

# Agenda Item 34.

Application Number	Expiry Date	Parish	Ward
231900	29 September 2023	Arborfield & Newland	Arborfield

<b>Applicant</b>	Wokingham Borough Council
<b>Site Address</b>	2 Wormstall Cottages, Greensward Lane, Reading, RG2 9JP
<b>Proposal</b>	Full application for the proposed change of use from residential dwelling house (use class C3) to children's home (use class C2).
<b>Type</b>	Full
<b>Officer</b>	Rowan Reynolds
<b>Reason for determination by committee</b>	Applicant is Wokingham Borough Council and proposal would result in additional staff.

<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Planning Committee on Wednesday, 11 October 2023
<b>REPORT PREPARED BY</b>	Assistant Director – Place and Growth
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>APPROVAL subject to conditions and informatives</b>

<b>SUMMARY</b>
<p>This planning application is brought before the planning committee as the application is made on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council and involves an increase in staff numbers.</p> <p>The application site consists of a three-bedroom semi-detached two-storey property which has previously and is currently being used as a residential dwelling (Use Class C3). There is a private rear garden, a paved driveway, and an integral garage.</p> <p>The application seeks consent to change the use of 2 Wormstall Cottages from a single dwelling (C3) to a residential institution (C2) in order to care for vulnerable children with specialist needs. There would be no associated construction or building works to accommodate this change of use.</p> <p>The scheme performs a substantial social role in the provision of living accommodation to vulnerable children, thus complying with Core Strategy Policy CP2 and policy TB09 of the MDD Local Plan. There is a need for local children to be placed in homes within the Borough, rather than being placed in residential homes far from their existing social network. This need far outweighs the in principle loss of a single dwelling and the conflict with Core Strategy CP3.</p> <p>The proposed change of use would result in a development which would not adversely impact the character of the area. Likewise, the proposal would not result in any undue harm to the residential amenities of neighbouring properties as no significant intensification of residential activities would occur, nor would there be any parking or highway safety concerns. Paragraphs provide further details of these considerations and, subject to conditions, the application is recommended for approval.</p>

<b>PLANNING STATUS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Countryside</li> <li>• Bat Roost Habitat Suitability</li> </ul>

<b>RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY</b>		
<b>Application No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Decision &amp; Date</b>
39601	Two storey side extension to form enlarged garage with bedroom over.	Refused: July 1992

<b>SUMMARY INFORMATION</b>
<p><b>For Commercial</b>  Site Area – 286.5 m<sup>2</sup>  Existing Use – Residential Dwelling (141.4 m<sup>2</sup>)  Proposed Use – Residential Institution (141.4 m<sup>2</sup>)  Number of jobs created – Up to 14, comprising of 10 full-time employees and 4 part-time employees. (Total full-time equivalent: 12).  Existing parking spaces – 2 spaces + a single garage  Proposed parking spaces – 2 spaces + a single garage</p>

<b>CONSULTATION RESPONSES</b>
<p>WBC Environmental Health – No objection.  WBC Highways – No objection subject to conditions.  WBC Drainage – No objection.  WBC Health and Wellbeing – No comments received.  WBC Adult Social Care – No comments received.  WBC Education – No comments received.  WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received.</p>

<b>REPRESENTATIONS</b>
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**Town/Parish Council:** Arborfield and Newland Parish Council feel that the site chosen would cause more problems than it solves. They identify that the site is very rural with no facilities or amenities for the young people who will be housed here. They note that public transport links are hourly through the village which might not be practical for staff or family members travelling to the site. They also find Greensward Lane to be narrow and not suitable for increased levels of traffic that would result from staff movements between shifts.

**Local Members:** No response received.

**Neighbours:** 3 comments were received on this application.  
1 comment objected to the scheme on the following grounds:

- Potential increase in traffic and noise pollution.
- Unsuitable location that would isolate the child due to the countryside location.

2 comments, while not directly objecting, raised the following queries:

- Is there enough parking on site for the number of staff. *Officer comments: WBC Highways have deemed that the site has an acceptable level of parking spaces.*
- Commenters sought clarity on the number of children being housed and the number of live-in staff. *Officer comments: there will be 1 or 2 children present in the home at any one time. There will be 2 or 3 staff members present at any one time, with 2 staff staying overnight – one sleeping and one awake.*

- One resident felt that all residents of Greensward Lane should have been notified. *Officer comments: Standard consultation protocol was followed which resulted in adjoining neighbours being consulted.*
- One neighbour raised concern over problem teenagers moving into the property as they live alone and feel vulnerable. *Officer comments: the children are vulnerable and in need of care and will always be under professional adult supervision.*

#### **APPLICANT POINTS OF NOTE**

- The proposal at 2 Wormstall Cottages forms part of the Local Sufficiency for Children in Care Plan. It is explicitly supported by policy CP2 of Wokingham's adopted Core Strategy through the provision of a service to support the needs of vulnerable children within the borough.
- The property would be the home for up to 2 children, with the likelihood that mainly 1 child will be present at any one time.
- The parking on site is adequate for the needs. There will usually be only 2 cars parked at the home at any one time, but this could be extended to 3 or 4 when a social worker, family member or other professional may be visiting. The property has hard standing for 2 cars and plenty of unobstructive on-road parking.
- The home should be no noisier than any other family residence. In attempt to further improve neighbouring relationships the main child's bedroom will be over the garage area, this doesn't adjoin the neighbour's property.
- The home would have a staff presence at all times that would be appropriate to the level of care required. The staff will work on shift patterns, and they are not full-time residents.

