

**NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**  
**MINUTES OF THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Eastburn, South Park, Hexham NE46 1BS**  
**Wednesday 17 January 2024, 10am to 11.13am**

**Present:**

Cllr Julian Morrison-Bell (SoS Parish) (Chair)  
Cllr Sue Bolam (SoS Parish)  
Cllr Val Gibson (SoS Parish)  
Cllr Len Glen-Davison (SoS Parish)  
Cllr John Riddle (NCC)  
Cllr Alan Sharp (NCC)

**In attendance:**

Susannah Buylla (Head of Planning & Policy)  
William McKane (Planning Officer)  
Laura Garth (Assistant Planning Officer)  
Tom Jenkins (Legal Representative, Ward Hadaway)  
Jayne Longlands (Corporate Support Officer)

**PART ONE**

**DMC2024-01 Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from; Ms Marie Fallon (SoS National), Cllr Mark Mather (NCC) and Mr Chris Mullin (SoS National).

The Chair welcomed members, officers and members of the public to the meeting.

**DMC2024-02 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**DMC2024-03 Minutes of Previous Meeting: Wednesday 13 December 2023**

The draft Minutes of the Development Management Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 13 December 2023 were proposed as a true and correct record by Cllr Alan Sharp, seconded by Cllr Sue Bolam, and it was further:

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Minutes of the Development Management Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 13 December 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**DMC2024-04 Determination of Application for Planning Permission**

**23NP0107 Change of Use of Residential Dwelling (Use Class C3) to Children's Home (Use Class C2) at Burnhead, Haltwhistle, Northumberland, NE49 9PJ**

William McKane (Planning Officer) provided a detailed overview of his report. He presented the application with the support of location maps, photographs, elevations and proposed plans. He noted that two objections had been raised by members of the public.

Material considerations were assessed which included the principle of development, its impact on NNPA special qualities (to the landscape, biodiversity, tranquillity, and cultural heritage), highways and utilities.

The recommendation was to grant planning permission subject to the conditions and informatives as stated in the presented report.

### **Public Speaking**

Mr Alex Franklin, Senior Planner at Hedley Planning, addressed the room in support of the application, speaking on behalf of the applicant, A Wilderness Way Ltd (AWWL).

Mr Franklin noted that AWWL focused on the provision of residential care, catering for the health and education of children who had suffered from trauma and exploitation. Their aim was for children to feel safe and build confidence back within a tranquil environment; they provided care for one child within an extended period. AWWL's proposal would meet the specific housing requirements and there was no conflict with any relevant planning policy. Mr Franklin added that all homes went through a robust selection process, with safety, privacy and security of high importance. There was no intention of using the quarry for leisure activities, and no external lighting required.

Mr Franklin noted that no objections had been received from any consultees. He considered the principle of development was acceptable and accorded with all relevant planning policy; it supported vulnerable children with no adverse impacts, and the application was within local planning policy guidance.

Board members then raised the following points:-

- Cllr Bolam asked about occupation of the house for one child, and she assumed that the child would not mix with other children. Mr Franklin replied that, to prevent sibling rivalry and provide sole attention, the child would receive individual education, and someone would travel to the house to deliver this. Home schooling was also carried out by staff (agreed through Ofsted), and if the child were required to attend school then that staff member would transport them.
- Cllr Sharp asked how old the children were, where they came from and whether it would be the same child housed at all times. Mr Franklin replied that two carers would always be living on the premises, and there would only be one child in the house. This child would be aged between 8 and 17 years, with placements on average lasting between 17 and 22 weeks.
- The Chair asked about the history of recorded problems caused by residents. Mr Franklin noted that AWWL had an excellent or outstanding track record within this area.

Mr Willie Woodman then spoke in opposition to the application. He referred to his objection letter submitted. He farmed the land surrounding this property and had lived there since 1969; he did not think it was the right location as it was on Hadrian's Wall Path and thousands of visitors came past every year.

Mr Woodman was concerned about safety, as there was cattle and sheep in the surrounding fields; he considered that children would lack an awareness of how to act around farm animals, which was a particular concern as there would be different people based at the property. He also raised concern about the staff located there and whether they would have an understanding of rural living. Bad weather was also an issue; as roads leading in from the B6318 Military Road were not cleared of snow and prone to icy conditions. He noted that AWWL had four other houses in the area located in very close proximity and felt there was no need for an additional property in the area. He concluded, there were many other houses that would make a better site for a children's home.

### **Questions and Debate**

The Chair invited members to present questions and general discussions ensued as follows:-

- Cllr Bolam was concerned about environmental issues; she said less travel should be promoted whereas this proposal would require many car journeys (by staff, for medical travel etc). Cllr Bolam said she was conflicted on environmental grounds; she considered this proposal did not need to be in this specific area.
- Cllr Len Glen-Davison suggested that safety on site may depend on the age of the child and considered that escape from the property was an issue; if very vulnerable children were housed at this property then the boundary walls could easily be leapt over. He added that proximity to the quarry and agricultural land was a concern. He queried that if consent were granted and there was a problem, then how could this be rectified?

