

**PLANNING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE**  
**22 OCTOBER 2019****PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE FROM FORMER CHILDREN'S HOME (USE CLASS C1) TO FAMILY CONTACT (USE CLASS D1) AND OFFICE (USE CLASS B1), THE CONSTRUCTION OF NINE ADDITIONAL CAR PARKING SPACES, ONE MOTORCYCLE SPACE AND INSTALLATION OF A BIKE SHELTER AT 45 DOWNSSELL ROAD, REDDITCH, WORCESTERSHIRE**

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**Applicant**

Worcestershire County Council

**Local Member**

Mr R C Lunn and Mr B Clayton (Shared).

**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider an application under Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning Regulations 1992 for the proposed change of use from former children's home (Use Class C2) to family contact (Use Class D1) and office (Use Class B1), the construction of nine additional car parking spaces, one motorcycle space and installation of a bike shelter at Former Children's Home, 45 Downsell Road, Redditch, Worcestershire.

**Background**

2. 45 Downsell Road is a property owned and operated by Worcestershire County Council (Children's Families and Communities Directorate). The property has been used as a Children's Home since the 1960s.
3. The County Council's Children, Families and Communities Directorate (CFC) has transitioned to Worcestershire Children's First, a wholly owned company responsible for service delivery for Worcestershire County Council (WCC). As a consequence of this, the applicant (WCC) considers that 45 Downsell Road would be better suited to providing office accommodation for CFC staff (social workers and support staff) as well as accommodation for family contact workers for supervised family contact.
4. Family contact takes place when children are unable to see their family (parents, grandparents, extended family) without being supervised and supported by an independent person. Family contact is often court ordered and the local authority has a duty to provide safe and positive contact enabling families to spend quality time together. Overnight stays are not required.

5. The proposed development originally applied for was the change of use from Use Class C2 former children's home to Use Class D1 Non Residential Institution and Use Class B1 Business (family contact and office accommodation), the construction of 8 additional car parking spaces and installation of a bike shelter. In their comments, the County Highways Officer sought additional information from the applicant to demonstrate that the level of proposed car parking was appropriate. The application has been subsequently amended so that nine car parking spaces would be provided, in addition to the existing two car parking spaces, as well as a motorcycle space.

6. To seek to address the concerns of the County Highways Officer, the applicant has sought to justify the levels of parking as put forward within the submitted Transport Note. The applicant has also amended their proposal by now proposing permeable tarmac for the new parking spaces to allow rainwater to drain through the wearing surface, and has reduced the amount of office accommodation.

## **The Proposal**

7. The County Council is seeking planning permission for the proposed change of use from former children's home (Use Class C2) to family contact (Use Class D1) and office (Use Class B1), the construction of nine additional car parking spaces, one motorcycle space and installation of a bike shelter at Former Children's Home, 45 Downsell Road, Redditch, Worcestershire.

8. The proposed development would be a local hub for providing family contact services as well as being an operational base for social work teams dealing with vulnerable children within the north and east of the County (Redditch, eastern parts of Bromsgrove and northern Wychavon).

9. The applicant states that a strategic decision has been made, as part of a wider service development, to connect social care professionals with partners and early help services in the local area they serve, and to reduce travel time for staff enabling them to spend more time working directly with children and families.

10. The applicant has confirmed that the proposal would involve only minor alterations to convert rooms into family contact facilities on the ground floor and office accommodation on the first floor. The applicant is also proposing maintenance repairs, including replacement fascias and soffits, re-decoration, new energy efficient lighting and new additional data and power wiring.

11. It is proposed that there would be two social working teams consisting of 16 members of staff in total and three family contact workers. The ethos would be agile / flexible working and therefore the numbers of staff on site would fluctuate according to other commitments such as meetings elsewhere (i.e. at client's homes, and homeworking). Staff would spend a good deal of time working in the field visiting clients. There are also various other operational hubs around the County. Staff would therefore be likely to choose to base themselves at whichever location would be closest to their clients. The applicant states that social workers would only spend about 30% of their time at 45 Downsell Road. For each team, a Team Manager and Business Support Officer would be based at the property for most of the working week. The applicant has also clarified that the family contact officers would spend

approximately 90% of their time at the Downsell Road premises, although there would be instances where the family contact session may be held off site elsewhere.

