

Appendix 1 – Representations from neighbours sent to Members of the Planning Committee

Dear Councillor

We are writing to you in advance of the upcoming Planning Committee meeting to discuss the planning application on the 29th of May for the establishment of a children's home at 17 Bridge Street, Stretton [P/2024/00083]. This is one of two applications submitted recently by 5AB Care within a small area of Stretton. The first application [P/2023/01300] for full planning permission, was for 81 Church Road this was refused in March 2024 although the home will still operate with fewer children under an LDC which was approved on the 23rd March 2023, [P/2022/00793].

Until recently there were three applications in the same small area however P/2023/01267 for 118 Church Road has been withdrawn [possibly temporarily or permanently]. Despite the withdrawal of the application for number 118 Church Road, it is worth noting that there were 68 letters of objection from neighbours. There have also been objections to the applications for 81 Church Road and 17 Bridge Street which includes petitioned objections of just under 140 handwritten signatures. The reasons for the planning officer's refusal for 81 Church Road were on the basis of noise and disturbance to local residents and parking and traffic movements. In our view, the same impacts will apply to the proposals for 17 Bridge Street and the application should be refused on the same grounds.

The refusal for number 81 noted:

"It is considered that the likely level of vehicle movements to and from the site – 4 carers with shift changeovers, manager and other visits would also be likely to result in daily significant noise and disturbance to neighbouring residents which would not be akin to that of a family household i.e. it would be highly unusual for 4 no. members of the same household to be leaving home at 10pm every night. There would also be a situation whereby there could be up to 8 no. carers on site to allow for the handover; in addition to the manager (although it is accepted this would be on rare occasions). The late evening/night shift change over (where ambient noise levels are generally lower) would in particular result by virtue of cars leaving the site/cars waiting to park on the drive, car doors slamming, car engines, front door opening/closing would undoubtedly result in harm to neighbouring amenity; particularly given the aforementioned close proximity of the dwelling to these properties.

It is also considered that although this is a sustainable location the specified shift changes would rely upon the use of the private car given the bus services offered in the locality do not correspond with the shift patterns which have been provided and therefore this in itself would undoubtedly result in demand for the 3 no. spaces as well as waiting on the highway to enter the site – with potential for engines left running adjacent to neighbouring dwellings, again to the detriment of neighbouring residential amenity. As previously set out it would not just be carers coming and going from the site, there would undoubtedly be visits by other professionals i.e. social works, counsellors, clinicians, representatives from school settings, particularly where there are children with specialised needs. There is also likely to be multiple drop offs/picks ups to different school facilities and educational facilities. It is therefore considered that the use would generate a level of activity that would not be akin to a family setting in a relatively modest 5 no. bedroom dwelling."

"For the reasons set out above the proposals are considered to be contract [sic] to Policies SP1, DP1 and DP7 of the East Staffordshire Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework." [Officer's report P/2023/01300]

We point out that the parking plan on the application for 17 Bridge Street assumes parking for 5 cars based on standard vehicle size but does not allow for the type of people carrier normally used by

children's homes for transport as standard cars are usually too small to accommodate the numbers of children and accompanying carers.

We also note that a previous planning application approved by ESBC required 7 car parking spaces [see below], for a home for 3 children with similar staffing levels and shift patterns to those proposed for 81 Church Road and 17 Bridge Street. Relevant extracts from P/2022/00959 Reeves End House King Street Yoxall Staffordshire DE13 8NF:

"The comings and goings will be mainly to take children to school and return them after school, then out to activities. We usually have 2-3 vehicles to transport the children and the team's cars will be parked with little movement during their shift patterns. Shift patterns consist of a team of 2-3 staff members arriving at 8am to take the children to school, those staff then remain on shift until around 11pm, sleep in the home and then get the children up and ready for school before finishing work around 0.30am, to be replaced by a fresh team"

"This permission shall relate to the use of the premises as a children's home, for a maximum of three children, as described in your application and for no other purpose."

