

OPTIONS GROUP

Planning Application for Development of Residential Service for Young People with Autism and Associated Learning and Physical Difficulties

Planning Support Statement

**SITE OF FORMER NEEDLEWOOD CHILDREN'S
HOME, KERESFORTH HILL ROAD, BARNSELY,
SOUTH YORKSHIRE**

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CORE DOCUMENT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 INTRODUCTION
- 2.0 THE APPLICANT & BACKGROUND
- 3.0 THE SITE & THE PROPOSAL
 - 3.1 The Site
 - 3.2 The Proposal
 - 3.3 Employment and Training
 - 3.4 Need for a Safe and Enclosed Environment
 - 3.5 Summary
- 4.0 PLANNING POLICY
 - 4.1 Central Government Policy Advice
 - 4.2 Local Planning Policy
- 5.0 THE ISSUES
 - 5.1 The Development Plan
 - 5.2 Very Special Circumstances
 - 5.3 Other Material Considerations
 - 5.3.1 Job Opportunities
 - 5.3.2 Highways
 - 5.3.3 Contamination
 - 5.3.4 Landscaping
- 6.0 CONCLUSION & BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The proposal which forms the subject of this application for planning permission is for the development of a small scale residential service for young people with autism on the site of the former Needlewood Children's Home, Keresforth Hill Road, Barnsley. The scheme, which is submitted in detail, is for the development of specialist residential accommodation, the form of which derives from the function and purpose of a care facility. The proposal constitutes a comprehensive scheme for the site and includes details of the landscaping of the areas around the proposed building, which is a key feature in the treatment and care of patients.

The principal aim throughout has been to develop a high quality and sympathetic proposal which will be of benefit to the care of residents and, at the same time, achieve a high quality aesthetic design which will sit well in the landscape.

The following supporting documents/information is also submitted with the application:-

1. Full layout plans and details by A C Craig Associates.
2. Planning Supporting Statement by Townsend Planning Consultants.
4. Design & Access Statement by Townsend Planning Consultants.
5. Tree Report by Coppice Landscapes.
6. Bat and Barn Owl Report by Eric Bennett Consultancy.
7. Landscaping Scheme by C F Landscape Design.
8. Contamination Report produced by Haigh Huddleston Associates.
9. Highways report by Paul Howarth Highway Consultants.
10. Japanese Knotweed Report by M J Clough.

11. Background Report by the Options Group.

It is considered that this statement, together with the accompanying documents, clearly demonstrates to the Council that the proposal accords with planning policy and, when judged against this and all material considerations, it is clearly the case that planning permission should be granted. Additionally, the statement demonstrates that notwithstanding the fact that the site is located in the Green Belt, there exist the "very special circumstances" necessary to warrant the grant of planning permission for the redevelopment of the site for this proposed specialist residential accommodation.

This statement proceeds to give details of the applicants, the site and the proposal. Relevant planning policy and central government advice in the form of Planning Policy Guidance Notes and local planning policies are then discussed. The issues that the proposal raises are also examined and finally the conclusion is reached that planning permission should be granted for the proposal to proceed. Nevertheless, the applicants remain willing to discuss all aspects of this proposal with the Council.

2.0 THE APPLICANT & BACKGROUND

The Options Group has achieved national recognition in recent years for the quality of their specialist services for children, young people and adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

Since 2001, the Options Group has developed specialist services in the field of Autism in the following locations:-

- (i) AALPS College opened in Roxby, near Scunthorpe in North Lincolnshire in 2001. This facility provides an innovative transitional service preparing young people with complex autism for a fulfilling adult life.
- (ii) AALPS College, Midlands, near Worcester, opened in April 2006. This is the second regional AALPS Service.
- (iii) Cruckton Hall School, near Shrewsbury, Shropshire, is an established residential special school that has developed a nationally-recognised specialism in services for boys with Asperger's Syndrome in the high-performing range.
- (iv) New Options School, Barton-on-Humber, North Lincolnshire, which was opened in August 2006 is an innovative residential school model for children with complex autism.
- (v) New Options School, Holywell, Flintshire, North Wales. Due to open July 2007, will provide a second regional centre based on the Barton model.
- (vi) New Options School, Higford, Shropshire. Due to open August 2007. A further development of the New Options model for children and young adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and

specific additional difficulties with communications, social skills and integration.

- (vii) The Group has also secured planning permission for the development of a National Hospital to accommodate people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders at a site at Shortwood in Barnsley. That proposal gained strong support from many departments in the Council. Currently the applicants are awaiting the discharge of planning conditions and will then proceed with the development.

