

New Chapters Homes Response to Objections from June 2024

Petition

We are writing to address the concerns raised by some neighbours regarding the proposed opening of a children's home in the community. We hope we are able to address the concerns raised in the petition within this response, the main themes of the concerns have been partitioned into the headings.

Lack of experience in the opening of a children's home

There seems to be apprehension about the directors' qualifications and experience in handling such a sensitive and crucial responsibility.

First and foremost, we would like to clarify and reassure everyone that the directors of the children's home possess extensive experience in child protection. We have collectively spent over 35 years working in various capacities within social services. Our professional backgrounds includes, child protection, working in family courts, working with children looked after, independent reviewing officer (oversight of care plans, monitoring the performance of local authority to ensure that they are fulfilling their duties in meeting children who are looked after care needs), health visiting, working within law enforcement to safeguard children at risk of sexual exploitation (including working with the police and assisting with any arrest where there are children present such as drug raids, immigration concerns etc) and managing a family support team.

We demonstrate a deep commitment to the welfare and safety of children, which is paramount for the successful operation of any such residential children's home.

We have been actively involved in child protection work where we have dealt with a wide range of cases involving vulnerable children. Our hands-on experience has equipped us with the necessary skills to understand and address the complex needs of children who require a supportive and nurturing environment.

Additionally, the directors hold advanced degrees in social work and health and social care. Our academic training has provided us with a solid theoretical foundation, which we have successfully applied in our professional practice. We have also participated in numerous specialised training programs and workshops focused on child welfare, trauma-informed care and family dynamics.

Furthermore, we have a proven track record of working collaboratively with other social service agencies, schools, healthcare providers, and law enforcement to ensure a holistic approach to child protection.

Our ability to coordinate and communicate effectively with various stakeholders is crucial in creating a safe and supportive environment for the children in our care.

It is also important to note that we are committed to ongoing professional development. We regularly attend conferences and stay updated on the latest research and best practices in the evolving field of child protection. This commitment to continuous learning ensures that we remain well-equipped to provide the highest standard of care to the children in our care.

In light of this extensive experience and dedication, our expertise will not only benefit the children but also enhance the overall well-being and safety of the community.

We hope this information alleviates any concerns relating to the director's expertise in this area and demonstrates that the children's home will be in very qualified and capable hands.

CO2 emissions, Parking and Traffic control

We would like to reassure you of our absolute commitment to reduce our carbon footprint and the ongoing initiatives we will implement to protect the wellbeing of the community, as well as minimise traffic within the residential area.

We understand that changes to transportation and daily routines can raise questions and uncertainties, and we want to provide reassurance and clarity on our efforts.

We will actively engage in Hillingdon climate strategy which is to become Carbon Neutral by 2030 by attending community meetings to support broader environmental goals and initiatives to support sustainability of working towards the reduction of CO2 emissions in the area.

New Chapters Homes aim will be to create a healthier, safer, and more sustainable environment for all residents by encouraging the use of public transportation, carpooling, cycling, and walking. These options not only reduce emissions but also alleviate traffic congestion.

In addition, we will ensure that detailed information about public transportation routes, schedules, cycle and walking are easily accessible to all of our staff.

We will also facilitate a staff carpool matching service to encourage staff to carpool and the three designated parking slots within the grounds of our property will be available for parking convenience.

To further encourage sustainable transportation, we have provisions to store up to 5 bikes for young people and staff to travel to local locations.

We will also implement flexible work arrangements for our administrative staff who will have the option to work from home.

We recognise that not everyone can work from home, but small adjustments in commuting times can help reduce peak-hour traffic and congestion, which will benefit both employees and the community.

We are also dedicated to supporting eco-friendly vehicles. We aim to work towards purchasing an electric or hybrid vehicle for company use in the near future.

Moreover, in an effort to optimise operational practices, the aim will be to recruit locally in order for staff to commute to work by walking or cycling to the workplace. Video conferencing and other digital tools will be utilised for meetings and training sessions to reduce the need for travel to the home.