12. The proposal includes the provision of three family contact rooms serviced by shared kitchen and toilet areas. The family members would report to family contact officers on site via the dedicated entrance. The family contact officers would then grant access to a dedicated living room environment (for that particular family). The living room environment would have within it soft seating as well as tables and chairs and families would also have access to the shared family contact kitchen and toilet facilities. Family contact officers can either be in the room during family contact sessions or on standby if required. Family contact sessions are risk assessed prior to sessions and the appropriate mitigation measures are put in place. These mitigation measures usually involve closer supervision rather than the introduction of panic alarms.

13. The current car parking arrangement for the site is a tarmac driveway at the rear (northern side) of the site. This car parking is accessed via a drop kerb on Lyndenwood and provides two formal car parking spaces albeit the applicant states that, historically, four smaller vehicles have been known to park there.

14. The applicant is proposing to extend the current tarmac car parking area southwards, across part of the western side of the application site, which is currently grassed as well as accommodating one cherry tree. They propose providing nine additional car parking spaces for staff and visitors (which includes one space for an electric vehicle and a charging point) and a formal enclosed bin storage area. The existing drop kerb is proposed to be extended from the current car parking area across the front of the proposed new spaces in order to provide suitable vehicular access from Lyndenwood. As a result of the proposed car parking, the cherry tree would be required to be felled. A secure bicycle shelter for the parking of six bicycles is also proposed to the east of the site, on the former hard play area.

15. The current tarmac car parking on site drains directly on to the road. The proposed new parking spaces would be constructed using permeable tarmac, therefore, allowing rainwater to drain through the wearing surface.

16. The applicant has confirmed that there would be an increase in toilet provision on site, which would be connected to the existing foul sewage drainage.

17. The applicant has confirmed that the use of the building by office based staff would generally be between 09:00 to 17:00 hours Mondays to Fridays. Operating hours for family contact would be between the hours of 08:00 and 20:00 hours Mondays to Fridays, with occasional Saturday use. However, the majority of family contacts are between 09:00 and 18:30 hours Mondays to Fridays.

## **The Site**

18. The application site is situated within the Webheath residential area of Redditch, located approximately 2 kilometres broadly south-west of Redditch Town Centre. The surrounding area comprises residential properties to the north, south and west, and the hard play area of Webheath Academy Primary School to the east.

19. The application site is roughly rectangular with the main entrance / front elevation (south side of the site) facing onto Downsell Road. The eastern side of the site contains the former Children's Home hard play area. The rear of the property (northern side) contains former garages, which were converted into a meeting room and which back onto the side of access of the dwelling of 1 Lyndenwood. The western side of the building is sited on the residential road of Lyndenwood. The western side of the application site is predominately laid to grass with three trees and a small area used for bin storage and the tarmac driveway.

20. The property is split into two areas. The first area and the majority of the property was for children, generally up to the age of 16 years old. This space has five children's bedrooms, one staff bedroom, two bathrooms, one shower room / toilet, two toilets, kitchen, dining area, living room, games room, freezer room, laundry room, quiet / study room, manager's office and general staff working areas. The second area was two semi-independent flats for older children between the ages of 16 and 19 years old. The flats have a dedicated entrance from Downsell Road (front elevation) and have two separate bedrooms, shared kitchen, and shared shower room / toilet.

21. There are a number of non-statutory wildlife designated sites within 2 kilometres of the application site, notably the Foxlydiate and Pitcher Oak Woods Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Ancient Woodland is located approximately 315 metres north of the application site. Pitcher Oak Golf Course LWS is located about 825 metres broadly to the north-east of the application site. Brockhill Wood is located approximately 1.9 kilometres broadly to the north of the application site. Southcrest Wood LWS and Oakenshaw Wood LWS are located approximately 1.7 kilometres and 1.8 kilometres, broadly to the east of the application site respectively. Downsell Wood LWS is located about 790 metres broadly to the south of the application site, beyond which is Walkwood Coppice LWS located about 1.3 kilometres south of the application site. Bow, Shell, Swan and Seeley Brooks LWS is located about 1.8 kilometres south-west of the application site.