The facility subject to this application will enable an important role in the treatment and care of patients with Autism to be carried out. The function of the proposed facility is to provide a home for life for 8 young people with autism in the medium to high dependency range. In recent years the understanding of the nature of these problems has greatly increased, together with the potential for assisting those affected. With effective support being provided through specialist programmes, individuals with autism can now make substantial progress towards successful independence.

The proposal will provide long term accommodation for young people with autism from the Barnsley and surrounding areas who may have completed a programme at the regional AALPS (Adolescent to Adult Life Preparation Service) College in Scunthorpe, and who are now ready to move to a long term placement in their home area. It is intended that the Needlewood development will provide a purpose built environment designed to meet their needs. It must be stressed that currently there is no service local to the Barnsley area that provides continuity of approach with AALPS College. It is the Option Group's experience that continuity is vital to maintaining the progress made by young people at AALPS. This will be the third development of its type provided by the Options Group in the past three years, the others being

in Wressel near Scunthorpe covering North Lincolnshire and in Otley covering Leeds.

The Options Group has a proven track record in the provision of services for young people and adults with Autism which is based on a Pathway approach known as the Lifelong Support Programme. This provides continuity of approach as individuals develop their capacity for independence and involves infinitely flexible programmes which respond to their varying needs over time.

National Context. Government Strategy for adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorders is currently covered within policy relating to those with a Learning Disability, as set out in Valuing People and subsequent National guidance. This requires Local Authorities to undertake individual needs assessments of all adults defined as vulnerable due to any form of Learning Disability, and to provide effective services to meet their needs with the objective of enabling them to enjoy the optimum level of independence. Eventually, it is hoped that through specialist voluntary agencies, academics, families and independent specialist providers, the distinct needs of those with Autism will merit a separate strategy.

Local Context. The proposed accommodation will be a resource for Barnsley and the South Yorkshire area. At the time of writing there are nine young people from the South Yorkshire area at the AALPS college all of whom are scheduled to move to long term accommodation as part of their programme over the next two to three years. This facility will provide the continuity of approach required to maintain the progress made by these young people towards independence.

As the service is intended to serve the South Yorkshire area, it is considered vitally important that ease of access to the motorway

network combined with proximity to an urban centre are present when determining the location of the facility.

The site at Needlewood has been selected for the provision of long term accommodation and will cater for the identified need within the South Yorkshire area for such a service.

The site provides the opportunity for young people with autism and a range of other conditions to benefit from structured specialist support within their home area, close to family and friends. The location of the service is significant. The Needlewood site provides an excellent setting in this regard as it is quiet and secluded with grounds which are spacious and private thereby providing a safe space in which to develop life and social skills. Whilst the site is accessible to the full range of amenities in Barnsley and is easy accessible to family and friends, it also provides the peace and privacy from the outside world that individuals with autism find so important as part of their individual programmes.

It is apparent that the level of service available for young people with autism often results in the need for them to move away from home for a period in order to obtain the specialist care, education and support that they need to maximise their future potential. This clearly has an impact on the young people concerned and their families. This opportunity to provide specialist residential accommodation in the Barnsley area will resolve the problem of maintaining contact in the long term for 8 South Yorkshire families.

In summary, the residential accommodation proposed will meet an identified specialist need within the Barnsley and South Yorkshire Area where at present there is no provision. In this context, it is hoped that the Council will fully support this important proposal, and welcome the opportunity to facilitate the provision of a service that is vital to meet the

needs of the families and young people in the area affected by autism and other related disabilities.

3.0 THE SITE AND THE PROPOSAL

3.1 The Site

The subject site extends to some 3 acres or thereabouts and is located off Keresforth Hill Road (B6099), Barnsley. The site is situated in close proximity to the southern edge of the main urban area of Barnsley and is in close proximity to built up areas such as Dodworth, Shawlands and Kingstone.

The site comprises of a large detached 2½ storey property which sits within extensive landscaped gardens and woodland. This property was last used as a Local Authority run Children's Home accommodating between 8 and 12 children. In planning terms, the site falls within use class C2 (Residential Institutions). It is understood that the building originally formed a dwelling but was extended and developed to accommodate the care use. Unfortunately the building, which is unattractive and unsightly, does not meet with the requirements of the standard of care to be provided, hence the need for a purpose built care facility.

There are a number of mature trees within the grounds and on the external boundaries of the site. These large trees combined with high hedges around the perimeter of the site effectively screen the building from view. The site is predominantly surrounded by open countryside.