New Chapters Homes aims to function just like a typical family home, ensuring that its operations do not increase CO2 emissions, traffic or parking issues in the neighbourhood. Their goal is to seamlessly blend into the community without causing any disruptions or environmental impacts.

We hope this alleviates any concerns in relation to traffic, parking and CO2 emissions.

Concerns of Anti-social behaviour

Children's homes are established to provide a safe, supportive, and structured environment for children who, through no fault of their own, cannot live with their families. These homes are managed by experienced professionals who are dedicated to fostering positive behaviours and supporting the emotional and social development of the children in their care. A children's home is part of a holistic group of professionals that support children in ensuring they live in a safe and secure environment where all their needs are met to achieve their full potential.

Children's homes operate under strict regulatory frameworks and guidelines, including Ofsted and Children's Home Regulations, which are designed to maintain high standards of conduct. To operate as a children's home in England and Wales, the facility must be regulated by Ofsted and undergo monthly monitoring visits (Regulation 44 visits) to ensure it is safe and meets the needs of the children it accommodates. **Please note Ofsted reserve the right to make unannounced visits to the Children's Home. Please note that the purpose for an unannounced visit being to aid spot checking the running of the home which will also include the maintenance inside and out of the home.**

Staff members are trained in various different training including safeguarding, child protection, and non-violent resistance (NVR) to handle any behavioural issues constructively and promptly. The goal is to integrate these children into the community positively, not to disrupt it.

A well-run children's home should blend seamlessly into the neighbourhood, making it indistinguishable from any other home. The objective is for the children to fit discreetly into the community, replicating a normal family setting rather than an institution. Given that this home will not accommodate a large number of children, it should not feel institutional at all.

While the children's home will be a place where children live, it is important to note that it will not function like a school or recreational facility with high levels of noise. The children are taken out of the home frequently to explore the community and experience new activities whilst supervised rather than being kept at home all the time. While at home, measures will be in place to ensure that the environment remains respectful and in keeping with the surrounding neighbourhood. The children's home will have robust security measures in place, including 24/7 supervision and monitoring to ensure the safety of both the residents and the community. These homes are typically well-maintained and managed to prevent any potential disturbances or safety concerns.

We understand that change can sometimes be unsettling, but it is essential to approach this situation with an open mind and a sense of empathy. The children who will live in this home are part of our broader community. They deserve the opportunity to grow and thrive in a supportive environment, just as any child does. We take note around the concerns of some neighbours living in fear due to anti-social behaviour. In our experience, children who are looked after, when placed in any new environment also live in fear and anxiety of their new surroundings.

Many people in life may have experienced similar traumas in their own childhood and have been lucky enough to be fostered or placed in an affective/stable children's home and have been able to make great change in their lives.

Please note that behaviour is not always displayed as aggressive outbursts. It could manifest as a child who is withdrawn, developmentally delayed, has difficulties with speech and self-care, eating disorders, or is isolated and anxious.

Children with profound needs are not just placed into a children's home; they work with a team of professionals who support them in meeting their needs. This team can include social workers, counsellors, psychotherapists, support workers, and doctors. The children have access to various resources and activities to help address their needs, such as animal therapy, swimming, art and music therapy tutoring, rock climbing, and other positive activities tailored to their interests and needs.

New Chapters Homes will have a matching referral to ensure that the children we accept into our care are able to function and live in a home like setting with their needs being met with the resources available. We believe every child is important and should be given a chance if assessed appropriate to live in a home environment however a child's placement with New Chapters Homes will be reviewed for children whose needs cannot be met in the home and whose behaviours are negatively impacting on the neighbourhood.

It is important to address that some of the concerns that have been expressed can be rooted in misconceptions. Assuming that the presence of a children's home will inevitably lead to anti-social behaviour is not only unfair but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes about vulnerable children in care. Such views are not reflective of the reality of how these homes operate and the positive outcomes they achieve.

By working together and fostering understanding, create a more inclusive and supportive community. The children who will live in this home deserve the opportunity to grow and thrive and be offered the same opportunities as any other child.

