and bike repairs etc.; a sports hall; sensory room; lounges for leisure/recreation; a playroom; cinema room; and engagement/therapy rooms. Outside clubs and activities will also be available and include basketball, netball, horse riding lessons and forest school. Within Knowsley Village, the applicant refers to the Knowsley Recreation Ground as a community facility offering outdoor activities, as well as nearby woodlands providing natural play space.

The Local Planning Authority notes that the application site is located within the rural Knowsley Village. It is surrounded by the Green Belt, with the exception of the Knowsley Industrial Park South located to the northwest. Recreational activities within the village are very limited. Given the lack of amenities available for children/young persons, the Local Planning Authority does not consider the application site to be appropriately or suitably located for the proposed use given its scale and the number of children who would reside at the property. The Council's Safer Communities team have also expressed concern regarding the lack of amenities in the area for young people, noting that this may result in an increase in anti-social behaviour due to the location and lack of diversionary activities.

Additionally, Merseyside Police have stated that they are aware of the limited amenities within Knowsley Village and is therefore in support of the amenity provisions included within the site, as set out above. However, Merseyside Police have highlighted that these amenities and the very nature of Millbrook Manor may increase its appeal to offenders, increase attraction to the site's location and the risk of offences caused either towards the building or its residents.

Summary

Consequently, taking account of the previous local crime incidents and the concerns raised by Merseyside Police and the Council's Safer Communities section, given the substantial size and type of the proposed children's home, there are significant safeguarding concerns for the vulnerable children/young persons who may be accommodated within it. This is due to the number of children accommodated at the home and the site being close to nearby, easily accessible, high-speed transport links of the M57 motorway and the A580 East Lancashire Road and to nearby bus stops. The safeguarding concerns relate to potential issues of exploitation, an increase in missing or absconding children/young person's, organised crime groups having easy reachability, and self-harm/suicide risks. Knowsley Village is also a rural location which has limited local amenities available for children/young people. As such, whilst it is acknowledged that the application site would be generally considered as being within a sustainable location, for the above reasons, the proposal would fail to be located within an appropriate environment with local amenities given the number of children who would reside at the property. The proposal would, therefore, not accord with criterion 1a) of Policy CS16 and CS19 of the Local Plan or the NPPF and the principle of the development would be unacceptable.

Design and Visual Amenity / Impact upon Heritage Asset

Design and Visual Amenity – Policy Context

Policy CS2 of the Local Plan seeks to promote good quality design and ensure that development respects its setting taking into account relevant design requirements, and best practice.

Policy CS19 of the Local Plan requires, amongst others, new developments to respond to and integrate positive characteristics of immediate surroundings, including

local materials, scale, mass, form, layout, alignment and density of the existing built environment.

The Design Quality in New Development SPD (2016) sets out the Council's aspirations and expectations for design standards in new development.

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF requires planning policies and decisions to ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.

Heritage Asset – Policy Context

Policy CS20 of the Local Plan seeks to preserve the local distinctiveness and character of historic assets through sensitive design of new development, including appropriate integration with their setting and immediate landscape.

Saved Policy DQ5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that new development within or close to a Conservation Area must preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Area, having regard to the scale, form, massing, height, materials and architectural detail of existing buildings in the Conservation Area; existing plot layouts and the street scene; important views into, within and out of the Conservation Area; the need to preserve existing open spaces, structures and landscape features; likely levels of noise, pollution, traffic, parking or disturbance that may be caused by the development; and the visual impact of any vehicular access, parking or servicing/delivery areas that are needed to serve the development.

Paragraph 212 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of proposals on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Paragraph 213 goes on to state that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 215 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (LBCA Act) relates to Conservation Areas and states that in undertaking its role as a planning authority, the Council should in respect to Conservation Areas pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Design and Visual Amenity / Impact upon Heritage Asset – Assessment

Some neighbouring objections have commented that the proposed alterations will appear out of place with the Conservation Area and the proposed use will negatively impact the historic significance of the building. Concern has also been raised regarding the proposal negatively impacting the rural character of the village.

The application site is located within the Knowsley Village Conservation Area and is adjacent to a Grade II Listed Knowsley War Memorial (List Entry Number: 1463967) located to the west. The proposed external alterations to the front elevation include the replacement of 2no. garage doors with 2no. windows and a door access. Given that these would be replacements of already existing openings, the overall visual impact is deemed to be minimal. The proposed installation of 2no. windows and a door access to the rear elevation will also not appear highly visible from public vantage points, given its siting to the rear. These replacement/new openings are also considered to be of a suitable size and would be located on later extensions, which

would ensure that any unacceptable harm upon the historic character of the original building and wider Conservation Area is limited. Given their siting to the front and rear elevations, the proposed external alterations would have a neutral impact upon the nearby Listed War Memorial. The Conservation and Design Officer has also noted that these external alterations would be broadly acceptable.