22. The development is located within Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding).

## **Summary of Issues**

23. The main issues in the determination of this application are:

- The location of the development
- Visual impact and residential amenity
- Water environment
- Ecology and biodiversity, and
- Traffic and highway safety.

## **Planning Policy**

### **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

24. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated on 19 February 2019 and replaces the previous NPPF published in March 2012 and July 2018. The NPPF and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The revised NPPF is a material consideration

in planning decisions and should be read as a whole (including its footnotes and annexes).

25. Annex 1 of the NPPF states that *"the policies in this Framework are material considerations which should be taken into account in dealing with applications from the day of its publication"*.

26. The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental), which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives).

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

27. These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in the NPPF; they are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

28. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking, this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

29. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

30. The following guidance contained in the NPPF, is considered to be of specific relevance to the determination of this planning application:

- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Section 4: Decision-making
- Section 6: Building a strong, competitive economy
- Section 7: Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Section 9: Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 11: Making effective use of land
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

### **The Development Plan**

31. The Development Plan is the strategic framework that guides land use planning for the area. In this respect, the current Development Plan that is relevant to this proposal consists of the adopted Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 (2017) and the adopted Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy (2012).

32. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.

33. With regard to the weight to be given to existing policies adopted prior to the publication of the revised NPPF, Annex 1 states "*existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with this Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)*".

### **Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy**

34. The Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy policy that is relevance to the proposal is set out below:

Policy WCS 17 Making provision for waste in all new development

#### **Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4**

35. The Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 policies that are of relevance to the proposal are set out below:

Policy 1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development  
Policy 2 Settlement Hierarchy  
Policy 3 Development Strategy  
Policy 5 Effective and Efficient Use of Land  
Policy 15 Climate Change  
Policy 16 Natural Environment  
Policy 17 Flood Risk Management  
Policy 18 Sustainable Water Management  
Policy 19 Sustainable Travel and Accessibility  
Policy 20 Transport Requirements for New Development  
Policy 22 Road Hierarchy  
Policy 25 Development Outside of Primarily Employment Areas  
Policy 26 Office Development  
Policy 39 Built Environment  
Policy 40 High Quality Design and Safer Communities

#### **Consultations**

36. **County Councillor Brandon Clayton** is concerned with the amount of parking spaces allocated to this application and would be against these proposals in particular because of the parking problems that residents have been experiencing for many years in this area. This is demonstrated by the number of double yellow lines in the vicinity of the proposal.

37. **Redditch Borough Council** has no objections. They consider that the issues that need to be assessed are the suitability of the proposed use in this location; the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of area, particularly in relation to the removal of the grass verge at front to create the proposed parking area; residential amenity; highways safety and parking implications; drainage implications; and the impact of the proposal on the trees and the biodiversity within the site.

38. **Worcestershire Regulatory Services** have no objections to the proposal in terms of any nuisance issues, but in order to minimise any noise, vibration and dust during the construction phase, the applicant should refer to the WRS Code of Best Practice for Demolition and Construction Sites and ensure its recommendations are complied with.

39. **Worcestershire Wildlife Trust** have no objections to the proposal, stating that they note the findings of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. There do not appear to be any overriding ecological constraints to the proposed change of use, and they wish to defer to the opinions of the County Ecologist for all on-site ecological matters.