"A minimum of 7 No. car parking spaces shall be retained as available for their designated purposes within the application site all times for the life of the development. Reason: In the interests of the safe and efficient use of the adjoining highway and to mitigate on-street car parking in accordance with East Staffordshire Local Plan Policies SP1 and SP35, the Yoxall Neighbourhood Plan Policy T1, the East Staffordshire Design Guide Revised Car Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document and the National Planning Policy Framework. "

East Staffs PARKING STANDARDS Supplementary Planning Document Sept 2020 notes the following in respect of parking at care homes that will be relevant to this application:

"Proximity to Off-Street Car parking – town centres and nearby edge of centres are likely to generate excessive traffic at peak times causing congestion on existing roads, or hazardous turning movements. The need for car parking spaces can be exacerbated at peak by the times by the proximity and availability of off-street parking. Particularly, where available off-street parking is inadequate. Therefore, new proposals will also need to be considered in the context of other acceptable opportunities either on adjoining streets or within nearby designated car parks."

"Parking requirements will also need to assess whether comings and goings are likely to result in a significant impact on neighbouring amenities. Again, these matters will need to be tested against the relevant circumstances. In that regard, a flexible visiting hours policy and evidence that service traffic would be spread throughout the day will be of assistance in supporting applications where there would be no perceptible traffic increase as a result of this type of proposal."

"Parking must be designed so that exit onto the highway is always possible in a forward gear."

Both Church Road and Bridge Street are in heavily congested areas and are particularly impacted during school drop off and pick up times as well as normal rush hour [see photos below].

As regards the SPD requirements above we note that vehicles at number 81 Church Road are already in the habit of reversing onto Church Road. Moreover, vehicles have been observed parked illegally across the pavement on three separate occasions recently [see pictures below].

We also note an appeal decision in 2021 by the Planning Inspectorate [Appeal Ref: APP/V4630/X/21/3279430] endorsed the refusal of planning permission for an increase for a care home in Willenhall to be increased from three places to four citing, among other considerations increased traffic movements over and above what would be expected of a normal residential dwelling. In addition to the specific planning objections cited above in respect of 17 Bridge Street, we are writing on behalf of a large number of Stretton residents who are very concerned regarding a number of adverse impacts on both neighbours and the wider Stretton Community especially as it appears that Stretton is being targeted by businesses wishing to establish children's homes. Should 17 Bridge Street DE13 0EL be approved and 81 Church Road DE13 0HE be operating under an LDC, 5AB Care will have two establishments in close proximity, online maps advise the properties are a 1 minute drive and 8 minute walk away from each other. As noted earlier, an application for 118 Church Road has been withdrawn but residents are concerned re a proliferation of Childrens homes and the impacts on local resources, as well as on local amenity.

Our objections relate both to the individual applications and the aggregate effects of two homes in a such close proximity to each other. Moreover, it appears that there is already sufficient capacity in the county to meet the needs of Staffordshire children as shown by Staffordshire's Strategy for Children's homes.¹ Whilst this document is for the county as a whole rather than just East Staffordshire it does contain some extremely useful information in particular regarding Childrens home provision in the county. It appears that Staffordshire already has more than sufficient number of places within the county but seems to be making provision for out of county children.

"Staffordshire has enough independent residential sufficiency within its borders to place all children and young people currently in Residential care, 3.5x over... (Appendix 1, Graphs 3/4/5). Neighbouring authorities placed more children within Staffordshire than we did in the same period." [Page 9].

We understand that each Local Authority is required to ensure sufficient accommodation for children in care. It appears that this requirement is already met in Staffordshire.

The bar chart on page 22 is quite compelling showing that of the residential places in Staffordshire, 250 were children from the county yet 188 were from other authorities including Birmingham, Cheshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Shropshire. Thus, Staffordshire is bearing the cost of public service provision [education, health, policing etc,] for other areas. This also shows that the children themselves are not being well served in that they are being moved far from home in some cases.

It seems difficult to justify additional Childrens homes in Stretton when there is already sufficient capacity within the county.

We are sympathetic to the needs of vulnerable children that will be accommodated in such homes and recognise that stable communities are more preferable locations than areas where vulnerable children may be exposed to e.g. criminality. However, locations for children's homes should also take account of the context of the surrounding environment as well as possible adverse effects on neighbours due to the nature of such homes.