Retrospective permission is being applied for the unauthorised entrance gates and posts which have been installed. Given their siting towards the northeast, the gates/posts are considered to have a neutral impact upon the Listed War Memorial, as they are screened from this heritage asset by the site's existing landscaping and boundary treatment. However, the Conservation and Design Officer notes that the new gates and entrance piers are primarily viewed in the context of the Old Meadow entrance feature adjacent. Whilst the siting of the new gates/piers is in a fairly tucked away part of the Conservation Area, new primary entrances to key historic sites should be designed to enhance the Conservation Area and setting of the heritage asset, or better reveal its significance, in line with Paragraph 219 of the NPPF.

Whilst the reclaimed stone pier capping is acceptable, the height is wholly disproportionate, and the plain rendered piers and large solid timber gates are atypical of primary entrances in the Conservation Area. As currently designed, these do not preserve or enhance the Conservation Area. The design does not relate well to the existing low iron railings which partially surround the site. The maximum height of the piers and gates should be no taller than the entrance feature to Old Meadow. The piers and gates are also considered to result in a harmful impact upon design and visual amenity, due to its imposing and dominating appearance, which will be highly visible from the westbound approach along Mill Lane. A revised design is therefore recommended, one which has greater design value, and better relates to the architecture and materials of the main historic building, and its village setting.

As such, it is considered that, by reason of its height, design and materials, the retrospective, unauthorised entrance gates/posts results in an unacceptable, harmful impact upon the character, appearance and wider setting of the Conservation Area. The entrance gates/posts also appear intrusive and overly dominant from public vantage points along Mill Lane and fails to appear in keeping with the surrounding main entrances of the area. The proposal therefore fails to accord with Policy CS2, CS19 and CS20 of the Local Plan, Saved Policy DQ5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP, The Design Quality in New Development SPD, as well as the NPPF. In coming to this conclusion, the local planning authority has undertaken its statutory duty as required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Neighbouring Amenity

Neighbouring Amenity – Policy Context

Policy CS19 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 135 of the NPPF seeks to maintain a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Saved Policy H5 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that new development within the Primarily Residential Areas (or proposals for the change of use or redevelopment of existing buildings) will be permitted provided that the development, amongst others, would not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers by reason of noise, disturbance, overlooking, visual intrusion, smells, fumes, on-street parking or other causes.

Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that proposals for the provision of residential homes will be permitted provided it meets the criterion as set out from a) to e). In particular, criterion d) states that in the case of proposals to

convert existing property, the property would be suitable in terms of its size and character to accommodate the development proposed. Criterion e) goes on to state that in the case of proposals for residential homes, the proposals should be not result in: an existing dwelling having a nursing home, residential home, hostel or HMO on both sides; or more than 2 adjoining properties being used as a nursing home, residential home, hostel or HMO.

Saved Policy ENV2 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that development that will either cause an unacceptable increase in noise or vibration levels or itself be subject to unacceptable noise or vibration from an existing source will not be permitted.

Criterion a) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that proposals for the provision of residential homes will be permitted provided that there would be no unacceptable increase in the level of noise or disturbance, or loss of privacy, for occupiers of neighbouring property.

Neighbouring Amenity – Assessment

Several objections have been received stating that the proposal will result in a harmful impact upon residential amenities due to increased comings and goings and noise/disturbance.

The application property is a large building and could accommodate the proposed change of use and conversion into a 10no. bedroom children's home. If permission was granted, the proposal would not result in an existing dwelling being adjoined by a nursing home, residential home, hostel or HMO on both sides, or more than 2 adjoining properties being used as a nursing home, residential home, hostel or HMO. The proposal would therefore accord with criterion d) and e) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP.

The proposed children's home will be for up to 10no. children, with a staffing ratio of 3no. staff per 5no. children per shift. In addition to this, there will be 1no. Registered Manager, 2no. Deputy Managers, 1no. therapist and 1no. Director. As such, if the home was to be fully occupied by 10no. children, there would be a total of 11no. members of staff on site. Given that the application property is currently vacant, if the application was to be approved, there will be a notable increase in activity and comings and goings to the site. However, taking into consideration the site's previously established use for a restaurant, the proposed level of activity is not considered to be any greater than this previous use, which would have had far greater comings and goings from customers and staff. The application property is also a detached building, located within a large plot and the proposed children's home will be for a residential use, within a Primarily Residential Area. The application building is also considered large enough to accommodate the proposed use and Environmental Health have raised no objections. The nearest neighbouring dwellings would also be distanced over 24m away and the application site has existing tall boundary treatments which will provide full screening from the application property and the proposed replacement openings. The proposal would therefore have an acceptable impact on the amenity of the occupiers of the neighbouring residential properties. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to comply with Policy CS19 of the Local Plan, Saved Policy H5, ENV2 and criterion a) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP, and the NPPF.

