

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

22 February 2024

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined below:

APPLICATION NO: 23/1335/09 (GH)
APPLICANT: Lolly Support Services Ltd
DEVELOPMENT: Certificate of Lawfulness for a proposed change of use of a dwelling C3(a) to a Children's Residential Home C2 for up to 2 children.
LOCATION: 134 TURBERVILLE ROAD, PORTH, CF39 0ND
DATE REGISTERED: 31/01/2024
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Porth

RECOMMENDATION: GRANT A CERTIFICATE OF LAWFULNESS

REASONS:

The proposal to utilise the existing residential dwelling for the provision of residential accommodation and care for up to 2 no. children between the ages of 8 to 18 years, alongside 24 hours support staff coverage, operating in shifts, is considered to result in a prima facie change of use, Class C3 to Class C2.

However, based on the evidence and supporting information submitted by the applicant, as a matter of fact and degree, the change of use would not be considered material. Consequently, the development is lawful for planning purposes and planning permission is not required. Therefore, a Certificate of Lawfulness can be issued.

REASON APPLICATION REPORTED TO COMMITTEE

A request has been received from Councillor Ros Davies for the matter to come to Committee.

APPLICATION DETAILS

This is an application for a Certificate of Lawfulness for a Proposed Development under Section 192 of the 1990 Act ('CLOPUD') that seeks to establish whether the proposed use of a residential dwelling at 134 Turberville Road, Porth, as a residential children's home, as detailed in the description of development, submitted plans and associated documents, would be lawful for planning purposes.

Effectively, the application seeks to establish whether the proposal would result in a material change of use of the property or if it is capable of being carried out without the need for planning permission.

The proposal seeks to utilise the existing house for the provision of residential accommodation and care for up to two children between the ages of 8 – 18 years old. The children would be supported by up to three staff during the day and two at night.

The supporting information submitted with the application sets out that the registration of the home would be with of a maximum of two children on a staff ratio of 1:1:

- A registered manager would work Monday to Friday, between 8am and 5pm
- Care staff would work shifts from 8am to 8pm, with two on a day shift and one waking night duty and another one on a sleep-in basis.

The application details also outline that the existing residential setting would be maintained, which comprises three bedrooms, a lounge/diner, kitchen/breakfast room and a bathroom.

SITE APPRAISAL

The application property comprises a mid-terrace Victorian three-bedroom dwelling which is located on hillside to the north-west of Porth town centre.

The house has an appearance typical of its age, with a dressed stone elevation, ground floor bay window and canopy. It is set back from the western side of Turberville Road by a small, enclosed garden.

To the rear of the property, the house has a two storey off-shot leading to a long and steep rear garden, beyond which is an unadopted and unmade rear lane.

At the southern end of Turberville Road there is a small convenience store; however, all of the surrounding development is residential and mostly of the same era.

PLANNING HISTORY

There are no recent or relevant applications on record with this site

PUBLICITY

The application seeks the determination of whether the proposed use is lawful and as such no consultation with nearby properties is therefore required to be or has been undertaken.

CONSULTATION

The application seeks the determination of whether the proposed use is lawful and as such no internal/external consultation is required to be undertaken. However, despite this fact, given the nature of the proposed determination, consultation has been undertaken with the Council's Legal and Democratic Services section in order to gain a legal opinion in respect of the proposed use.

The Council's Solicitor commented that having assessed the information submitted and the nature of the proposed use described, the Council could properly issue a Certificate of Lawfulness should the proposal not be considered to constitute a material change of use; hence planning permission would not be required.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The determination of this application cannot include any consideration of the planning merits of the case. Therefore, there are no Local Development Plan policies that need to be taken into account.

National Guidance

Welsh Office Circular 24/97: Enforcing Planning Control, Annex 8, deals with 'Lawfulness and the Lawful Development Certificate.'

Paragraph 8.26 states that if the LPA are supplied with information satisfying them that the use or operations described in the application would be lawful, they shall issue a certificate to that effect and, in any other case, they shall refuse the application. The burden of proof is firmly on the applicant.

Paragraph 8.28 advises that a LDC granted under Section 192 shall specify the land to which it relates, describe the use or operations in question (identifying the relevant use class where appropriate), and give the reason why the proposal would be lawful.

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Scope of application and legislative background

This is an application for a Certificate of Lawfulness for a Proposed Development under Section 192 of the 1990 Act ('CLOPUD') that seeks to establish whether the proposed use of the existing residential dwelling as a residential children's home, as detailed in the description, the submitted plans and associated documents, would be lawful for planning purposes. In effect the application seeks to establish whether the proposal would result in a material change of use of the property or is capable of being carried out without the need for planning permission. As such the application should be determined on the facts submitted and the law rather than on planning policy/merits.

As noted further above, the property is a three-bedroomed dwelling house located within a residential area of Porth. The property is intended to be used for the provision of residential accommodation and care for up to 2 no. children between the ages of 8 – 18, with up to 2 no. support staff at the property 24 hours a day, operating in shifts through a sleep in service and with a manager present during working hours.

The new use would not result in any external alteration and the application does not include proposals to change the internal layout of the property. Consequently, the children and staff would share the kitchen, bathrooms and communal facilities and the children would each have their own bedroom. Furthermore, the children would be expected to attend education during the week and the support staff would assist the children with recreational activities after school and on the weekends.

