

Chair, on behalf of East Farm Park residents thank you for this opportunity.

This is not a fancy speech written by an expert full of legal jargon and planning references but by the residents. We take this opportunity to share our concerns with you as it continues to blight our small community.

The original application, after one referral, was then refused planning permission by yourselves, but an appeal overturned this decision.

Condition 7 of the Appeal Decision states “The premises shall only be used as a residential care home for children, with a maximum of 3 children in residence at any one time who shall be from the Northumberland County Council area and shall be no older than 12 years when first placed in care at the premises, and for no other purpose.”

Appeal Decision Conditions Para 27 includes the following “Although the appellant sought to allow some flexibility in the region from where the children would have formerly resided, I find their suggested wording to be imprecise and unenforceable. In any case, based on the evidence of the Designing Out Crime Officer, I consider that it is important to the operation of the site that children are not remote from family and friends and are from the local area. These conditions are necessary to minimise the intensity of the use and protect the amenity of neighbours.”

The Planning Inspector included these important conditions to reduce the risk of disturbance to the neighbouring amenity and to safeguard the wellbeing of children placed at the home.

One of our major concerns centres on the potential disruption that will result from missing children and the effect on local support services. These children will have a variety of social needs and they need to be comfortable in their surroundings; by moving them to this rural location can only increase their anxiety.

When we were notified of this new application we contacted the Planning Inspectorate who stated “We would expect Local Planning Authorities to respect the decision of the Planning Inspector”.

We were astounded when this application was recommended for approval as it not only goes against the decision of the Planning Inspector it also brings into question the failure to recognise National Best Practice of Children in Care. We have thoroughly researched this subject and copies of the relevant documents have been posted on the planning portal.

AFC are requesting wording changes in the conditions and the flexibility to draw from a wider region. If relevance is to be given to their proposal it is clear this request has nothing to do with children but to maximise profit realised by increasing the catchment area.

AFC have admitted they are a fee-based organisation and are using the planning system to maximise income which goes against what their primary aim should be, to safeguard children.

NCC are building two new children's homes and from a Freedom of Information request there will be ample capacity for the County's needs. Therefore we question why this home is needed especially if children need to be transported in from other counties to make it viable.

Surely this is setting a new precedent that only the Planning Inspectorate can respond to.

Over the past 18 months we have attempted to reach out and build bridges with Officers from AFC by adopting an open and honest approach but relationships between AFC and local residents are broken. Dialogue has again stopped, leaving us with an uncertain future that has manifested in a combination of anger, confusion and fear.

- AFC have refused to give accurate information on what "type of home" they propose to open, is this for
 - a) Children "at risk" from being left in their family situation. Or
 - b) Children out of control where families can no longer cope?
- AFC have used incorrect information in their applications.
- AFC have changed wording during applications, e.g. emotional and behavioural children to vulnerable children.
- AFC have misled the residents of East Farm Park with conflicting communications.
- AFC have intimidated some residents of East Farm Park.

It is clear that we find ourselves in an East Farm Park *versus* Action for Children situation, a toxic and unhealthy situation is developing, a situation that Ofsted will take a very grim view of.

We urge you to look at the vast amount of evidence presented to you and, in the interests of everyone, to support the Planning Inspector's Appeal Decision in its entirety, refusing any changes to a catchment area outside the Northumberland County Council boundaries.

Thank-you