Access, Highway Safety and Parking

Access, Highway Safety and Parking – Policy Context

Policy CS7 of the Local Plan states that new development will be required to be, amongst others, located and designed to prioritise accessibility and sustainable modes of travel through a choice of walking, cycling, public transport, and incorporate access for private vehicles.

Criterion c) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that proposals for the provision of residential homes will be permitted provided that any necessary vehicle parking areas would be adequate to meet the needs of the development, safe and screened and/or landscaped so as to avoid causing loss of visual amenity in the area.

The Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD (2010) provides the parking standards for each land use type.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Access, Highway Safety and Parking – Assessment

Some objectors have commented regarding the proposal's impact upon increased traffic and congestion, pedestrian safety and the lack of parking provision.

Appendix A of the Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD requires 1no. parking space per 5no. bedrooms for residential care homes within Class C2, as well as 3no. disabled parking bays, 2no. cycle spaces and 2no. motorcycle spaces. The proposal will have 10no. bedrooms which, in total, requires 2no. parking spaces, 2no. disabled bays, 2no. cycle spaces and 2no. motorcycle spaces. The submitted plans show that 8no. parking bays will be provided on site, and this would achieve the parking standards. However, whilst Highways have raised no objections, they consider that the submitted plans do not adequately show how the parking/disabled spaces are to be allocated, nor does it show where cycles and motorcycles can be securely parked/stored. All parking spaces must also be at least 5.5 metres in length, with the width being a minimum of 3 metres on property frontages (this can only be reduced to 2.4 metres if a separate pedestrian walkway is provided). A planning condition for a parking scheme is therefore requested to identify these areas of parking. Should the application be approved, such condition would be attached. Moreover, whilst the proposal may increase the number of trips to the site, its last established use was for a commercial restaurant. Therefore, the impact of the proposal is not considered to be any greater than this previous use, which would have had far higher comings and goings as a result of customers and staff. As such, subject to the above condition, it is considered that the development would have no severe impacts upon access, highway safety or parking, in accordance with Policy CS7 of the Local Plan, criterion c) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP, the Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD and the NPPF.

Waste

Waste – Policy Context

Policy CS26 of the Local Plan states that the Council will promote sustainable forms of waste management in accordance with the waste hierarchy through, amongst others, encouraging good design in new development in order to minimise waste, promote the use of reclaimed and recycled materials and to facilitate the collection and recycling of waste.

Criterion c) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP states that proposals for the provision of residential homes will be permitted provided that bin

stores, fire escapes and clothes drying areas would be adequately screened or designed so as to avoid causing loss of visual amenity.

Policy WM9 of the of the Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan requires, amongst others, that the design and layout of new built developments facilitates the collection and storage of waste and provide sufficient access to enable waste and recyclable materials to be easily collected and transported for treatment.

Waste – Assessment

The submitted Application Form details that waste and recycling bins will be stored on site, which is considered to large enough for any discreet storage. Access is also possible at Old Meadow Road for the presenting of bins at the adopted highway of Mill Lane. The proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of waste management and storage, in accordance with Policy CS26 of the Local Plan, Criterion c) of Saved Policy H7 of the Knowsley Replacement UDP and Policy WM9 of the of the Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a new mandatory requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain to ensure that most new developments increase baseline biodiversity value by a minimum of 10%. Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 74-003-20240214 states that BNG does not apply to retrospective planning permission. An Existing and Proposed Site Plan has been submitted which states that no works are proposed to the wider areas. However, upon reviewing satellite aerial imagery, it is evident that works have taken place within the wider site (within the red edge of the submitted Location Plan. These include the provision of a lawn and a hard surfaced parking/driveway area, which are not subject to consideration under this application. An entrance gate/posts has also been erected without permission, which does form as part of this application. Notwithstanding this, these wider works are retrospective and would therefore be exempt from demonstrating 10% BNG. Additionally, condition no.14 of planning approval ref: 16/00328/FUL relates to the submission of a landscaping scheme and has not yet been fully discharged. The retrospective landscaping works which have been undertaken could, therefore, still be approved under this outstanding condition via a Discharge of Condition or a section 73 Variation of Condition application.

Other Matters Raised in Neighbouring Representations

Some neighbouring objections have raised concerns over the staff to children ratio. The submitted supporting information details that there will be 3no. staff members per 5no. children, as well as 1no. Registered Manager, 2no. Deputy Managers, 1no. therapist and 1no. Director. The Local Planning Authority notes that the Council's Children's Regulatory Services section have raised no specific concerns regarding staffing ratios and in any case, such matters would be controlled via Ofsted and other legislation requirements.