Other factors / concerns raised within the objections such as previous concerns of previous residents, risk to schools and any impact, a children's home being out of character of the neighbourhood and the layout of property

We can sympathise and take on board that there have been some reported negative experiences/ incidents linked to this address or the surrounding area before our involvement. Thank you for sharing this and information shared from this petition will be included in any further risks assessments moving forward.

We do understand that having vulnerable children in the area can cause some anxiety due to the unknown aspects of the children we will be caring for. We are not aware of any targeted research or data nor is it our view to suggest that there would be a significant increase of risks to any schools in the area due to a children's home being located near or in the same area.

Children who are looked after are not generally excluded from attending mainstream schools and are not considered a safeguarding risk to children who are not in care. The children in our care will be expected to attend some form of education and this can take place in many forms such as some children will already attend a mainstream school in the area and be supported to attend by staff, or they may be educated virtually if that better suites their needs, off site one to one tuition will be offered and this will be dependent on risks assessments for that child.

It is our view that it is imperative for children not to be left idle and to have structure and routine every day, this we believe will support their understanding of being productive members of society.

It is highly unlikely that the children's home operating at this address will have an impact on any of the routines of parents and children attending nearby schools. The property has an adequate parking area off road therefore limiting any impact on pedestrians, traffic or parking in the area.

New Chapters Homes agrees that the property is located in a lovely, quiet residential area. We do not concur with the concerns that the property is not suitable for vulnerable children. The layout of the property will allow for the space to be used in the same character of the neighbourhood, which is as a family like residential home. It is our professional view that this home environment can support the stable, safe and secure living environment we hope to achieve for the children we will have in our care.

The home is a 5-bedroom home with 3 reception rooms and a good size kitchen. The front garden has space for up to 3 cars parked and a double sized garage in the front of the property. There is a spacious garden, and we plan to have 6-foot fences on the side adjoining to the neighbour's property to ensure privacy and security for the children and neighbours.

The space within the home allows for the care of children with needs who require a nurturing home environment in which specialist staff will monitor and support the children with their day-to-day tasks as set out in the anti-social behaviour section. It is our experience that this home layout inside and out does and will meet the needs of vulnerable children that are in care and may have never experienced living in this type of home environment. The children's home will operate 24 hours a day but will function as much as possible like a normal family home and there will be minimal activity outside of working hours limiting any significant impact in the area.

This property will allow for the children to experience living in a lovely residential setting which New Chapters Homes will continue to foster within the home and around the property. New Chapters Homes understand how much a community and homely environment can impact positively on the upbringing of a child. Being around the positive aspects of living in a caring and nurturing neighbourhood will allow for vulnerable children in our care to experience something different and new which we know will have a positive impact on their overall childhood experience.

The home will be undergoing renovations to ensure that it is safe and habitable for the children living at the home and the staff working in the home.

As stipulated in the anti-social behaviour section, New Chapters Homes will be required to adhere to the quality standards for children's homes and will be regularly reviewed by Ofsted a minimum of twice a year. Children looked after are also visited at the home by their social workers every 6 weeks. The home will be staffed by 2-4

members of staff a day depending on the need for the child/ren. Due to the capacity of the property, we will not exceed more than 7 bodies in the home at a continuous time to ensure that children and staff have adequate space and there is not an increase to staff entering and leaving the home.

We understand that there are groups in the community such as elderly neighbours that are reportedly worried and may meet any change or proposal for a slight change with hesitation and reservation. New Chapters Homes wish to reassure the community that the care that will be offered to the children at New Chapters Homes will be consistently risk assessed, monitored and supported, limiting any possible risks that children from the home will cause any neighbours significant disturbance, distress, or negatively impact of their sense of feeling safe.

New Chapters Homes will provide neighbours with details of who they can raise issues to if they have any concerns. We aim and hope to be good neighbours and wish to continue to work with services in the community and its residents to ensure that we can offer the best care to the children in our care whilst maintaining the neighbourhood's good character.

We are committed to transparency and open communication with all our neighbours. We invite you to participate in community meetings where you can learn more about the operations of the children's home, meet the staff, and ask any questions you may have. We believe that through dialogue and cooperation, we can address concerns and build a community that supports all its members, especially its most vulnerable ones.

Kind Regards,

New Chapters Homes