40. **The County Ecologist** has no objections to the proposal, subject to the imposition of a condition requiring bird boxes (sparrow terraces and house martin cups) being installed on the exterior of the building, as recommended in the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

41. **The County Landscape Officer** has no objections to the proposal, given that the proposed works would not impose significant structural change to the existing building exterior view and its setting. Provision of additional parking and loss of the cherry tree, and amenity grass would impose a slight adverse visual impact to receptors adjacent to the site on Lyndenwood although this would not be out of character when assessed in the context of the suburban setting. While the visual impact resulting from the loss of the cherry tree and other vegetation cannot be directly mitigated, the County Landscape Officer recommends the applicant carries out some compensation planting within the amenity part of the site that borders Downsell Road. This could be a local variety of apple or pear, such as a Worcester black pear, pitmaston pineapple or similar. With regard to the proposed re-turfing, a simple swap from standard perennial rye to a more floristically diverse and low maintenance lawn turf such as Emorsgate EL1 would be welcomed.

42. **The County Highways Officer** has no objection, noting that the application has been supported by an updated drawing and transport note which seeks to review the anticipated car parking demand and the opportunities which exist to access the site sustainably. The scope of the transport note was agreed in advance between the applicant and the County Highways Officer. The use results in a demand for 10 car parking spaces. Nine additional car parking spaces are to be provided in addition to the two existing car parking spaces, therefore providing a total of 11 car parking spaces, of which one would be an accessible space and one is reserved for electric vehicles. It is accepted that there would be some variation in the demand for spaces as the movement pattern of social works are difficult to predict. With this in mind a separate car parking survey has been provided to assess the available on street capacity. This confirms that there is a surge in demand around school arrival times, which is not unexpected. Thereafter, there is available space to absorb these variations within the existing highway without affecting safety and it is not considered that this proposal requires the provision of any on street parking restrictions. However, this situation can be monitored and if deemed necessary, the County Councillor could promote a traffic regulation order. It is not considered that this is necessary to implement a restriction at this stage. A condition is sought to ensure that the proposed accessible space is provided within the area of proposed parking that would be closer to the ramped entrance to the building. This may require a street lighting column to be relocated. The County Highways Officer concludes that there would not be a severe impact and therefore there are no justifiable grounds on which an objection could be maintained.

43. **The County Archaeologist** has no objections to the proposal.

44. **North Worcestershire Water Management** have no objections, stating that the proposal is located within Flood Zone 1 (low risk of river flooding) and has a low surface water flood risk according to the Environment Agency's Surface Water Flood Map. They have also confirmed that they do not have any records of flooding located at or near to the site. The proposal does not affect the building footprint, but proposes nine additional hardstanding car parking areas which may increase run off. Additional drainage should be put in to accommodate these additional car parking

spaces. Gullies should be positioned on the low spot for water to drain into before connecting to the existing drainage system. The change of use may be an opportunity to accommodate SuDS measures which are required in Policy 17 of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan, these could include but are not restricted to porous paving, a sub-base for attenuation under the new parking bay or rain gardens. Given the low flood risk to the site and nature of the development, they do not deem it necessary to attach a drainage condition.

45. **Severn Trent Water Limited** have no objections to the proposal, as there is no new proposal to connect to the public sewerage system.

46. **Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service** has not made any comments

47. **West Mercia Police** have no objections.

### **Other Representations**

48. The application has been advertised on site and by neighbour notification. To date, three letters of representation have been received commenting on the proposal. These letters of representation are available in the Members' Support Unit. Their main comments are summarised below:

#### Traffic and Highway Safety

- Comments that they experience many problems with car parking along Lyndenwood due to parents bringing children to the two schools in Downsell Road. They comment it is almost impossible to get into and out of Lyndenwood during school pick up and drop off hours as Lyndenwood is well used by parents for parking. Over the years this problems has escalated due to the extra houses that have been built. The parents park on the pavements, green areas and often block residents' driveways. Lyndenwood is totally elderly residents who are vulnerable. On occasions parking along Lyndenwood has prevented ambulances from driving along Lyndenwood. They do not mind the proposed additional parking, but considers that Lyndenwood should be restricted to resident parking only to ease the current situation.
- Considers that revised plans are worse than the original application submission due to the need for more parking for cars and motorbike and concerned about where these would go. Also, they comment that with the problems from parking from the schools as well as staff from WCC, this would mean more chaos. They would like Lyndenwood to be made residents parking only, due to the number of local residents being vulnerable elderly residents.
- Does not object to the use of the building, but as her bungalow is located opposite the proposal she concerned that the proposed car park would mean that people would park the road. The road is narrow and she has problems getting to her drive. She has two schools either side and parking is horrendous. Ambulance and dial a ride have difficulty accessing bungalows as it is. Considers that double yellow lines on road opposite might be a solution.