Access to the site is taken from a single track tarmac road, and there are parking facilities within the site for up to eight or nine vehicles.

3.2 The Proposal

The proposed facility at Needlewood will provide residential accommodation for 8 young people with autism in the medium to high

dependency range. Whilst these individuals will have made some progress towards independence they will, however, still need the support of trained staff and professional experts, alongside that of a community environment due to their dependency needs.

It is proposed that specialist individual programmes of care and support will be delivered by leading professionals. The accommodation has been designed to best compliment this care and support in a manner that can be adapted and developed to provide appropriate levels of living space, dependent upon the needs of the individual and the progress made towards independence.

The landscaped grounds of this site will offer opportunities for occupation, recreation and learning, together with space for therapeutic and technical support where needed. Care and support can be delivered within an environment specifically designed to enhance individual development and provide high levels of comfort and normality.

The design and layout of the proposal has been developed as a result of:

- (a) the experience gained by the Group through the operation of its care practices; and
- (b) the need to ensure that the proposed building has no greater impact on the location than the existing.

This has resulted in a proposal that will provide purpose built facilities that incorporate design and equipment features necessary for the residents to thrive, whilst being wholly acceptable in terms of visual impact for a site of this nature.

It is proposed to demolish the existing care home buildings which have an overall floor area of approximately 613.50 m sq and replace them

with “state of the art” building designed to meet 21st Century care standards whilst incorporating elements that are environmentally beneficial. The floor space of the proposed building is not materially greater than the building it replaces at 614.74 m sq (only a 5% increase).

It is proposed that the new building will be located on the site of the former making best use of an existing clearing within the site. As such, we can be made of the existing access into the site and parking areas, which are located on areas where there are existing clearings in the trees.

The proposed facility will provide two units which are attached by a central staff facility. Each of the units comprises 4 individual “flats”. Each individual flat comprises a bedroom with ensuite facilities and access to a shared day room, dining area and kitchen. A small area of accommodation comprising offices and staff facilities is built into the roof at first floor.

The building proposed has been designed in a manner that reflects its “woodland” and landscape surrounds. The external elevations are to be clad in timber and incorporate elements of glass. The glass will both reflect the surrounding foliage and ensure that the building appears visually “light”.

The height of the building has been kept to a minimum at 6.5 metres, as compared to the height of the existing building being 10.5 metres. The roof is designed with a soft curve to reflect the contours of the site and its impact with be minimised by the use of a “green” roof. Clearly, such a design brings both visual and environmental benefits to a site of this nature, which is currently occupied by an unattractive building of no architectural or environmental merit.

Whilst the young people who will occupy the facility clearly have medium to high dependency needs, the aim of the proposal is to avoid the negative associations of a large institution. The building has been designed to strike an ideal balance between the minimum required to sustain the support needed whilst being large enough to function as a supportive community. The floor space that will be provided allows for an appropriate balance between solitude and socialisation, providing the facilities necessary for its target group of residents in an appropriately designed and located environment.

3.3 Employment and Training

Whilst it is acknowledged that some specialist recruitment will need to take place outside the area, the Options Group anticipate that the proposal will generate up to around 40 jobs, the majority of which will be filled by local people. The facility will provide an opportunity for local training, together with the acquisition of specialist skills, and will assist in the diversification of the local workforce.

3.4 Need for a Safe and Enclosed Environment

The environment within which a service of this nature is set is a significant factor in providing the best levels of care and support.

A safe, quiet and private environment is essential for the wellbeing and development of the client group concerned. An environment that provides clear physical boundaries will give residents a sense of personal security. It will protect them from unplanned intrusions from the outside and also protects them from harm should they become anxious or confused and wander off.

The Needlewood site provides an excellent setting in this regard. It is quiet and secluded with grounds that are spacious and private offering safe open space in which to develop life and social skills. Whilst the

site is accessible to the full range of amenities in Barnsley, it also provides the peace and privacy from the outside world that individuals with autism find important as part of their individual programme.

3.5 Summary

This site has been specifically identified by the Options Group as being eminently suitable to meet the exacting requirements necessary to serve its client group. It provides for a safe, secluded and private facility whilst at the same time being readily located close to transport networks and in close proximity to the main urban settlement.