The applicant for 81 Church Road and 17 Bridge Street makes use of Appeal Ref: APP/B3410/W/22/3291205 [Newborough] and the included statement *"it cannot be presumed that potential occupiers of the care home would behave in an anti-social manner or increase opportunities for crime and fear of crime."*

¹ Sufficiency Strategy - Homes for Children in our Care (staffordshire.gov.uk)

In our view the concerns regarding antisocial behaviour should not be summarily dismissed on the basis that such behaviour should not be automatically assumed. Or, that should such instances occur, they can be dealt with by the care home staff and/or the police. It is of course difficult to provide evidence before the event. However, there is sufficient publicly available information from government sources and data [see for example, the information from Blackpool Council below], and from examples from other care homes in Derby and Burton to show why local residents are right to be concerned.

Indeed, Staffordshire Police developed an information pack,² for 120 care homes in Staffordshire. Every care home in Staffordshire is appointed a police officer or PCSO to be a single point of contact who *“will work with care homes/supported accommodation to prevent incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour around premises.”* While it is laudable that Staffordshire police are taking this approach, the document clearly shows an expectation that problems can occur. We note also that in respect of the application for 81 Church Road, Staffordshire Police recommended crime prevention measures to be installed.

In support of our opinions, we note the concerns that have been raised by, e.g. Wyre and Blackpool councils in relation to proliferation of children’s homes within parts of the authorities. Also, a **Planning Appeal decision** for premises in Stockport [Appeal ref: APP/C4235/X/10/2132351] which identified differences between residential use of a property and that for an institution, such as a Children’s home: The Inspector noted: *“There would be more comings and goings of cars and the people carriers referred to by the appellant than might be expected in a normal domestic household. Residential use of the property by troubled children could bring more disturbance than would most family homes.”*

Blackpool Council quoted government statistics regarding the high percentage of children in children’s homes with significant mental health difficulties, conduct disorders and violent and aggressive behaviour, special educational needs and a propensity to go missing noting *“This places a significant strain on local policing and the provision of education and mental health support.”*

Wyre Council Guidance on Children’s homes [October 2023] has as a principal objective, *“Prevent an undue concentration of specialist uses in any particular area of the borough in order to safeguard the local character and amenity”*

“Whilst such children undoubtedly deserve to live in a pleasant, caring and supported residential environment as part of the community, it is also important that the amenities of neighbours be appropriately protected.”

The Council also noted: *“As a result of these discussions, notwithstanding the fact that every planning application must be determined on its own merits, the council is now of the opinion that a change of use from a dwellinghouse to a children’s home will generally be material for a number of reasons including:*

- *Change in the character of the use as a result of increased day-to-day activity;*
- *Change in the character of the use as a result of the necessary form of operation of the premises;*
- *Impact of the proposal in terms of the loss of family dwellings;*
- *Impact of the proposal on local public service delivery*

In addition, Wyre Council requires applications for Children’s Homes to demonstrate that the premises be in a suitable location by providing a justification for this including [among others], the following factors:

² [Looked-After-Children-Care-Providers-Information-Pack.pdf](#)

- *that it would not lead to undue concentration of children’s homes in the particular area; and*
- *would not impact on local character and amenity.*

As regards parking and vehicle movement Wyre Council noted:

“It is recognised that children’s homes require more car parking than a dwellinghouse of a comparable size. This is because of the number of staff Children’s Homes who are likely to be working at the property at any one time, but also because of the potential for visits from other professional support workers.

Vehicular movements and frequency of access that would result from the intensification of activity in and around the site, particularly in unsociable hours, can be disruptive in a residential setting and impact on residential amenity. The increase in car parking in the locality can also affect visual amenity. On this basis, proposal for children’s homes will only be supported where there is no impact on living conditions of existing residents or impact on visual amenity.”

Blackpool Council Advice for Children’s Care homes [August 2020] has similar objectives regarding safeguarding local character and amenity, loss of family dwellings, impact on local service delivery and traffic.

Blackpool Planning Committee in June 2020 set out the intended approach for the determination of Certificate of Lawfulness applications relating to the proposed use of properties as residential children’s homes. Whilst these three applications are for planning permission, rather than Certificate of Lawfulness, the commentary is also relevant in this case. The document notes that:

“Impact of the proposal (wider strategies) – *case-law has established that it is reasonable to consider off-site effects as part of an assessment of materiality. Residential children’s homes are more profitable than the use of a property as a single house. This results in pressure to convert family homes into residential children’s homes.”*

Finally, we are aware of an Ofsted inspection³ [see attachment], which, in October 2023, identified serious shortcomings at another home run by this applicant notably:

“the following serious concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance inspection:

- *Staff do not actively protect children from harm and understand potential risk in the home.*
- *Staff do not have the necessary skills to recognise signs that children are at risk of harm.”*

“Children had spent prolonged periods unsupervised in one child’s bedroom smoking cannabis. Staff failed to take effective action, despite knowing the risk of harm to both children. Furthermore, the covering manager gave no direction to staff to prevent a reoccurrence of these behaviours.

