



PLAN NO. 15/01518/FUL

HOMELEIGH RESIDENTIAL CARE HOME, AVENUE ROAD, ERITH

Temporary change of use for 2 years from residential nursing home (Class C2) to residential accommodation for the homeless (Sui Generis).

APPLICANT - London Borough of Bexley

SUMMARY

The main issues to be considered when assessing this application are the suitability of the site for the proposed use and the potential impacts on the character of the overall area and on the neighbours generally.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposed temporary use is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact that it will have on the neighbouring residential properties. The temporary permission will allow for review at the end of this period. With the implementation of Secured by Design measures it is considered that the fear of crime within the neighbourhood should be addressed and it allows for the need for homeless provision with Bexley Borough.

NOTE

This summary is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all the issues in relation to this application.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Homeleigh residential care home is a large detached building which is a 3-4 storey development, located on the north side of Avenue Road opposite the junction with Broadoak Road. The original building was first granted consent as a care home for the elderly in 1961. The building has a distinctive 1960s design with some elements being flat roofed and other parts having pitched roofs. Whilst this is all one building that links in, it appears to be sectional and created almost an 'H' block formation.

The building materials are predominantly red brick with white panelling under the windows. Both the flat roofed and pitched roof sections are built in a similar style. There appears to be later additions to the building, however there are no planning records apparent for these additions. The style of the building is typically 1960s.

The Lesney Park Road Conservation Area is located some 250m to the east of the application site.

Homeleigh is accessed from Avenue Road via a vehicular access on the eastern side of the site and a pedestrian staircase on the western side of the site. It is elevated from the road due to the topography of the area.

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BACKGROUND

Previous use of the site

Since the 1960s Homeleigh has been used as a care home for the elderly. The building was built specifically for this use. Whilst it served well for a number of years, in recent times there have been changes in legislation for elderly and dementia care homes which now require a minimum room size per resident with suitable washroom facilities (en-suite toilets and bathrooms etc). It is for this reason that the building is no longer deemed to be suitable for purpose.

Neighbour consultation prior to the planning submission.

On 21st May 2015 a meeting was held, which invited a number of the neighbours to attend so that the future plans for this building could be discussed. The plans included the current planning application for temporary use.

The general feedback from officers in attendance is that the meeting was not particularly productive as there was a number of concerns from residents and there was little opportunity to enable the details of the application to be discussed.

It should be noted that the planning department were not privy to any neighbour consultations or meetings prior to this submission. The application has been submitted by the Regeneration & Assets Department and it was not appropriate for the Planning Department to get involved with these pre-submission discussions.

Homeless provision within the borough

Recent temporary accommodation statistics showed that currently Bexley have in the region of 740 units of temporary accommodation that are offered to residents for emergency accommodation within the Borough. This is a combined figure of shared and self-contained accommodation.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of different reasons why people find themselves in a situation when they are in need of emergency accommodation. These can include termination of tenancy, family no longer being willing or able to accommodate, violence within the home, mortgage arrears/repositions.

PROPOSAL

This application seeks temporary consent for 2 years for the change of use from a (now vacant) residential care home (Class C2) to residential accommodation for the homeless (Sui Generis).

The layout of the building is not being altered in any way but is being used in its current arrangement. There are no external changes proposed to the building. The temporary accommodation will provide emergency accommodation for up to 15 families and 10 individuals.

In terms of its proposed use, the rooms are considered to be adequate with bath and wash facilities remaining separate. Floor plans for the property show that there are no physical alterations required in order to carry out the proposed use. From these plans it

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can be seen that the toilet and bathroom facilities are quite central within each floor with the bedrooms being located to the north and south of the west block and more centrally in the central area.

On site catering will be provided which is to comprise a cold breakfast, tea and coffee available all day and a hot dinner.

CONSULTATIONS

Highway Authority: The application site is located on the north side of Avenue Road opposite the junction with Broadoak Road. Avenue Road is an unclassified road. There are no waiting restrictions operating in the vicinity of the application site. The proposal is for the temporary change of use from residential nursing home (Class C2) to residential accommodation for the homeless (Sui Generis). It is understood this will provide 'Emergency Accommodation' for up to 15 families and 10 individuals.

The existing vehicular and pedestrian access arrangements will be retained. These are to a satisfactory standard and provide segregation between vehicles and pedestrians. There is capacity to park at least 20 cars. Refuse vehicles can enter the site for collections. In terms of traffic movements and parking demand it has been estimated that approximately 25% of families will have cars and therefore a maximum demand of around 7 cars is anticipated. There will be one live-in operative, as well as one cleaner and one member of kitchen staff who will visit the property for a few hours each day. It is estimated that only a maximum of 2 parking spaces between these staff members will be required, a substantial reduction on the previous staff use requirements. Under the former care home use there were 16 staff present on site at any one time.