In planning terms, the site currently falls within the C2 use class (Residential Institutions) and the proposal seeks no change of use. however, the existing care home building is one that is unattractive, has lacked maintenance over a significant period of time and does not meet with modern care standards. The proposal seeks to replace the existing building with a carefully considered sympathetic proposal that is both visually and environmentally beneficial to this site whilst meeting the care needs of the client group.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that in considering planning applications, the determination must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. PPS1 also advises of a presumption in favour of development which accords with the development plan. The importance of the statutory development plan in the decision making process necessitates an examination of the relationship between the policies and proposals of the plan and government guidance.

4.1 Central Government Policy Advice

It is considered that the following central government policy advice in the form of planning policy guidance notes is relevant to the consideration of this proposal:-

4.1.1 Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development

The government's objectives for the planning system include the following at paragraph 8:-

"This plan-led system, and the certainty and predictability it aims to provide, is central to planning and plays the key role in integrating sustainable development objectives. Where the development plan contains relevant policies, applications for planning permission should be determined in line with the plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

This reinforces the presumption in favour of development which accords with the plan, as outlined in Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

With regard to 'Key Principles', it states at paragraph 13 subsection (iv):-

"Planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development..."

This proposal achieves that aim.

With regard to spatial planning, at paragraph 31 it states:-

"...Decisions have to be taken in accordance with the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Only policies in plans which can be implemented through the granting of planning permission can form the framework for decisions under section 39 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004."

In respect of 'Design', at paragraph 33 it states:-

"Good design ensures attractive usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning."

At paragraph 34, it proceeds to state:-

"... Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people..."

At paragraph 35, the advice states:-

“High quality and inclusive design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process. High quality and inclusive design should create well-mixed and integrated developments....”

It is considered that good design has been achieved in respect of this proposal and that, in fact, high quality design is essential in the provision of such a specialist facility.

4.1.2 Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts

The site was last used as a residential care home for children falling within Use Class C2 of the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order. However, the site falls wholly within the Green Belt as identified on the Unitary Development Plan Proposals Map.

Section 1.5 of PPG2 sets out the purposes of including land in Green Belts, as follows:

- “- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;***
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;***
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;***
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and***
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”***

It is considered that the redevelopment of this site in the manner proposed would not harm any of these purposes.

Section 3 of the above advice states that there is a presumption against “inappropriate development” and states at paragraph 3.1:- ***“such development should not be approved except in very special circumstances”*** (TPC underlining).

Furthermore, at paragraph 3.2 it states inter alia “very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development would not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by material considerations”. It is contended that “very special circumstances” do indeed exist in respect of this site as will be demonstrated in the text of this statement. In the circumstances, the proposal conforms with this advice.

At paragraph 3.15 in relation to visual amenity the advice states:-

“The visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts might be visually detrimental by reasons of their sighting, materials or design”.

The proposed building has been designed to minimise visual impact. Careful consideration has been given to issues of height, form and materials in this regard as can be seen from the submitted plans. It is considered that the replacement of the existing building with that now proposed will enhance the visual amenities of the Green Belt.

The Council is, therefore, invited to reach the conclusion that the proposal is acceptable due to the presence of “very special circumstances” which warrant the grant of planning permission. It is contended that any harm that might arise from the proposed use of the site is no greater than any harm which could arise from the current use of the site.

4.1.3 Planning Policy Guidance Note 4 'Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms'

In general terms the advice states that authorities should adopt a sympathetic approach to small firms.

At paragraph 1, the advice states that one of the Government's key aims is to encourage continued economic development in a way which is compatible with its stated environmental objectives.

At paragraph 13, the advice states that a positive approach should be adopted with regard to development control and states amongst other things:-

"Development control should not place unjustifiable obstacles in the way of development which is necessary to provide homes, investment and jobs, or to meet the wider national or international objectives".

4.2 Local Planning Policy

The statutory development plan for the area is the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council UDP. It should be noted that only those policies referred to in the Schedule of Saved Policies contained within the Secretary of State's Direction to Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council dated September 2007 have been considered in the preparation of this planning support statement. The following policies are considered relevant to the consideration of this application:-

(i) Green Belt

Policy GS7 of the Council's UDP states:-

"WITHOUT PREJUDICE AND SUBJECT TO THE APPLICATION OF POLICIES GS8A, GS8B, GS8C, GS8D, GS8E AND GS9 IN THIS PLAN, DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE GREEN BELT WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS IT MAINTAINS THE OPENNESS OF AND DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND IN THE GREEN BELT."

It is considered that the development as proposed will maintain the openness of this Green Belt location and has no conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt, as will be demonstrated in the text of this statement.