One child, who has moved out of the home in response to the serious allegation, has had a high number of missing-from-home episodes since the full inspection. When children go missing from the home, staff follow the children’s plans and search for them. However, staff lack professional curiosity and did not explore concerns about the potential of a child being exploited while they were missing from home, despite the child disclosing that they were with an adult of concern. The management of these incidents demonstrates that staff do not have the necessary skills to recognise signs that children are at risk of

³ [50236031 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50236031)

harm. This impacts on the staff's ability to manage the children's relationships and prevent them from harming each other.

Two children have made serious allegations against another child. Children have reported that these incidents happened while they were in the home."

As a result of this Ofsted inspection the home was served with a compliance notice.

Whilst some of the issues raised are not considered to be planning issues we nevertheless provide this information as context and request the committee to consider these aspects.

We therefore have a number of questions:

1. How does East Staffs deal with proliferation of children's homes and possible impacts on community cohesion, character and amenity?
2. To what degree has the council undertaken an impact analysis of the effects on the local community?
3. Why has there been no public consultation in Stretton?
4. How can East Staffs justify further children's homes given the current excess [3.5 times], capacity?
5. Will the home only board local children? Has East Staffs calculated the cost to the borough of provision of public service providers including police, education, mental health services and others in providing resources for children from outside the borough? Can East Staffs justify this additional charge on Staffordshire tax payers?
6. Has East Staffs looked at provision from non- profit care homes?
7. How have the applicants demonstrated it/they will deal with any complaints from the local community?
8. How has the applicant demonstrated it will deal with traffic and parking especially given its' already cavalier response to parking at 81 Church Road?
9. Ofsted asks any Children's Home applicant to consider other nearby homes. However, any Ofsted application will be post-planning. Should East Staffs have the this as a planning requirement?

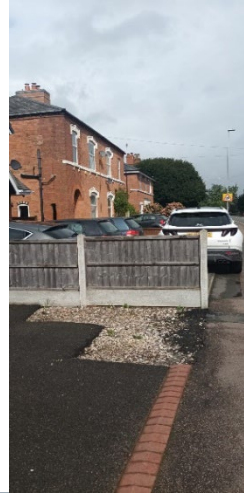
We provide this information in advance of the Planning Committee meeting/s in order to make you aware of local opinion regarding these applications and also to request that each application not be considered in isolation, irrespective of the need to consider each application on its' merits especially as the two applications recently under discussion are from the same applicant, 5AB Care Ltd. We have been in touch with the Parish Stretton Council and with our MP Kate Kniveton and understand that they are supportive of this approach although it seems that the response from the planners is that each application must be judged singly.

We understand that you will not be able to provide us with an opinion in the advance of the committee meeting however, we are happy to meet with you face to face in order to discuss these concerns and to provide any additional information that you may consider to be of help.

On behalf of residents of Church Road, Bridge Street, The Green, Bridgeside, Bridge Farm Mews and those living close to the planning application locations

Photos below:

Recent parking at **81 Church Road** is shown in the photographs below taken on three different days. In each case the vehicle parked on the pavement remained for some time.



3 photo examples of Bridge Street traffic below:

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Below please find photos of traffic situations at different times of day and different dates below – Edit of inserted blue arrow shows location of 17 Bridge Street DE13 0EL – NO diversion was in place on the days photos taken, these are normal traffic conditions for peak hours in the morning and late afternoon through to evening.





The Green, DE13 0EQ, a one-way street, is to the left of this photo, this road is used as a cut through to avoid staggered crossroads near to St Marys' Church in Stretton and so traffic adjoining Bridge Street is far higher than expected and includes heavy goods vehicles on a daily basis. There are also daily instances of drivers entering via the exit / no entry junction viewable in this photo.



Queue of traffic approaching Bridge Street from Bitham Lane