## The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy's Comments

49. As with any planning application, this application should be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant policies and key issues have been set out earlier.

### Location of the Development

50. The NPPF seeks to direct office accommodation to town centre locations. Section 7 of the NPPF states planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. The NPPF goes on to state that where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses (offices are considered to be a main town centre use), allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre.

51. Paragraph 86 of the NPPF states that *"local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered"*.

52. The introduction to Policy 26: 'Office Development' of the Adopted Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 states that *"the Borough Council aims to create a Borough where businesses have the opportunity to thrive and the Office Development policy offers a strategy towards meeting this aspiration. Whilst Town Centres are ideal locations for office development; Redditch Town Centre may not offer the most appropriate location for all office-based businesses to thrive in Redditch. Different businesses have different needs and priorities; therefore, this policy provides some flexibility in order that business opportunities elsewhere in the Borough are not stifled"*.

53. Policy 25 of the Adopted Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 relates to development outside of Primarily Employment Areas, such as in this instance. This Policy states *"sites within the urban area other than those within designated Primarily Employment Areas may be suitable for economic development, redevelopment or change of use. Within the Redditch urban area the economic development proposals should:*

- i. be in close proximity to suitable transport routes and services;*
- ii. have regard to the scale and nature of the travel demand across all modes likely to be generated;*
- iii. be accessible from existing residential areas by all appropriate modes of transport and are not dependant upon access by private transport, where amenity is not negatively affected;*
- iv. be acceptable in terms of impact on the wider environment; and*

- v. *demonstrate the provision of adequate infrastructure including Green Infrastructure required to support the proposal*".

54. The Reasoned Justification to this policy states *"economic development (which includes offices), redevelopment or change to employment use in locations that are not designated Primarily Employment Areas as identified on the Policies Map, may be appropriate where it does not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area"*.

55. The applicant states that the proposal would become a local hub for providing family contact services as well as being an operational base for social working teams dealing with vulnerable children within the north and east of the County (Redditch, eastern parts of Bromsgrove and northern Wychavon).

56. The strategic decision has been made as part of a wider service development to connect social care professionals with partners and early help services in the local area they serve and to reduce travel time for staff enabling them to spend more time working directly with children and families.

57. The family contact team and social workers work closely together to support families. Enabling these teams to be co-located promotes opportunity for formal and informal discussion and information sharing between staff and as such improved joint working.

58. The applicant states that family contact centres are deliberately sited within residential areas as opposed to city or town centres. The family contact team work with vulnerable children and families, and for some of these families it is neither safe nor appropriate to facilitate these family time sessions within a city or town centre. Family contact within a residential setting not only provides a higher level of privacy for families using the service, it also assists in a more relaxed and where possible, more natural environment for them. For some children, this controlled environment provides them with the security they need and the knowledge that they are safe.

59. Furthermore, the applicant states that the site's location and transport links makes Downsell Road an accessible facility for families and carers, and is ideal in terms of reach for these areas as social workers would be able to quickly access these areas via the A448. There are local bus services, with a frequency of up to every 30 minutes, which run close to the site and serve Redditch and Kidderminster, which the applicant has confirmed would be the primary catchment areas for families. Conversely, a town centre location would potentially create delays in travelling around the county or attending urgent enquiries, particularly at peak times.

60. The Downsell Road operational hub is to complement other operational hubs within Bromsgrove, Kidderminster and Evesham and also touch point offices in Malvern and Droitwich that cover the remaining areas of Worcestershire. CFC administrative / back office teams including Finance, Human Resources etc. would be based within central accommodation at County Hall, Worcester.