Policy GS8 states:-

"WITHIN THE GREEN BELT THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BUILDINGS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED EXCEPT IN VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES UNLESS IT IS FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

- A) AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY.**
- B) ESSENTIAL FACILITIES FOR OUTDOOR SPORT OR OUTDOOR RECREATION, FOR CEMETERIES OR FOR OTHER USES OF LAND WHICH PRESERVE THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT AND WHICH DO NOT CONFLICT WITH THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND IN IT.**
- C) THE REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING DWELLINGS IN COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY GS8E"**

As stated above, it is contended that “very special circumstances” do indeed exist in respect of this site, a fact which will be demonstrated in the text of this statement.

Policy GS9 of the Council's UDP states:-

“Development within the Green Belt or conspicuous from it, should not by reason of siting materials or design result in significant harm to the visual amenity of the Green Belt”

The screened nature of the site along with the design, siting and materials of the proposed building will ensure no conflict with this policy.

(ii) Housing for Special Needs

Policy H5 of the Council's UDP deals with housing for special needs and states:-

“THE COUNCIL WILL PROMOTE DIVERSITY OF DWELLING TYPES, SIZE, DENSITY AND DESIGN THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH TO MEET THE FULL RANGE OF HOUSING NEED. IN PARTICULAR THE COUNCIL WILL ENCOURAGE IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH:

- A) HOUSING FOR KEY WORKERS***
- B) AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOUSING FOR RENT***
- C) HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES (TPC underlining)***
- D) HOMES INTENDED FOR SINGLE PERSON HOUSEHOLDS”***

The subject proposal seeks to provide long term accommodation for individuals from the local area who have very specific needs. The provision of accommodation of this nature supports the Council's desire to meet the needs of all members of its community

(iv) Economic Development and Residential Amenity

Policy ED4 of the UDP states:-

“PROPOSALS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADJOINING OR CLOSE TO HOUSING WILL BE ASSESSED WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO THE LIKELY IMPACT ON RESIDENTIAL AMENITY IN TERMS OF:

- A) AIR POLLUTION INCLUDING SMELL, FUMES, SMOKE, SOOT, ASH, DUST OR GRIT***
- B) NOISE FROM OPERATIONS ON, OR TRAFFIC ENTERING OR LEAVING, THE SITE***
- C) VISUALLY INTRUSIVE BUILDINGS, PLANT, FENCING, LIGHTING OR OUTSIDE STORAGE.”***

Whilst the site is not in close proximity to housing, it is clear that the nature of the proposal will not give rise to issues of harm in such terms.

(v) Trees

Policy GS22 of the UDP states:-

“THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK THE RETENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF EXISTING HEDGEROWS, WOODLANDS AND TREES BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND IN GROUPS.”

The submitted landscaping scheme clearly demonstrates that the proposal will enhance both the setting of the site and the Green Belt. The proposal will result in the positive management of the wooded areas of the site. These areas are integral to the therapeutic qualities of the location and their retention vital to the proper functioning of the site.

(vi) Design

Policy BE6 states:-

"THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO ACHIEVE GOOD DESIGN STANDARDS FOR ALL TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT.

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT WILL BE ASSESSED USING THE FOLLOWING DESIGN CRITERIA:

- A) THE QUALITY OF LAYOUT, AND SUITABILITY OF SCALE OF THE DEVELOPMENT***
- B) THE USE, QUALITY, DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE TREATMENT OF OPEN LAND WITHIN THE SITE AND THE AREA AROUND BUILDINGS***
- C) THE STANDARD OF DETAILED DESIGN AND FACING MATERIALS OF PROPOSED BUILDINGS***
- D) THE SUITABILITY OF THE WHOLE DEVELOPMENT FOR ITS PROPOSED CONTEXT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ADJOINING LAND USES.***

DESIGNS WHICH THE COUNCIL CONSIDERS UNSATISFACTORY IN TERMS OF ANY OF THESE CRITERIA WILL BE REJECTED."

It is considered that the submitted plans clearly demonstrate that the proposal for the site will fully conform with this policy.

