

Tuesday, 16 June 2026

Objection to Application 26/01058/FP

Site Address: 3 Larkin Place, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 5UR

Description: Change of use from Class C3(b) (dwellinghouse providing care for up to three residents living together as a single household) to Class C2 (residential institution, children's home). Insertion of ground floor front window following removal of garage door to facilitate garage conversion to ancillary office.

Introduction:

This objection is submitted on behalf Jacqui and Graham O'Mahony of 7 Betjeman Road, SG8 5UP in response to planning application 26/01058/FP. The proposal is for a change of use from Class C3(b) to Class C2 to operate a children's home for up to three children aged 6 to 18. Non-resident carers would work 12-hour shifts with handovers at 8am and 8pm each day. The garage is to become an office ancillary to the use. The property sits in a quiet residential cul-de-sac.

Relevant Local Planning Policy

The relevant development plan is the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The policies most directly engaged are:

- Policy HS4: Supported, Sheltered and Older Persons Housing. This policy governs C2 and C3 supported housing uses and requires, in particular, appropriate levels of on-site car parking for residents, visitors and staff. It cross-refers to Policy HS3(b), which requires schemes to reflect an appropriate density, scale and character for their location.
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design. Policy D1(e) requires residential schemes to meet or exceed the Nationally Described Space Standards. The NDSS sets a minimum of 7.5 m² for a single bedroom.
- Policy D3: Protecting Living Conditions. This policy requires development proposals not to cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of neighbouring properties, whether from traffic, parking, noise or activity levels. Where the Council cannot be satisfied that harm can be mitigated to an acceptable level, the proposal falls to be refused.
- Policy T2: Parking. Policy T2(d) requires applicants to clearly identify how all likely types of parking demand will be provided for and to demonstrate that parking will be safe and will function satisfactorily. This is a positive obligation on the applicant.

Discussion of Scheme:

The Certificate of Lawful Development

Earlier this year the Council granted a Certificate of Lawful Development confirming that the property could lawfully operate as a care home under Class C3(b). The planning statement refers to this certificate at several points, appearing to treat it as establishing the principle of care use at the property, or as a fallback position that limits the weight to be given to adverse impacts.

On principle, the certificate confirmed only that a specific use was lawful under C3(b), namely care provision by resident carers living at the property as their main home, without shift working and without staff rotation. The Council's own officer noted explicitly that introducing shift patterns would have made the use more akin to a Class C2 facility. This application is precisely that C2 facility: non-resident carers working 12-hour shifts with twice-daily handovers. The certificate was not granted for this use and establishes no principle in its favour.

On fallback, a fallback use only carries weight where it is a realistic and credible alternative. The approved use required carers to live permanently at the property. Nothing before the Council suggests the applicant has any intention of doing that; the planning statement makes clear throughout that the intention is a fully staffed C2 institution with non-resident shift workers.

Even treating C3(b) as a genuine fallback, it would generate far fewer vehicle movements than the C2 proposal, as there would be no shift changeovers. The comparison does not assist the applicant in the way the planning statement implies. It reinforces how significant the change in character and impact would be.

The previous approval carries no weight in the determination of this application, either in favour of granting permission or in limiting the weight to be given to the identified impacts.

Absence of Management Information:

No management plan accompanies this application. The planning statement contains operational fragments at various points but they are not presented as a plan and do not function as one. The Council has accordingly been given no coherent picture of how this home will operate in a residential street, and no basis on which to assess whether the neighbouring properties will be harmed.

Policy D3 requires the Council to be satisfied that a proposal will not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions. Where that satisfaction cannot be reached, the policy requires refusal. Policy HS4 requires appropriate parking for residents, visitors and staff, which is impossible to assess without knowing precisely how access, staff, visits and trips will be managed. Paragraph 135(a) of the NPPF (December 2024) requires developments to function well over the lifetime of the development. It is not considered that the Council can make any of those assessments on the information before it.