61. Redditch Borough Council have been consulted and have raised no objections to the proposal.

62. In view of the above, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy considers that in this instance the proposal would be appropriately located to serve the needs and priorities of the service.

### **Visual Impact and Residential Amenity**

63. The applicant is only proposing minor maintenance works and repairs to the exterior of the building, which includes replacement fascias and soffits. However, the applicant is proposing extending the existing parking arrangements on site, which would require the felling of an ornamental cherry tree.

64. The County Landscape Officer has been consulted and has asked for a replacement tree to be considered and for a low maintenance and more floristically diverse lawn turf to be considered. The applicant has confirmed that the planting of a replacement ornamental cherry tree or similar would be acceptable and that they will consider the re-turfing alternative. These matters can be controlled through the imposition of a suitable condition.

65. With regard to noise impacts, the applicant states that the proposal would be for predominantly office workers with children only attending the site as part of a family contact arrangement. The building is detached. Furthermore, the applicant states that the operating hours for family contact would be between the hours of 08:00 to 20:00 with the majority of family contacts being between 09:00 and 18:30 inclusive rather than the previous 24 hours a day, seven days per week usage when the building was used as a children's home.

66. Worcestershire Regulatory Services have been consulted and have raised no objections to the proposal in terms of any nuisance issues (noise, dust, odour, vibration).

67. In view of the above matters, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy considers that the proposal would not have an adverse or detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the local area or residential amenity.

### **Water Environment**

68. The proposed development is within Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding), as identified on the Environment Agency's Indicative Flood Risk Map. The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) identifies that all uses of land are appropriate within this zone.

69. The applicant is proposing to extend the current tarmac car parking area southwards, across the grassed area along the western side of the application site in order to provide nine additional car parking spaces. The applicant states that the current tarmac car parking area on site drains directly onto the road (Lyndenwood). The proposed new parking spaces would be constructed using permeable tarmac, as previously suggested by North Worcestershire Water Management, and it is recommended that a condition is imposed to this effect. The applicant has also confirmed that there would be an increase in toilet provision on site, which would be connected to the existing foul sewage drainage.

70. There is no objection from Severn Trent Water Limited. In view of this, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy is satisfied that the proposal would have no

adverse effects on the water environment, subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition.

### **Ecology and Biodiversity**

71. There are a number of non-statutory designated wildlife sites within two kilometres of the proposal, the nearest of which is the Foxlydiate and Pitcher Oak Woods LWS and Ancient Woodland, which is located approximately 315 metres north of the proposal.

72. The application was accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, which concludes that there are no obvious or immediate issues for the proposed works with regard to protected species and no further dedicated surveys for any species are required. However, in the unlikely event that protected species are found during the construction works, all works must cease immediately and the advice of a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist obtained and followed. The appraisal recommends bird nesting opportunities for house sparrows and house martins should be provided in the form of sparrow terraces and house martin cups on the exterior walls of the building.

73. Due to the proximity to LWSs, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have been consulted. They have not raised any objections to the proposal and have deferred to the opinions of the County Ecologist for all on site ecological matters. The County Ecologist has no objections, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions reflecting the recommendations of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

74. In light of the above, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy considers that, subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition, the proposed development would have no adverse impacts on the ecology and biodiversity at the site or in the surrounding area, and would enhance the application site's value for biodiversity.

### **Traffic and Highway Safety**

75. Paragraph 109 of the NPPF states *"development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe"*.

76. The applicant is seeking to provide a total of nine formal car parking spaces (11 if parking on the existing driveway is included), which includes a space for electric vehicle charging. The applicant would also provide parking for six bicycles. The applicant states that the ethos would be agile / flexible working, therefore, the numbers of staff on site would fluctuate according to other commitments such as meetings elsewhere (i.e. visiting client's homes, and homeworking). The applicant states that they would seek to promote car sharing and the use of public transport wherever possible, and they are considering options such as being able to book rooms and car park spaces in advance of staff attending the site.