(vii) Public Access

Policy BE6B states:-

"IN ASSESSING ANY PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT TO WHICH THE PUBLIC WILL HAVE ACCESS INCLUDING ROADS AND FOOTPATHS IN RESIDENTIAL AND OTHER AREAS, THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK, WHERE APPROPRIATE, THROUGH THE FOLLOWING DESIGN CRITERIA, TO ENSURE THE CREATION OF A FULLY ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT:

- A) WHEREVER POSSIBLE, NEW DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE SITED AND DESIGNED TO MAKE IT EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS**
- B) IN THE DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS, REFURBISHMENTS AND CHANGES OF USE INVOLVING NON-DOMESTIC BUILDINGS, GOOD PROVISION MUST BE MADE FOR DISABLED WORKERS, VISITORS AND CUSTOMERS TO GAIN ACCESS TO, AND MOVE WITHIN ALL BUILDINGS**
- C) AN APPROPRIATE NUMBER OF OVER-SIZED CAR PARKING SPACES MUST BE PROVIDED CLOSE TO NON-DOMESTIC BUILDINGS AND PERMANENTLY SET ASIDE FOR THE USE OF THOSE WITH MOBILITY HANDICAPS.**
- D) IN THE DESIGN OF EXTERNAL AREAS THE COUNCIL WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF ALL SPECIAL GROUPS EG WHEELCHAIR USERS, THE BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE WITH PUSHCHAIRS AND/OR SMALL CHILDREN, AND**

***THE ELDERLY AND INFIRM, IN ORDER TO
CREATE A SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE
ENVIRONMENT."***

These issues are fully dealt with in the Highways and Design and Access statements.

(viii) Pollution

Policy ES1 states:-

***"THE COUNCIL WILL REFUSE PROPOSALS FOR
DEVELOPMENT WHICH ARE LIKELY TO RESULT IN
HARM TO THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH
EXCESSIVE LEVELS OF POLLUTION ARISING
EITHER WITHIN THE SITE TO BE DEVELOPED OR
OCCASIONED ELSEWHERE BY THE PROPOSED
DEVELOPMENT.***

***THE COUNCIL WILL IN PARTICULAR RESIST
DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS LIKELY TO RESULT IN
HOUSING, SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS OR OTHER
SENSITIVE LAND USES BEING SUBJECTED TO
EXCESSIVE LEVELS OF AIR, NOISE OR OTHER
POLLUTION.***

***WHERE DEVELOPMENT IS PERMITTED THE
COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THAT RESULTING
POLLUTION IS AVOIDED OR MINIMISED."***

The proposal will not give rise to such issues.

(ix) Contaminated Land

Policy ES7 states:-

“WHERE DEVELOPMENT IS PROPOSED ON LAND WHICH THE COUNCIL KNOWS OR STRONGLY SUSPECTS IS CONTAMINATED TO AN EXTENT WHICH WOULD AFFECT THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OR INFRINGE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS, THE COUNCIL WILL REQUIRE TO BE SATISFIED THAT THE APPLICANT HAS:

- A) UNDERTAKEN INVESTIGATIONS TO ESTABLISH THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CONTAMINATION AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED, AND***
- B) WHERE APPROPRIATE, PROVIDED DETAILS OF MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO REMOVE AND / OR TREAT THE CONTAMINATION OR TO PROTECT THE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT FROM ITS EFFECTS TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE COUNCIL. SUCH MEASURES MUST BE IMPLEMENTED PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OR IN ACCORDANCE WITH A TIMESCALE TO BE AGREED BY THE COUNCIL.”***

Issues of contamination are fully addressed in the submitted reports.

(x) Supporting Planning Guidance

The following Supplementary Planning Guidance is also considered relevant:-

(a) SPG25-26 'Landscape Design'.

The landscaping scheme submitted wholly conforms with this advice.

(b) SPG28 'Developing Contaminated Land'.

Full details regarding contamination have been submitted with this application.

(c) SPG22 'Parking Transport and Travel Plan'.

Full details are submitted in the enclosed highways report.

5.0 THE ISSUES

5.1 The Development Plan

It is acknowledged that this site is located within the Green Belt and that the proposal must be judged in the context of policies relating to that fact. In terms of Green Belt policy, the Council are invited to accept that whilst the proposal would constitute "inappropriate" development, it is quite clear that "very special circumstances" exist in this case sufficient to warrant the grant of planning permission. In the circumstances, it is considered that the proposal conforms with the development plan.

It is, therefore, considered that in the context of Section 38(6) the presumption inherent therein should be made in favour of the applicant.

5.2 Very Special Circumstances

The Courts have held that any circumstances can be deemed to constitute "very special circumstances". It is considered that these exist in respect of the subject proposal for the following reasons:-

a) Historic Use of the Site

Until recently, the application site was owned by the Council and provided accommodation for between 8 and 12 children as a Local Authority Children's Home. In planning terms, the site falls within use class C2 of the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order (Residential Institutions), which is a non-conforming use in the Green Belt. The applicant does not seek to change the use of the site but simply to provide a care facility that is fit for purpose.