There are concerns that the planning statement cannot agree with itself on how many people will be working at the property. Paragraph 7.7 says the maximum is four carers at any one time. Paragraph 7.5 says the home will be supported by up to six members of staff depending on the complexity of the placement. The two statements are contradictory and it is unclear how many staff would be at the premises at any time. These are the basic operational figures from which traffic generation, parking demand, noise levels and amenity impact all flow. Without reliable staffing figures, none of those things can be properly assessed. Without clarity on this point, the higher figure of six must be treated as the operational maximum, since children referred to homes of this type frequently have complex and multiple needs.

At 8am and 8pm each day, multiple vehicles will be simultaneously arriving and departing at a forecourt that cannot accommodate them all. The manoeuvring that results, reversing on a shared driveway, and vehicles parking on the street will generate engine noise and disturbance on each occasion. In a closed residential cul-de-sac, that level of activity is disruptive, and the application makes no attempt to address it.

Staffing demand is further complicated by the professional visits that are inseparable from the regulated operation of a children's home. Independent Reviewing Officers, social workers from placing authorities, CAMHS practitioners, Ofsted inspectors who may arrive unannounced, education welfare officers, medical professionals, and the home's own management and administrative staff will all attend as part of the home's regulated operation. The planning statement acknowledges professional visits at paragraph 7.7 but describes them as rare and says nothing about where those visitors will park. A children's home operating under the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and subject to Ofsted inspection will receive a significant volume of professional visits, and there is no reason to expect their timing to be coordinated around the twice-daily shift windows.

On-street parking in Larkin Place will accordingly become a routine feature of this use. During the shift changeover windows, when the forecourt is already contested between arriving and departing staff, any professional visitor will find no space on site and will park on the street. Changeover windows last up to 30 minutes and happen twice a day at fixed times. Professional visitors are not going to consistently avoid those windows, and there is nothing in this application that would require them to. On-street parking in a quiet residential cul-de-sac affects the amenity of residents who live on that street, and this impact has not been assessed.

A management plan submitted with this application would need to address, at minimum: how shift changeover manoeuvring is to be managed and by whom; what sequencing or coordination arrangements will apply to staff arrivals and departures; how professional visits will be managed relative to changeover windows; what the operational hours and staffing of the converted office will be; how incidents involving residents will be handled at night without disturbing neighbours; and what mechanism exists for neighbouring residents to raise concerns about the home's operation. None of those questions have been answered and as such, it is unclear how the operation would be managed day-to-day to ensure there would be no unacceptable impacts on the residents of Larkin Place.

Parking and Highways:

The planning statement confirms at paragraph 7.7 that there will be up to four carers working 12-hour shifts with handovers at approximately 8am and 8pm daily, lasting between a few minutes and 30 minutes. During those windows both the departing and the arriving shift will need simultaneous access to the forecourt. The application confirms a four-space off-street parking provision. That figure is exactly sufficient for one shift, with nothing in reserve. It is incapable of accommodating two overlapping shifts without displacement.

The vehicle demand associated with this proposal extends beyond the personal vehicles of attending carers. At a meeting with local residents, the owner/operator of the proposed home confirmed in person that a pool car will be kept at the property, insured for use by carers when transporting children. That vehicle constitutes a fifth car associated with the use as a minimum. Its existence is not disclosed anywhere in the application documents and emerged only because residents asked the operator directly at that meeting. The four-space forecourt, already demonstrated to be incapable of accommodating two overlapping carer shifts, cannot absorb a fifth vehicle without further and inevitable displacement onto the street. The omission of the pool car from the submitted material is a further illustration of the inadequacy of the information before the Council, and reinforces that the true parking demand generated by this proposal has not been honestly assessed.

Both sets of vehicles will require the same four-space forecourt at the same time. Departing carers will find their vehicles blocked in, especially given the precise parking layout proposed. Manoeuvring

on a shared driveway within a closed cul-de-sac is constrained by the geometry of both the site access and the carriageway itself. Vehicles that cannot be accommodated on site will park on the street. This is the direct operational consequence of the shift model the applicant has itself described, arising twice daily at fixed times.

The highway safety consequences of that displacement are material. Anchor Road is a residential cul-de-sac with a constrained carriageway width and no through-flow to disperse vehicle conflict. Additional on-street parking at or near the access to the application site will reduce the effective road width available to passing vehicles. Sightlines for vehicles emerging from the driveway will be compromised where parked vehicles extend across the visibility splay from the access. The cumulative effect is a demonstrable harm to highway safety at this location.