#### **PLANNING POLICY**

**National Planning Policy Framework**  
**National Design Guide**  
**National Planning Practice Guidance**

#### **Core Strategy (CS)**

CP1 – Sustainable Development  
 CP2 – Inclusive Communities  
 CP3 – General Principles for Development  
 CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals  
 CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits (Inc Countryside)

#### **MDD Local Plan (MDD)**

CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
 CC02 – Development Limits  
 CC06 – Noise  
 CC07 – Parking  
 TB09 – Residential Accommodation for Vulnerable Groups

#### **Other**

Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

## PLANNING ISSUES

### Site Description:

1. The application site consists of a moderately sized three-bedroom, two-storey, link semi-detached property with a private garden to the rear, off-street driveway parking and an integral garage.
2. The existing layout comprises of three bedrooms, an upstairs bathroom, a downstairs toilet, a kitchen, a lounge, a dining room and a study. There site has ample amenity space to the rear with a 15.4 metre garden to the east of the site.
3. The property was constructed and has been occupied as a dwellinghouse. The applicant now wishes to purchase the property and occupy it as a children's home, providing accommodation to vulnerable children.
4. The site is located in the countryside, there is a small copse of trees to the west and a riding school to the east, located north and south of the site are residential dwellings situated on Greensward Lane.

### Proposal Description:

5. This application seeks to consent to the change of use of 2 Wormstall Cottages from a single dwelling (Class C3) to a residential institution (Class C2) in order to care for vulnerable children.
6. There would be no physical modification to the site, neither internally or externally and the existing internal layout will remain as such. There would be no change to the access or the parking on site which currently provides 2 parking spaces in addition to a single garage (3m x 7.7m).

### Principle of Development:

7. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local development plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD Local Plan) Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
8. The site is located outside of settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where it does not result in an inappropriate increase in scale, form or footprint of the original building. As no physical alterations are being made to the building, the proposal is acceptable in principle.
9. Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of:
  - *An ageing population, particularly in terms of housing, health and wellbeing;*

- *Children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs;*
- *People with special needs, including those with a physical, sensory, or learning disability or problems accessing services.*

10. Policy TB09 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) (Residential accommodation for vulnerable groups) also states that the Council will in principle support proposals which provide for the following types of accommodation to provide for peoples' needs over a lifetime.
11. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.
12. Section (i) of CP3 also highlights that planning permission will be granted for proposals that do not lead to a net loss of dwellings and other residential accommodation or land.
13. With regard to the proposed C2 use, paragraph 91 of the NPPF states that *decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other (...), are safe and accessible (...) and enable and support healthy lifestyles.*

#### *Loss of C3 Residential:*

14. The proposed change of used to Class C2 would result in the loss of a residential dwelling, thus technically in conflict with part i) of the CP3 of the Core Strategy which states that planning permission will be granted on schemes that '*do not lead to a net loss in dwellings and other residential accommodation or land*'. On the other hand, the proposal would still comply with parts (a) and (h) of Policy CP3.
15. The scheme would provide an important social contribution and an essential community facility for supporting vulnerable children with specialist needs within the Borough instead of children being placed in care far from their existing social network, thus helping ensure essential care is delivered. Moreover, the property would still provide a home and residential accommodation albeit on often a temporary basis. Hence, the proposal broadly complies with the spirit of the Core Strategy Policy CP2 as well as being in accordance with policy TB09 of the MDD Local Plan. The proposal outweighs the loss of a residential dwelling (C3), regardless of minor policy confliction and is therefore acceptable in this respect.

#### **Character of the Area:**

16. The area is largely comprised of two-storey, semi-detached dwellings, but there are also several two-storey detached dwelling and a number of bungalows too.
17. Whilst the proposed C2 use would result in the loss of a residential dwelling in use only, the primary nature of the proposed use would be quasi-residential and as such it is considered appropriate due to the existing residential form in the directly local area.

18. As mentioned, there would be no physical change to the building in terms of extensions or external works, so there would be no harm in regard to this.

### **Neighbouring Amenity.**

19. There would be no overbearing, overlooking or overshadowing concerns due to no external works proposed.

20. Noise and Disturbance - The site is a semi-detached, so it adjoins another dwelling, and has neighbouring properties on both sides. It is acknowledged that the proposal could result in a minor increase in the level of users within the site. However, the increase would be minimal and nuisance from vehicles particularly during the later hours of the day would see only a minor change from the vehicle usage of the sites original use as a residential dwelling. This is due to day/night staff that would be present on site, of which there would be a minimum of 2 on site at a time. Also, the WBC Environmental Health officer had no objection and no noise concerns.