It is considered that the application of Green Belt policy in relation to a proposal of this nature must be made in the context of the fact that there would be no change to the use of the site, and as such the activities which the site generates will vary little from its historic and lawful use.

b) Need

As outlined in Section 2.0 above there is a shortage of appropriate services for young people with autism of medium to high dependency who need support in the long-term both locally and nationally.

The applicants wish to draw the Council's attention to the National Autistic Societies "I Exist" campaign, which is currently highlighting the profound impact that the shortage of appropriate facilities and services is having on families throughout the country. At present there is a large shortfall in the supply of appropriate accommodation and support in all local areas for young people and adults with autism.

The consequence of this shortfall in appropriate placements is that individuals face the situation of never having their specialist needs met. Placements in settings that are not autism friendly tend to breakdown, with a resulting increase in support being needed. The proposal submitted by the applicants would assist in addressing the shortfall in provision for people in Barnsley and South Yorkshire. This facility will be available for individuals completing a programme at the Regional Adolescent to Adult Life Preparation Service (AALPS) College in Scunthorpe, and who are now ready to move to a long-term placement in their home area in a facility offering a purpose built environment designed to meet their needs.

There is an identified need for the development of specialist long-term facilities for young people as they become adults in all areas. Moreover, there is no service local to Barnsley that provides continuity of approach with the AALPS College, a continuity which is vital to maintaining the progress made by young people at AALPS.

At the time of writing (October 2008), there are 9 young people from the South Yorkshire area in attendance at the AALPS College who are scheduled to move to long-term accommodation over the next 2 – 3 years as part of their development programme. The Needlewood development would provide the specialist accommodation that is required for these young people and resolve the problems of maintaining contact in the long term for 8 South Yorkshire families. It is, therefore, considered that there is a demonstrable need for the development.

c) Location

Having established that there is a particular need for the type of facility proposed, the issue of providing a suitable site to meet such a need must be fully considered. Owing to the nature of the disability, there are specific requirements which must be met for a site to be considered suitable.

The applicants, The Options Group, expertise extends to the design of appropriate environments to support, care and incorporate specialist therapies. In developing this proposal, the Options Group have drawn from previous experience, including some design features included in the Group's most specialist facility to date, a school at Higford in Shropshire. It is the Options Group's experience that the location of the service facility to be provided is a significant factor in ensuring the best

possible quality of life in the long-term for the occupants of the facility.

The Needlewood site was chosen specifically for the facility proposed after a long term search. It is considered that it provides an ideal location to meet the functional and development needs of those people with autism. It provides for the need to be quiet and secluded with grounds that are spacious and private offering a safe space in which to develop life and social skills. The site is accessible to a full range of amenities in Barnsley and, at the same time, provides the peace and privacy from the outside world that individuals with autism find important as part of their individual development programmes.

The site is sufficiently close to the major road network to ensure that contact in the long-term for the families of the residents can be easily maintained whilst also having the benefit of being close to public transport routes and Barnsley Urban Centre.

d) Size of Proposed Facility

The new service will have the same capacity as the former Needlewood home that it replaces (i.e. 8 residents). However, the quality of the service will be to 21st century standards with state of the art design and facilities to meet the long-term needs of young people with autism.

Care has been taken to ensure that the floor area of the proposed facility is not materially greater than that which it replaces. The floor area of the existing buildings amount to 613.50 sq m or thereabouts, whilst the proposed building has a floor area of 648.74 sq m, an increase of just 5%.

The individuals with autism and relatively high levels of dependency require a good level of personal and communal space to practice the skills and routines that they will need to improve their independence. The size of the facility has been calculated using experience from elsewhere where the Options Group are providing for similar specialist groups.

The size of the development is sufficient to function as a supportive community whilst at the same time integrating into the locality without developing the negative features of a large scale institution. It is the minimum size required to provide a viable service for this specialist client group offering them the facilities and support they need to ensure a satisfactory long-term placement in which they can develop their independent living skills.

A minimum number of 8 residents are required to provide local, effective and affordable services, which offers a balance of opportunities for socialisation and privacy both within the service and externally whilst having the space and access to the facilities they need to progress. The proposal has been designed to avoid the negative associations.