77. The service would continue to consider these options but they originated from the building having a much greater occupancy. The transport assessment and travel plan based on the revised reduced occupancy levels now negates the need for this as it has been demonstrated the number of spaces proposed for the site would be adequate without the need for additional parking on the highway.

78. The revised Transport Note (September 2019) contains data to aid an understanding of the existing baseline conditions and what the future travel demand will be associated with the proposals. This leads to the identification of any necessary measures arising from the impact of the change of use.

79. A two-day parking survey was undertaken on Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 September 2019 to evidence current on-street conditions. This covered Heathfield Road, Lyndenwood and Downsell Road and including considering parking stress, which is a calculation to consider the number of parked vehicles as a percentage of available parking for each parking type. Stress can be over 100% if cars are small and/or parked very closely together; The key findings of the analysis showed that:

- Heathfield Road peaks at 91% capacity at 08:30;
- Downsell Road peaks at 77% capacity at 08:30;
- Lyndenwood peaks at 45% capacity at 08:30, and
- After 08:30 demand declines and the demand profile is similar to the previous weekday.

80. The revised Transport Note therefore references that Lyndenwood does not experience high levels of on street parking. This is a situation which the development proposal seeks to maintain by the provision of adequate on-site car parking and the provision of a robust travel plan.

81. A number of neighbours have concerns about parking in the vicinity of the site. The County Highways Officer has been consulted. Whilst they recognise that there may be some short term vehicle displacement onto the network, as set out earlier in this report, they conclude that there would not be a severe impact on the highway and, therefore, there are no justifiable grounds on which an objection could be maintained. While the analysis shows that there would be sufficient parking capacity throughout the day, the applicant has stated that team meetings would be likely to be arranged outside of school drop off and pick up times to help reduce the impact on the highway.

82. In light of the above, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy is satisfied that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact upon traffic or highway safety, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

## **Other Matters**

### Crime and Safety

83. West Mercia Police have been consulted and have no objections to the proposal. In view of this, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy is satisfied that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact upon crime and antisocial behaviour.

### Bin storage and recycling

84. The applicant has stated that the proposed development would continue to use both a large general waste and a large recycling bin, which would be located within the new bin store being constructed on site. This can be controlled subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition. They have also confirmed that smaller bins would be provided throughout the building to separate what is general and recyclable

waste and these would be emptied into the appropriate external bin by the cleaning team.

## Conclusion

85. Worcestershire County Council is seeking planning permission for the proposed change of use from former children's home (Use Class C2) to family contact (Use Class D1) and office (Use Class B1), the construction of nine additional car parking spaces, one motorcycle space and installation of a bike shelter at Former Children's Home, 45 Downsell Road, Redditch, Worcestershire.

86. The proposed development would be a local hub for providing family contact services as well as being an operational base for social working teams dealing with vulnerable children within the north and east of the County (Redditch, eastern parts of Bromsgrove and northern Wychavon).

87. The applicant states that the family contact team and social workers work closely together to support families. Enabling these teams to be co-located promotes opportunity for formal and informal discussion and information sharing between staff and as such improved joint working. Its location and transport links makes Downsell Road an accessible facility for families and carers, and is ideal in terms of reach for these areas as social workers would be able to quickly access these areas via the A448. A town centre location would potentially create delays in accessing other places in the County or attending urgent enquiries, particularly at peak times.

88. In view of the above, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy considers that in this instance the proposal would be appropriately located to serve the needs and priorities of the service and would not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area.

89. The County Landscape Officer has raised no objections to the proposal, and minimal changes are proposed to the exterior of the building, with the key changes being the extension of the car parking area and removal of a cherry tree. In view of this, it is considered that the proposal would not have an adverse or detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the local area or residential amenity.

90. North Worcestershire Water Management and Severn Trent Water Limited have both raised no objections. It is considered that the proposal would have no adverse effects on the water environment, subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition regarding the car park extension to be permeable tarmac.

91. Based on the advice of the County Ecologist and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, it is considered that subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition that the proposed development would have no adverse impacts on the ecology and biodiversity at the site or in the surrounding area, and would enhance the application site's value for biodiversity.