The proposals are therefore likely to lead to a reduction in traffic movements and parking demand. The B12 bus route runs passes along Avenue Road at the front of the property. The Highway Authority raises no objections.

Environmental Health: No objections.

MET Police Designing Out Crime Officer: I have read the documentation attached to this application and cannot find any specific details for the plans to incorporate measures that will be employed to meet Secured by Design standards to reduce and prevent criminality. The application therefore does not demonstrate how such measures are to be incorporated into the development especially given the guidance within NPPF paragraphs 58 and 69 which state:-

Paragraph 58 of National Planning Policy Framework clearly states that local and neighbourhood policy should 'create safe and accessible environments where the fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion.'

Paragraph 69 of this document 'promoting Healthy Communities' underlines this statement by encouraging the planning system to play an important part in facilitating

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‘safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion.’

If this were a new build, I would have no hesitation in seeking to have a ‘Secured by Design’ condition attached to any permission given, to achieve Secured by Design standards in accordance with New Homes 2014. The fact that this conversion could be housing vulnerable families and individuals means that its residents should enjoy the same benefits of enhanced security enjoyed by residents in new build developments. As you are aware, there are concerns within the community about the proposed development, and if permission is given for this application, the residents of ‘Homeleigh’ who may be new to the area, may themselves feel unsettled. To that end, I feel that any concerns could be minimised if the development adopts the enhanced security standards of Secured by Design, thereby helping to create a safer and more secure environment.

I do appreciate though that because we are dealing with a building already in existence, this could mean that it may be difficult to incorporate all the design features expected of an application for new homes. To overcome this issue, early discussion with the South East Designing Out Crime Office should lead to specific and appropriate solutions to any issues raised.

Therefore having reviewed the plans submitted for this application, I would seek to have a ‘Secured by Design’ condition attached to any permission that may be granted in connection with this application and that the wording is such that the development will follow the principles and security requirements of Secured by Design.

REPRESENTATIONS

39 letters of objection have been received predominantly from neighbouring residents. As part of the consultation process 145 of the surrounding residential properties were consulted, however it became apparent through the consultation process that a local resident did a flyer drop over a wider area.

The main points that have been raised within the objection letters that have been received are set out below, separated into 4 main headings:

Residential amenity

- Increase in noise within the area
- Increase in traffic within the locality
- Pedestrian traffic will increase
- Not taken into account visiting traffic
- Loss of privacy to neighbours
- Impact on local services
- Pressure on oversubscribed schools
- Will security lighting be increased?

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- Grounds are poor currently – needs clearing/cleaning up
- What police presence will there be?
- Out of character within the neighbourhood

Use of the building

- The area is lacking in elderly care
- There are already people staying in there – lights are always on
- Can it not be reused for the elderly
- No planning permission for the guardians to be there
- How will tenants be managed?
- Building was not 'fit-for-purpose' as a care home. Why is ok for as homeless accommodation?
- Will this continue beyond 2 years?
- More information is required with regards to management and general running of building
- Will temporary become permanent – what is the long term plan for the building.

Crime and disorder

- Homeless accommodation will impact on the safety of the area
- The needs of some could result in volatile behaviour
- Property destruction has already occurred whilst guardians are on site
- Increase in anti-social behaviour
- Residents may be victims of alcohol, substance or domestic abuse
- Background of these residents will not be known
- Could bring drugs to the area
- Quite respectable neighbourhood – disgusted that Council would place homeless on our doorstep
- What will children be exposed to?
- Threat of increased crime is a real concern
- Threat of burglaries and anti-social activities
- Will it home ex-offenders or people with offences against children?
- Will need to increase security to peoples own properties
- Potentially families being homed alongside drug users and alcoholics

Other

- It will reduce property value
- There has been a deliberate lack of consultation
- North of the borough is the favoured location for this sort of proposal

PLANNING POLICIES

London Plan (2015)

Policy 3.1 – Ensuring equal life chances for all

Policy 7.2 – An inclusive environment

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Core Strategy (2012)
CS04 – Erith geographical region

Unitary Development Plan (2004) (saved policies)
Policy ENV39 – Built Environment

ASSESSMENT

There are a number of issues that need to be outlined and addressed as part of the assessment of this application. These include:

- Assessing the impact of this proposal on the area and its neighbouring residents
- Looking at the future of the building

Impact on neighbours and general area

The main concern raised by neighbours in relation to this application is the detrimental impact that this proposal would have with regards to the safety of the area and the general suitability of homeless accommodation within this leafy part of Erith.