In summary, it is considered that the information provided above clearly demonstrate that there are sufficient "very special circumstances" present which outweigh any harm which might arise from the proposed development, specifically:-

- (i) there is a specific demand in Barnsley and South Yorkshire for this type of facility;
- (ii) the chosen location is ideal for meeting the needs of the client group; and

- (iii) the size of the proposed facility required to facilitate the development of the occupants is not materially larger than that which it replaces.

e) Impact on the Green Belt

The proposed building has been designed with the need to ensure that it has no greater impact on the Green Belt than the existing buildings. This has been a key design priority which has helped inform the design process.

With this in mind, it was determined that the proposed facility be located on the site of the existing building which is relatively central to the site in a clearing in the surroundings. There is considerable tree growth to the boundaries of the site to such an extent that the existing building will not be visible to public view. In this location the proposed development will have very little impact on both the level of landscaping and on the mature trees within the site.

As stated in section 3.2 of this report, the building has been designed in a manner that will reflect its woodland and landscaped surroundings and will be attractive and sympathetic to its location replacing what can only be considered to be a somewhat unattractive building of very little architectural merit.

The proposed building is designed as a low level structure with a curved green roof. The external elevations are clad in timber incorporating elements of glass. In terms of height, the building is 4 metres lower than the existing building and thus its relationship with the surrounding landscape is somewhat improved upon than that of the existing building.

f) The fallback Position

As stated previously, the proposed design brings both visual and environmental benefits to a site of this nature and, as such, the proposal will be of benefit to the setting and character of the Green Belt and will be an improvement on the fallback position.

The courts have increasingly held that the fall back position, i.e. what the site can be used for if permission is refused, is an important material consideration. As stated above, the site has a C2 Use. If planning permission is refused, the use of the site for this purpose will be maintained but through the re-use of the existing unsightly building, with none of the visual and environmental benefits that would arise if the submitted scheme is permitted. It is considered that the fallback position presents a scenario that significantly less desirable in planning terms than that now put forward to the Council. The proposal has clear benefits to the character and appearance of the Green Belt in this location, environmental benefits and will provide accommodation for which there is a specific need which will assist in the care and support of the client group.

5.3 Other Material Considerations

The following matters are also considered to be material to the consideration of this application, and it is considered that an examination of such issues also points to the granting of planning permission

5.3.1 Job Opportunities

The redevelopment of this site will provide in the region of 40 jobs. It is considered that the employment to be generated is significant not only in terms of the numbers involved but also in terms of the range of

skilled posts that will be created. A broad spectrum of employees will be required and will be linked to the development of the National Autism Hospital at Shortwood. In both the long and the short term this proposal will be an important generator of high quality employment in the District.

5.3.2 Highways

Full details of highways access and travel are dealt with in the submitted report.

5.3.3 Contamination

Issues of contamination are dealt with in full in the submitted report.

Issues relating to the presence of Japanese knotweed on the site are dealt with in full in the submitted report. The applicants are fully aware of the implications of the presence of knotweed on the site and the need to deal with this in a specialised manner.

5.3.4 Landscaping

The full landscaping scheme which is submitted with this application clearly demonstrates that the proposal will enhance both the setting of the site and the Green Belt. The nature of the use to which the site is to be put as a result of this proposal requires extensive landscaping and planting in order to provide an attractive environment. Whilst there is a significant level of landscaping already within the site, the proposed development will allow for this to be enhanced and maintained thereby retaining the historic character of the site in question.

A full tree survey is submitted from which it can be seen that the development can be carried out with very little impact on the existing tree cover. There is sufficient space within the site to mitigate against any losses.

6.0 CONCLUSION & BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

The proposal before the Council for consideration provides an opportunity for the Council to work with the applicants in providing a facility that is of significance both locally and within the South Yorkshire area. The proposed facility will provide long-term accommodation catering for the needs of young people suffering from Autism who have medium to high dependency levels but no specialised facilities available to them at present. It has been identified that there is a definite need for the proposed facility in the area. It is considered that the provision of this facility will provide a high quality environment for future residents and will meet a need for which there is a proven shortfall. The characteristics of the site, being in a secluded, quiet and sheltered setting, are ideal for the provision of the necessary care and support of the future residents.

It is considered that this submission, together with the supporting documents, clearly demonstrate that all the issues raised by this proposal can be fully addressed. Furthermore, it is considered that due to the nature of the proposal, it wholly conforms with the Development Plan and that sufficient "very special circumstances" exist to warrant the grant of planning permission.

The applicants are keen to continue to work with the Council in bringing forward a scheme which will be of mutual benefit to the future occupants of the proposed facility, the Company and the District. The applicants remain willing to provide whatever further information may be required by the Council.