

To Northumberland Planning Department

I am writing in relation to the property proposed for the Former Druridge Bay Middle School site.

Firstly, what I would say is I think this could have been handled far better, I first learnt of these plans by reading an article in the Northumberland Gazette following a Cabinet Meeting of the Councils Administration. As an opposition Councillor I would have hoped that I was entitled to the same courtesy of being informed about these plans prior to a discussion at the Council.

I would like to thank the Officers who then met with me and the Parish Council to explain what an earth was going on after I expressed concern about being in the dark about this proposal. It's a real pity it all happened that way round. Unfortunately, because of the lack of information some members within the community have decided to make untrue statements about myself and the Parish Council being part of the proposal and we will need to take some action about that but the point is all this could have been avoided with information being properly shared.

I would have hoped that a more engaged process could have been used with the Community, the planning system on an item like this isn't simply black and white and other considerations and concerns need to be addressed. Had an open process of engagement been used many residents may not have the concerns they have. I would have preferred some engagement that shared more than the planning documents do to show people what your plans are.

At this point I should point out that I am fully in support of small, child centred accommodation like this in suitable locations, I am very familiar with other sites like this that operate very well and have backing of their communities. I don't believe anyone in the Hadston area would be stereotypical of children in care and realise that many of these small children require care because of no fault of their own and are wonderful young people. Many children will be in the care of the Council to protect them from abuse or should they become parentless because of something else. I also recognise the strain on Foster Care and why these types of small homely environments are required for young people to be safe, cared for and live integrated in communities where they can feel belonging and security to grow up with friends and a community just like everyone else. It is unfortunate that again, because of the lack of information provided locals are under the assumption that young people with criminal records, drug and alcohol issues will be placed here. I am comforted to learn that if approved this would not be the case.

In terms of the application listed I do have some concerns about the site itself, we had worked hard to gain the site and engaged with the community about the plans for an open space and community

area. While I appreciate this small footprint is not a large amount of the site is it really the best location in Hadston if this is your chosen village?

The natural pond that has appeared behind the proposed site has always been an issue for the school that resided prior to its closure, subsidence is something that land suffers from. Has this been investigated fully? It also sponsors a range of wildlife which may well be deemed protected has this too been investigated in depth?

In terms of the proposed site, the former caretaker's bungalow was built on a lower site and therefore didn't pose so much of a visual impact. I wonder will the proposal be from a sunken level? Or would it be from the elevated level? Was a single storey property every considered to be in keep with what was there previously?

The issuing of letters, I am concerned that many directly affected properties did not receive letters, it stipulates that only 8 were sent out, given more than 8 properties are opposite the site should this number not be greater following Council Policy?

Can anyone explain to me why the application heading has changed a few times and why originally letters that came out had a 4-bed property but in fact it's a 5-bed property? In addition, can anyone explain why the title of the application has changed and its number? I am a little confused by this.

Erection of signs on the land, I have not seen any signage on the land to indicate to residents can it be confirmed when this will be done to allow others the opportunity to comment? Public Notices should be displayed when will this happen?

In terms of the screening proposed for the property, I note that trees will be moved, some long established trees that would provide natural screening had the property proposed been kept to the footprint of the previous and some consideration given to this. I don't believe that the screening of this property is enough by looking at the plans submitted. Although a small number of children would live there, staff and others would be coming and going, and yes I appreciate that a school to cater for up to 500+ children has been there before but it's the additional times of the day that need to be considered, outside what would have been traditional school times. Sound and light protection for the site and the houses surrounding needs to be stepped up if this is to proceed.

In summary:

This is far more than a planning application this is a facility that could have integrated well into the community had more information, a more upfront approach and other considerations been given. I have a lot of respect for the Managers and Staff within these services and know they work incredibly hard to ensure that the similar sites that already exist in communities are part of them in all corners of Northumberland. I just can't understand the process that has been used with this proposal.

Allowing rumour and misinformation to be circulated without providing any factual information from the horse's mouth for want of a better expression is just terribly odd. It has allowed a lot of animosity to grow that may not have been needed had this been a codesigned proposal with myself and the community.

I know Councillors will be discussing and deciding on this application virtually and members of the community will have an opportunity to raise questions and concerns within that process, but I just would have hoped things could have been more open at a time when people are already anxious and concerned the Council really needs to be mindful of how it acts. Promoting inclusive communities and openness is something I full support but this isn't an example of this.

Hadston is a good community, it's a community that I have been part of all my life and has improved dramatically over recent years. It's a community that always speaks its mind but is open to discussion and disagreement when furnished with accurate information. Its just a pity, as a community we weren't given the opportunity to learn of this proposal and talk about it with professionals as a community.

East Chevington Parish Council discussed this application and on planning grounds had no objection which I can understand, however they did have reservations about information sharing and process to date relating to this application. But on the very restricted planning grounds they couldn't object which also leads to my earlier point about this being far more than a planning application. They too thanked the officers who spoke to them but again wished not to have learnt about this proposal in the Newspaper.

It goes without saying if the Council approves this application, I will do everything I can to support the young people who live there, the people who work there and our community.

Yours Sincerely

Cllr Scott Dickinson

Member for Druridge Bay Division