Some representations have mentioned the types of vulnerable children to be accommodated, with concerns that they may have a criminal history, mental health or behavioural issues. Whilst the children/young persons will be vulnerable, no assumptions can be made about the behaviour of the occupants who may reside at the property. As such, it is not possible to attribute the children's home occupants to any future incidents of crime, as there is no evidence to support these assumptions.

Many objectors have referred to the public meeting held on 07.11.2024, with apprehensions expressed regarding the operation of the proposed children's home, as well as doubts over the professional integrity and lack of experience of the management/owners. Objectors further note that the ownership of the children's

home (following approval) can be sold to another company who may have a poor reputation. In response to this, the Local Planning Authority can only assess the proposed change of use and developments. Therefore, any matters or concerns regarding the integrity, experience or reputation of any management/owners are not relevant or appropriate in the determination of this application.

Some representations have expressed concerns regarding the ecological impact of the proposal and from the removal of any habitats to facilitate additional parking. However, no additional parking facilities are proposed as part of this application and given the limited external works, the proposals impact upon ecology is considered to be minimal.

Many objectors have also commented that there are inaccuracies within the application form and the supporting information is misleading. Some objectors also note that inadequate information has been submitted, with no neighbour notification letters being sent to neighbouring properties. In response to this, this application has been determined on the information provided by the applicant, who has since submitted amended plans/documents to correct any discrepancies. Neighbour notification letters were also sent to all adjoining and nearby adjacent dwellings, where a site notice was also posted on a nearby lamppost.

Conclusion

The principle of the development is considered unacceptable as the proposed children's home for up to 10no. children, together with the large scale of the application building, is deemed to be of a size and type that would not offer a size or type of residential facility which would align with current health and social care service requirements, nor would it meet current specialist housing needs and demands for small children's homes within the borough. Moreover, taking account of the size and scale of the proposal, previous local crime incidents, the lack of nearby amenities and given the substantial size and type of the proposed children's home, there are significant safeguarding concerns for the vulnerable children/young persons who may be accommodated within it. The proposal would, given its size and scale, therefore, fail to be located within an appropriate environment with local amenities. It is also considered that by reason of its height, design and materials, the retrospective, unauthorised entrance gates/posts results in an unacceptable, harmful impact upon the character, appearance and wider setting of the Knowsley Village Conservation Area, and presents as an intrusive and overly dominant feature upon the street scene of Mill Lane. The application is therefore, recommended for refusal.

Recommendation

That Planning Permission be refused for the following reason(s):-

- 1) The proposed children's home for up to 10no. children, together with the large scale of the application building, is deemed to be of a substantial size and type of a residential facility, which would fail to align with current health and social care service requirements, and specialist housing needs and demands for small children's homes within the borough. Furthermore, there are significant safeguarding concerns for the vulnerable children/young persons to be accommodated within the proposed children's home, due to the site's size and scale and close proximity to nearby, easily accessible, high-speed transport links of the M57 motorway and the A580 East Lancashire Road, as well as to nearby bus stops. Knowsley Village is also a rural location which has limited local amenities available. The proposal would, given its size and scale, therefore, fail to be located within an appropriate environment, with local amenities for children/young people. The proposal is therefore contrary

to Policy CS16 and CS19 of the Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy (Adopted January 2016) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 2) By reason of its height, design and materials, the retrospective, unauthorised entrance gates/posts results in an overly prominent feature, which has an unacceptable, harmful impact upon the character, appearance and wider setting of the Knowsley Village Conservation Area. The entrance gates/posts also present as an intrusive and overly dominant feature upon the street scene of Mill Lane and would fail to reflect the historic character of the original building and of the surrounding area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy CS2, CS19 and CS20 of the Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy (Adopted January 2016), Saved Policy DQ5 of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (Adopted June 2006), The Design Quality in New Development Supplementary Planning Document (2016), the NPPF and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

SCHEDULE 1

Date Received	Ref. No	Version	Drawing/Document Title
29/09/2024	TQRQM24223183939919		Location Plan
13/12/2024	Drawn 07	Rev. A	Proposed Site Plan
07/01/2025	Drawn 06		Proposed Elevations
07/01/2025	Drawn 02		Proposed Floor Plans
07/01/2025	Drawn 05		Proposed Elevations

Signed Case Officer¹: **Kim Vo**

Signed Authorising Officer²: **Alan Kilroe**

Date: **21/02/2025**

Informatives

1. This decision relates to the plans and documents listed in Schedule 1.

¹ I confirm that I do not have a personal relationship with the applicant, agent or other interested parties; I also confirm that I do not have a financial interest in the site or the development proposed

² I confirm that I do not have a personal relationship with the applicant, agent or other interested parties; I also confirm that I do not have a financial interest in the site or the development proposed