

Community engagement is surely one of the most important issues affecting the longterm success of a vulnerable children's facility in Hadston. The principle objection to this planning application is the fact that it was submitted during a national lockdown, therefore, preventing the residents from meeting to discuss the impact of such a significant proposal within this small neighbourhood. Whilst we fully appreciate that this is not a material planning issue, we feel that it is deserving of equal consideration given the significance of the proposal. A Children's Care facility has far wider implications in a small community like Hadston so is fully deserving of face to face discussions involving all interested parties.

We all understand the importance of safeguarding vulnerable children. If successful, this planning application relies heavily upon community support to ensure success. Presumably, it is paramount to Northumberland County Council Children's services that any new residents in the proposed Children's home are accepted into the community. We remain astonished by the apparent short-sighted approach of the council to this new proposal. Due to the lack of community engagement, there remains much anxiety throughout the neighbourhood regarding this proposal. Without more than the current web based consultation, which has many barriers, this angst & skepticism will prevail. An example of this is the local aged miners neighbourhood who are feeling vulnerable about living opposite this care home. Without a public meeting to discuss this proposal, the residents remain fearful and are left with many unanswered questions. The community continues to feel marginalised by the local authority's view that the online portal is sufficient to achieve inclusive planning. This has the appearance of the council running roughshod over due process.

Child safeguarding for a vulnerable needs group is a major concern given the current crime statistics in Hadston. Antisocial behaviour & drugs related crime are rife. We urge the committee to take into account the minutes of East Chevington Parish Council monthly meetings over the past few months. These provide evidence of such antisocial behaviour & drugs related crime in the area, including a drugs related death reported in Red Row, November 2019. In addition, local ward Councillor Scott Dickinson submitted an objection in August 2020 to a different planning application in Hadston (Ref. No: 20/01480/FUL). His first concern is on the basis of 'current major antisocial behaviour'. This is significant when considering the suitability of Hadston as an ideal location for a Children's care home. The lack of youth services in Hadston coupled with the current rise in crime, call into question the suitability of this environment for vulnerable children.

Lastly, In 2017, the site of this proposal was designated as a community green space. After months of collaboration between NCC & local residents, initial drawings were created for a community park, which was welcomed by the neighbourhood. After the local elections & subsequent change of authority, the plans were abruptly cancelled without any explanation to the residents. Given the decades of under investment in this former mining community, many local services have been cut. We have lost a police station, local school, local transport. Critical services such as medical have been eroded to borderline viability. Therefore, It is no surprise that the community feels totally frustrated with NCC for submitting plans during lockdown to build on this formerly designated community green space & additionally, denying local residents a voice. We appreciate that this is not a planning consideration, however, it gives context to the huge feelings of ongoing disappointment felt by many in the community towards the current proposal.

To be clear:

We understand that we are living in unprecedented times with COVID-19 restrictions that are impacting how the local authority are operating.

We understand that the local authority are under pressure from central government to continue making planning decisions as quickly as possible with a focus on web based consultations.

We understand that this planning decision is not based upon popularity/unpopularity of the proposal or the number of objections/letters of support.

However, we do **not** understand the apparent reluctance of NCC to acknowledge that this consequential planning application requires a more inclusive consultation approach under the circumstances. Surely, anyone holding an interest must be given appropriate opportunities to consult and influence how this decision is made.

In closing, we ask you to promote open & inclusive planning by rejecting this planning application until the community are legally allowed to meet & discuss this important proposal in detail, with all interested parties. This is surely to the greater benefit of all.