Emergency vehicle access is also a material consideration. A children's residential care home is a use in which the need for police, ambulance or fire appliance access can arise at short notice. Where the carriageway is narrowed by displaced carer parking during handover periods, the operational requirement for emergency access may not be capable of being met at the times of highest risk. The application contains no assessment of this matter.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF (December 2024) provides 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. These are two separate and independent tests. The highway safety limb does not import the severity threshold applicable to road network impacts. Where on-street displacement creates hazards in a constrained residential cul-de-sac serving a use occupied by vulnerable children, the highway safety test is engaged directly. Policy T2(d) requires applicants to demonstrate that parking will function satisfactorily for all likely types of demand, which has not been achieved here.

The parking layout shown is also likely to be unworkable in practice, with a vehicle parked sideways, directly behind two other vehicles. This would further worsen the vehicle maneuvering concerns raised above.

The planning statement asserts at paragraph 9.20 that the use will not result in a material increase in vehicular movements. That assertion is not accompanied by a transport assessment, a parking stress survey, or any trip generation data. It stands in direct tension with the operational detail the same document provides at paragraph 7.7. The applicant cannot credibly describe with precision a shift model that generates four simultaneous parking demands twice daily and then assert in the same statement that vehicular movements will not materially increase. The Council is entitled to treat an unsupported assertion of this kind as carrying no evidential weight, and should require a Transport Statement addressing the full range of vehicle demand before the application is determined.

Substandard Bedroom Accommodation

The floorplans show that one of the bedrooms bedroom as being less than 5 square metres in floor area. The Nationally Described Space Standards set a minimum of 7.5 m² for a single bedroom, and a secondary minimum of 6.5 m² applicable only where no child under 10 will occupy the room. The room in question falls short of both thresholds.

Policy D1(e) requires residential schemes to meet or exceed the NDSS. The reason those standards exist is that rooms below 7.5 m² cannot accommodate a bed, a desk and storage without serious compromise to a person's ability to sleep, study and have any meaningful private space. For looked-

after children, who frequently arrive having experienced significant instability and disruption, adequate personal space is a basic requirement of a sound placement.

The planning statement does not acknowledge the sub-minimum bedroom. There is no explanation of whose room it is intended to be or any attempt to justify a departure from the standard. The application does not address this deficiency at all; it proceeds as though the room does not fall short.

Conclusion

The Certificate of Lawful Development does not establish the principle of care use at the property and does not operate as a meaningful fallback. It confirmed a use materially different in character from that now proposed, and the applicant has given no indication of any intention to operate within its terms. The certificate carries no weight in this determination.

The absence of a management plan is not a procedural omission that can be addressed by condition after permission is granted. It is a substantive failure that prevents the Council from assessing the application against Policies D3 and HS4, and against the requirement in paragraph 135(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework that development should function well over the lifetime of the use. The Council cannot be satisfied that the proposal will not cause unacceptable harm to living conditions on the information before it.

The parking and highways case against this application rests not on a general concern about traffic but on the direct and foreseeable consequence of the shift model the applicant has itself described. Four-space provision is incapable of accommodating two overlapping shifts, and displacement onto a constrained residential cul-de-sac is the inevitable result. The highway safety test in paragraph 116 of the Framework is engaged on those facts. Policy T2(d) requires satisfactory parking across all likely demand types, and the application fails that test against the care home use alone, without regard to the additional and unassessed demand from the office conversion, professional visits, and children's transport. Furthermore, the operator confirmed to residents in person that a pool car insured for carer use will also be associated with the property, bringing the minimum vehicle total to five. That vehicle appears nowhere in the application. The parking layout as drawn is also likely to be unworkable in practice.

The substandard bedroom falls below the minimum thresholds of the Nationally Described Space Standards, and the application contains no acknowledgement of that shortfall and no attempt to justify a departure from Policy D1(e). For a placement intended to house looked-after children with complex needs, the adequacy of personal living space is not a peripheral matter.

Accordingly, it is considered that the application should be refused.