21. The external amenity area would be used in the same way as they would be used in a family dwelling. Hence, the proposal would not be significantly more impactful than use of the premises fully occupied for C3 residential purposes and no significant impact on neighbouring amenities would occur in accordance with Core Strategy policy CP3.

### **Access and Movement.**

22. Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy seeks to manage travel demand with sustainable travel modes, appropriate vehicle parking and minimisation of traffic impacts. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out the minimum parking requirements for development proposals. Policy CP9 states that the scale of development must reflect the existing and proposed levels of facilities, services and accessibility at or in the location.

23. The proposal intends 2 parking spaces in addition to a single garage (3m x7.7m) which accords with the Council's parking requirements for the intended use of the site as a C2 children's home. This assessment has also taken account of the proposed shift patterns.

24. The site benefits from an existing vehicular access from Greensward Lane, which would be utilised with the current scheme, and it is considered acceptable for access by all modes of transport.

25. WBC Highways have recommended a condition that would require the garage to be retained for parking, they have also recommended a condition for details of cycle parking to be submitted and approved in writing.

26. On this basis, the proposal would be considered acceptable in terms of being sustainably located and would not result in unacceptable parking pressures on site or surrounding streets, nor prejudice highway safety.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

27. As the proposal is for change of use and no additional floor space is proposed, the development would not be CIL Liabe in accordance with the adopted CIL charging schedule.

**The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)**

*In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts upon protected groups as a result of the development.*

**Conclusion.**

28. The proposed change of used from a residential dwelling (Class C3) to a Residential institution/children's home (C2) is considered acceptable in principle, as the proposal would make a positive contribution to providing an essential community facility for supporting vulnerable children within the Borough and would help ensure that this essential infrastructure is delivered. As such, the proposed would accord with national and local planning policies and is therefore recommended for approval.

## APPENDIX 1 - Conditions / informatives

*APPROVAL subject to the following conditions and informatives:*

1. Timescale – The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.  
*Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).*
2. Approved details – This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings labelled ‘Location Plan – 2 Wormstall Cottages’, ‘Site Plan – 2 Wormstall Cottages’, ‘Ground Floor Plan’ and ‘First Floor Plan’, received by the local planning authority on 4 August 2023. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless other minor variations are agreed in writing after the date of this permission and before implementation with the Local Planning Authority.  
*Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associate details hereby approved.*
3. Restriction of change of use – The premises shall be used only for accommodating and caring for vulnerable children and for no other purpose, including any other purpose in Class C2 of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning [Use Classes] Order 1987 (as amended) or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order [with or without modification].  
*Reason: In granting this permission the local planning authority has had regard to the special circumstances of this case, being the care of vulnerable children, and wishes to have the opportunity of exercising control over any subsequent alternative use in the interests of the amenities of the area. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP3.*
4. Garage to be retained as such – Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), the garage accommodation on the site identified on the approved plans shall be kept available for the parking of vehicles ancillary to the residential use of the site at all times. It shall not be used for any business nor as habitable space.  
*Reason: To ensure that adequate parking space is available on the site, so as to reduce the likelihood of roadside parking, in the interests of highway safety and convenience. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.*
5. Cycle parking, details required – Prior to occupation of the development hereby permitted details of secure and covered bicycle storage/ parking facilities for the occupants of **[and visitors to]** the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The cycle storage/ parking shall be implemented in accordance with such details as may be approved before occupation of the development hereby permitted, and shall be permanently retained in the approved form for the parking of bicycles and used for no other purpose.  
*Reason: In order to ensure that secure weather-proof bicycle parking facilities are provided so as to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel. Relevant*



*policy: NPPF Section 9 (Sustainable Transport) and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.*

## **Informatives**

1. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received and subsequently determining to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF.
2. The applicant is asked to monitor noise levels from the use and should issues continually arise, review mitigation methods to limit the impact upon neighbours.
3. It is recommended that the applicant ensures ongoing community engagement is carried out to ensure the success of the home.

## **APPENDIX 2 - Parish Council Comments (Where relevant)**

### Arborfield and Newland Parish Council Comments:

Arborfield and Newland Parish Council in general supports keeping children in care as close as possible to their communities and siting children's care facilities in locations that will save time and expense for the staff travelling to these sites.

However, we feel the site chosen in this instance would cause more problems than it solves. The location is of a very rural nature with no facilities or amenities for the young people who will be housed here. For the children, the staff and any family visitors, it is worth noting that the local public transport links are hourly through the village and take some time to get to either Reading or Wokingham so will not be practical for the staff travelling to the site for their shifts nor for family members from other parts of the borough visiting the children.

Greensward Lane is a narrow road and not suitable for the increased levels of traffic that will result from the staff movements between shifts.