

Subject: Objection to Planning Application Ref 24/02173/FP for Change of Use from Care Home to Supported Hostel Accommodation, Anderson House, Florence Street, Hitchin.

Dear Mr Greeves,

I am writing to formally object to the planning application for Anderson House, Florence Street, Hitchin, which proposes to convert the current care home into a supported hostel accommodation for 86 residents. I am a resident directly across from the site and share this concern on behalf of many in the community, especially considering the family-oriented nature of the area and the potential harm to the amenity of existing local residents associated with this proposal.

Key Concerns:

1. Safety and Security Risks:

- Florence Street and the nearby areas are predominantly residential, with numerous families and children, including my own. The YMCA documents indicate that residents may have complex needs, including mental health and addiction issues. Having such a large concentration of vulnerable individuals which in my view will almost certainly increase the potential for anti-social behavior (ASB), noise, and security issues, which would negatively impact the sense of safety for nearby residents, especially families and children.
- While the YMCA intends to implement security measures like CCTV, past examples of similar accommodations suggest these measures may be insufficient in fully mitigating disturbances and maintaining community peace.

2. Over-intensification of the Area:

- The proposed 86 residents far exceeds the previous capacity of 65 elderly residents when it operated as a care home. Supported hostels inherently require more intensive support and supervision than elder care facilities. With only 22 parking spaces proposed, the density of residents, staff, and visitors could strain local amenities and add traffic congestion, which the residential streets may not be able to support safely.

3. Lack of Privacy for Nearby Homes:

- My home and many others on Florence Street are directly opposite Anderson House, and due to the layout of the building, residents have direct views into our homes. While the application proposes obscure glazing on south-facing windows, it fails to address the west-facing units that overlook Florence Street homes. This oversight compromises the privacy of local families, including mine, which is a serious concern given the nature of the accommodation.

4. Location Unsuitability for High-Support Needs:

- The area around Anderson House is heavily used by children and families, with a playground at the end of Florence Street and nursery facilities nearby. This makes it an unsuitable location for a facility of this nature, where residents may be dealing with addictions and other complex issues. Locating such a facility in a more isolated or commercial setting would better protect both the residents of the hostel and the neighbouring community.

5. **Inadequate Provision for Community Accountability and Shut-down Safeguards:**

- Given the potential issues related to ASB and other disturbances, it's essential that residents have a clear mechanism for raising concerns. The YMCA's history of working with police and security measures does not address ongoing accountability to local residents. It is essential for the Council to enforce a conditional approval (if granted) with stipulations for a shut-down or review period within the first two years if disturbances or community concerns arise.

6. **Over-reliance on Theoretical Benefits without Local Evidence:**

- While the proposal references One YMCA's success with similar projects, there is insufficient evidence to support that these benefits would extend to a site situated within a residential family neighbourhood. The proposal emphasises the support model's theoretical benefits but lacks localised evidence or case studies to demonstrate successful integration in a community like ours.

Recommended Planning Conditions if Approved:

- If the Council is inclined to approve this proposal, I strongly request consideration for reducing the number of residents to a maximum of 25 to ensure a more manageable impact on the area.
- Implementing a regular review process, with a legally binding shut-down option within the first two years if significant disturbances occur.
- Extend obscure glazing to the western windows overlooking Florence Street to protect neighbouring homes' privacy fully.
- Imposing a binding legal agreement on One YMCA that they will fully and properly adhere to the management measures set out in the application.

I urge the Council to prioritise the safety, privacy, and amenity of the current residents of Florence Street and surrounding areas and to consider whether such a facility would better serve the community in a less residential, family-centred setting. Please make my objections known to your Planning Committee when they meet to determine the planning application.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Williams

5 Florence Street, Hitchin, SG5 1QZ

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