The Planning Officer noted that NNPA had a responsibility to grant planning permission for a diverse range of housing. In addition, travel was already in place for residential use so there would be no increase in travel.

Susannah Buylla (Head of Planning & Policy) noted that AWWL's ethos was to provide holistic care which was why the ratio of two staff to one child would help support this. AWWL would have the best interest of the child at heart. Cllr Len Glen-Davison appreciated these comments but felt it was not the right location for this development; he asked that if we granted consent and there were problems, where did this take us.

- Cllr John Riddle queried how we could evidence local need and asked what local meant. The Planning Officer replied that AWWL had a market need for this scheme to go ahead. Cllr Riddle said he was familiar with children's homes through NCC and asked if there would always be two members of staff on site; Mr Franklin confirmed that this would be the case.
- Cllr Alan Sharp noted that he had called the application in to come to committee as there had been resident concerns. Cllr Sharp had security questions; there was a low wall around the

property, and he asked how the property would be secured. He added that AWWL had properties within five miles of this location and therefore queried what the local need was. He questioned how assurances would be given to Mr Woodman that the children would be safe in this environment. Cllr Sharp had expected AWWL to come to the meeting with some more materials.

The Planning Officer said that operations would be the responsibility of NCCs social care department and strict Ofsted reports would need to be met. The Head of Planning & Policy added that AWWL had gone through due diligence in choosing this site, and said they were creating a rural environment with the holistic support referred to.

Tom Jenkins (Legal Adviser) said that the safety of a child cannot be dismissed out of hand and is a material planning consideration. It is also assumed that the carers would have the best interests for the child. Therefore, the balance between these two elements must be considered in the decision making process.

The Chair noted that, if the proposal were rejected, he was worried what message this sent out to the general public about the Park's ethos, particularly with mental health support being so important. Also, the 2-to-1 carers to child ratio was very strong.

- Cllr Sue Bolam shared the Chair's thoughts; however, she reiterated the travel issue and being a long way from services and queried whether this was the right location for the proposal.
- Cllr John Riddle said he did not think there was a local need for the proposal, other issues were 'what ifs' and said a planning decision could not be based on this.

The Head of Planning & Policy read out the Written Ministerial Statement relating to this type of application and noted that local needs were referred to within this. She said that members could defer a decision to seek more information if required.

- Cllr Sue Bolam asked if there was an opportunity to grant temporary planning permission; the Head of Planning & Policy noted that was not the proposal put before the committee.
- Cllr Len Glen-Davison said that no risk assessment had been carried out. However, the Head of Planning & Policy said that Mr Franklin had noted AWWL's health and safety and site selection as part of his presentation. The Legal Adviser read out a statement that a child's safety concerns would be AWWL's primary responsibility; the Head of Planning & Policy added that regulators were in place to ensure this was implemented.
- Cllr Alan Sharp said he was torn with the application because he was not satisfied of the information and evidence to make a decision. He had serious concerns about local need issues and would ask for the decision to be deferred. He added that the location was not ideal, and he had safety concerns for children living in this location. He supported the principle that children needed to be housed in these rural homes, but this site was not suitable for a children's home. He suggested that a decision be deferred until a local needs assessment had been carried out.

The Head of Planning and Policy clarified the reasons for deferral were to require the submission of further information from the applicant relating to the following:-

- Evidence of local need.
- More information regarding how the applicant intends to address the safety concerns raised.

### **Proposal of, and vote on, the Motion**

The motion to defer a decision on this proposal was presented, with three members voting for this proposal (and three abstentions), as proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp and seconded by Cllr John Riddle, and it was;

**RESOLVED** to defer a decision on this proposal.

It was noted that the Planning Department would write to the agents to explain the situation and seek the further information requested; it would then be presented back at either the February or March DMC Meeting, depending on timescales.

### **DMC2024-05            Determination of Tree Notice**

#### **23NP0109 Tree Notice – Removal of Sycamore and Ash trees at Kirknewton House, Kirknewton, Northumberland, NE71 6XF**

Laura Garth (Assistant Planning Officer) provided a detailed overview of her report. Cllr Denis Mullan's wife (NNPA Deputy Chair) had submitted the application which was the reason for bringing the tree notice to committee.

She presented the application with the support of location maps and photographs. The Assistant Planning Officer noted that no objections had been raised by consultees. The recommendation was for no objection but to place an informative to ensure timings avoid harm to bird species.

There was no public speaking or questions and debate on this item.

### **Proposal of, and vote on, the Motion**

The motion set out in the report was presented, with members voting unanimously on the proposal, which was proposed by Cllr Alan Sharp and seconded by Cllr Len Glen-Davison, and it was;

**RESOLVED** that there are no objections.

### **DMC2024-06 URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 11.13am