92. Based on the advice of the advice from the County Highways Officer, the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy is satisfied that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact upon traffic or highway safety, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

93. Taking into account the provisions of the Development Plan and in particular Policy WCS 17 of the adopted Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy and Policies 1, 2, 3, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 39 and 40 of the adopted Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4, it is considered the proposal would not cause demonstrable harm to the interests intended to be protected by these policies, or highway safety.

## **Recommendation**

94. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy recommends that planning permission be granted for the proposed change of use from former children's home (Use Class C2) to family contact (Use Class D1) and office (Use Class B1), the construction of nine additional car parking spaces, one motorcycle space and installation of a bike shelter at Former Children's Home, 45 Downsell Road, Redditch, Worcestershire, subject to the following conditions:

- a) The development hereby permitted must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission;**
- b) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans 45DR-SP01, 45DR-BP01, 45DR-Ext 01 Rev A, 45DR-Ext 02, 45DR-PFF 01 Rev A and 45DR-PGF 01 Rev A, except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this permission;**
- c) Construction works shall only be carried out on the site between 08:00 to 18:00 hours on Mondays to Fridays inclusive, and 08:00 to 13:00 hours on Saturdays, with no construction work on Sundays, Public or Bank Holidays;**
- d) All existing trees, shrubs and hedgerows indicated to be retained shall be protected by suitable fencing in accordance with BS5837:2012. No materials shall be stored, no rubbish dumped, no fires lit and no buildings erected inside the fence. In the event of any trees, shrub or hedgerows being damaged or removed by the development, they shall be replaced in the next planting season;**
- e) All vegetation clearance at the site shall be undertaken outside the bird nesting season which generally extends between March and September inclusive. If this is not possible then any vegetation that is to be removed or disturbed should be checked by an experienced ecologist for nesting birds immediately prior to works commencing. If birds are found to be nesting any works which may affect them would have to be delayed until the young have fledged and the nest has been abandoned naturally;**
- f) Notwithstanding the submitted details, prior to the development being brought into use, details of replacement new turf and tree, including their location shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval in writing. The approved scheme shall be implemented within the first available planting season (the period between 31 October in any one year and 31 March in the following year) on completion of the development. Should the replacement tree die, be removed, damaged or**

diseased within a period of five years from the completion of the planting, it shall be replaced on an annual basis, in the next planting season with a tree of a similar size and species;

- g) **Within one month of the completion of the development, details describing the specifications and locations of sparrow terraces and house martin cups shall be submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval in writing. Following approval, the terraces and cups shall be installed within three months and thereafter so retained;**
- h) **Notwithstanding the submitted details, the position of the accessible parking, electric vehicle parking and motorcycle parking shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. The development shall not be brought into use until the approved details have been implemented and thereafter so retained;**
- i) **The development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until one electric vehicle charging space has been provided in accordance with a specification which shall be submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority. Thereafter, such spaces and power points shall be kept available and maintained for the use of electric vehicles as approved;**
- j) **No construction of the parking spaces extension, as shown on Drawing Numbered: 45DR-Ext 01 Rev A, shall take place until details of all surfacing materials, which shall be a permeable surface for the new parking spaces, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority. Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and thereafter so retained;**
- k) **The Development hereby approved shall not be brought into use until the access, parking and turning facilities have been provided as shown on drawing 45DR-EXT01 Rev A;**
- l) **The travel plan shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed details which have been registered with Modeshift STARS Business;**
- m) **Notwithstanding the submitted details, the development shall not be brought into use until details of the bin storage, including provision for recycling, are submitted to the County Planning Authority for approval in writing. The approved details shall then be implemented and thereafter so retained; and**
- n) **No more than 277 sq. m of the total gross floorspace of the development hereby approved shall be used as floorspace within Use Class B1.**

## **Contact Points**

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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**Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Strategic Infrastructure and Economy) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

The application, plans and consultation replies in file reference 19/000020/REG3.