The need for this sort of provision is required in the borough somewhere and given that this site is currently vacant, has been put forward as a realistic short term solution. The suitability of the site is considered to be acceptable given that there would be no alterations or building works required to the existing property. The layout and facilities currently within the building are suitable for the proposed use and it is considered that there will be sufficient bathrooms/communal space for emergency accommodation.

Whilst the building requires little/no building alterations in order to change the use there are other requirements that are considered. This includes parking provision for users of the facility, staff and visitors. As stated, there is capacity for at least 20 cars on site. The anticipated demand for users of the site is 7 car parking spaces. Given that there will be staff also, it is anticipated that the parking availability is more than ample. The vehicular activity from when it used to operate as a care home is considered to be reduced as the numbers of staff and visitors that frequent the site. In terms of the impact therefore of vehicular movements on the neighbouring residents it is considered that this will be minimal as there will be less movements overall.

It is understood why there is uncertainty as there is not any way of knowing the profiles of the people that will be placed within this temporary accommodation, however it should be noted that of the 25 'units' proposed within the building, 15 of these are 'family' provision and 10 are for single persons. The types of residents will vary. The background information on 'homeless provision within the Borough' seeks to explain this point.

Consultations with Secured by Design have advised that a number of measures should be incorporated within the scheme to ensure that both occupiers and neighbours feel safe and secure. This includes various measures including external lighting and access

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control methods. Details of these measures, and additional ones would need to be submitted and approved in writing by way of a planning condition and would have to be in place prior to the building's occupation. With this in place it is considered that both residents of the unit itself and neighbouring residents should feel safer knowing that security is in place. In turn this should help with the perception of being safe.

Additional to this, the management company that are primed to be in place (subject to final contract being signed if and when planning permission is granted) are registered social landlords with experience in this field across many London Boroughs. There is a strict zero-tolerance for anti-social behaviour so any residents that are found to be carrying out inappropriate activities that impact other residents or neighbouring properties will not be allowed to stay.

Given the security that will be in place as a result of condition and the fact that the management company will oversee the residents generally it is considered that the perceived threat of any increase in anti-social behaviour or safety of residents is sufficiently dealt with and that the application overall is acceptable on a temporary 2 year basis.

The future of the building

The planning application under consideration is for temporary permission to allow for the building to be used for this specific purpose for a period of 2 years.

Discussions with Regeneration & Asset Management have occurred and it is currently not known what the long term plans for the site are. It has been stated that during the term of this application the options for the site will be considered and the possible uses for the site will be part of the consideration.

At this moment in time, the application is for a temporary 2 year consent and there is no certainty with regards to the use of the site beyond this time scale.

RECOMMENDATION - Approve, subject to:-

CONDITIONS:

1. The use of the building hereby permitted shall cease permanently and the building be restored to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority on or before 30th September 2017 unless prior approval has been obtained in writing from the Local Planning Authority for an extension of the period now granted.

Reason: In order that the position may be reviewed at the end of the period in the light of the circumstances then obtaining.

2. The development hereby permitted shall incorporate security measures to minimise the risk of crime and to meet the specific security needs of the development in accordance with the principles and objectives of Secured by

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Design. Details of these measures shall be submitted and to be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to occupation.

Reason: In order to achieve the principles and objective of SBD to improve community safety and crime prevention in accordance with Policy ENV60 of the UDP

3. The building shall be used in accordance with the approved plans, which ensures that 15 family units shall be available at all times and that the provision of single person units is limited to 10.

Reason: To prevent any unacceptable deviation from the approved plans and to ensure the concerns of the neighbouring residents is safeguarded.

4. Prior to occupation a Landscape Management Scheme shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority that sets out details of general grounds maintenance for the duration of the temporary consent.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the building and visual amenities of the area.

5. The shelter as approved shall have a warden/member of management on site at all times.

Reason: In order to ensure a satisfactory level of management to safeguard the interests and wellbeing of both residents and neighbours of the facility.

INFORMATIVE:

To assist applicants in a positive manner, the Local Planning Authority has produced policies and written guidance, all of which together with national and London wide policy, is available on the Council's website. A pre-application advice service is also offered and encouraged. Whilst no pre-application discussions were entered into, the policy advice and guidance available on the website was followed by the applicant. The applicant and the LPA therefore worked in a proactive manner taking into consideration the policies and guidance available to them, and so the LPA was able to deliver a positive decision in a timely manner in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF.

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