Section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 defines the term 'development' which includes the making of any change of use of any buildings. Section 55(2) (f) explains in the case of buildings used for a purpose of any class specified by the Welsh Government the use of the building for any purpose within the same class shall not be taken for the purpose of the Act as amounting to 'development'.

On 25 February 2016 the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 was amended in Wales by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (Wales) Order 2016 whereby Part C of the Schedule now states:

Class C3. Dwelling Houses

Use as a dwelling house (whether or not as a sole or main residence) by –

(a) A single person or by people to be regarded as forming a single household;

(b) Not more than six residents living together as a single household where care is provided for residents; or

(c) Not more than six residents living together as a single household where no care is provided to residents (other than a use within C4)' (Class C4 relates to the use of a dwelling house by not more than six residents as a house in multiple occupation).

In light of the above, the proposed use of the property would clearly not fall within Class C3(a) as it would not be occupied by people living together as a family. Further, it would not fall within Class C3(c) as an element of care would be involved. Consequently, unless the proposed use falls within Class C3(b), it would fall within Class C2.

Whilst the definition of Class C3 was altered in the amendment Order 2016, the definition of 'care' was not, and therefore remains as stated in the original 1987 Order:

'In this Order, unless the context otherwise requires:

'care' means the personal care for people in need of such care by reason of old age, disablement, past or present dependence on alcohol or drugs or past or present mental disorder, and in class C2 also includes the personal care of children and medical care and treatment;'

The Order however does not define the term 'personal care' but the term is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as:

'the job of helping people who cannot take care of themselves, for example because they are disabled'

Alternately, the Department of Work and Pensions defines the term 'personal care' as:

'personal care includes: assistance with dressing, feeding, washing and toileting, as well as advice, encouragement and emotional and psychological support.'

It is noted that the definition of 'care' within the Order appears to exclude the personal care of children, except in Class C2. In class C3 there is reference (in the parenthesis to C3(b)) to care provided for residents, but that care does not by the definition clause include the care of children.

In the determination of this application, the key issues are twofold: Firstly, would the proposed use fall within current use class of the property, Class C3 (dwelling house), or Class C2 (residential institutions)? Secondly, if the proposed use is held to fall within Class C2, would this result a material change of use for which planning permission should be sought?

Consideration

The answer to the first question, above, is that children's homes fall within Use Class C2 Residential Institutions and not Class C3 Dwelling Houses

Development Control Practice (DCP) explains that the key consideration is *North Devon District Council v First Secretary of State and Southern Childcare [2003]*. The case concerned the use of a house to provide residential care for two children.

In this regard, it was held that the concept of what constituted a household, as per the wording of Class C3 within the Use Classes Order, was more than just a matter of the number of occupants. Furthermore, it was necessary to assess whether the occupants could truly be regarded as a household.

It was determined that children, on their own, cannot be considered to form a single household and carers who did not live there all the time meant that the use fell within Class C2. This has become the established case law position.

Moving onto the second issue and whether the proposal would constitute a material change of use is a matter of fact and degree. DCP contains numerous example of past appeals where Inspectors have based their judgment on the level of occupation and intensity of use; any changes to the appearance of the property; any alterations to internal layout; the nature of the comings and goings associated with the use; the scale and location of the proposed use and any impact on local amenity.

These considerations are not an exhaustive list, but in judging whether the overall character of the proposed use at 134 Turberville Road would differ materially from that of a dwellinghouse or the existing residential use and context of the surrounding area, the following points are noted:

- The North Devon case operated on the basis of non-resident carers working a shift pattern but it was found that this would not result in a material change of use. Therefore, that the dwelling would effectively act as a place of employment for the relevant staff is not a concern.
- The proposed times of the shift changeover at 08:00 and 20:00 hours would not be at unsocial times or likely vary from, or be at odds with, the patterns of movement caused by other local residents returning to and from their homes either due to work, shopping, school or other social activities.
- No changes are proposed to the appearance of the property or its internal layout.
- Regarding intensity of use and the level of occupation, this is limited by the scope of the application and the physical size of the property and would therefore be comparable to other neighbouring dwellings.
- The proposed parking requirements would not be considered to be materially different from those associated with other residential uses in the locality, where the number of vehicles associated with a family, or the number of comings and goings can vary.
- The two children would be accommodated and cared for in a manner that would be as close as possible to that of any other family occupied unit.

On the basis of the foregoing and having reviewed the outcomes of comparable appeal decisions at Fenland (re. 2155849), Poulton Le Fylde (ref. 3277997), Rochdale (ref. 3145074), Brecon (ref. 2205394), it is considered that the proposed children's home would not represent a material change of use and thus the issuing of a Certificate of Lawfulness would be appropriate.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 31 December 2014.

The application is for development of a kind that is not CIL liable under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended).

Conclusion

The proposal to utilise the existing dwelling for the provision of residential care for up to 2no. children between the ages of 8 – 18, along with up to 3 no. support staff operating in shifts, is considered to fall within Use Class C2.

However, based on the evidence and supporting information submitted by the Applicant and a review of case law, it is considered as a matter of fact and degree, that the change of use would not be considered material.

Consequently, the proposed development is lawful for planning purposes and planning permission is not required. As such Certificate of Lawfulness can be issued for this proposal.

RECOMMENDATION: GRANT A CERTIFICATE OF LAWFULNESS

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