

Planning Statement

Proposed Change of Use from a Dwellinghouse, Use Class C3, to a Residential Children's Home, Use Class C2

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Executive Summary

This Planning Statement has been prepared by Storah Architecture on behalf of Aurora Children's Homes in support of an application to change the use of 35 Torrington Street, Heywood, from a dwellinghouse within Use Class C3 to a small residential children's home within Use Class C2. The home will provide accommodation for one child, supported by two resident carers.

The proposal has been designed around the continued domestic use of the property. The child will live at the building as their home, attending school, sharing meals with carers, completing homework, taking part in local activities and spending the evening within an ordinary household environment. The property will not operate as an institution, public facility, clinic or administrative office.

Aurora specialises in solo residential placements. The home will therefore accommodate only one child at any time, within a settled household supported by two resident carers. This arrangement allows care, routine and the domestic environment to be tailored to the individual child, without the activity associated with a group living arrangement.

The building is an existing end terrace property which has been vacant for some time and is presently in a poor condition. Internal strip out works have provided an opportunity to provide a living room, a kitchen with dining space, an ancillary office, a utility room and a separate WC at ground floor. The first floor will contain three bedrooms for the child and two resident carers, together with two bathrooms, one for the child and one for staff. No extension or material external alteration is proposed. The elevations and enclosed yard will be repaired and improved using materials consistent with the existing property and surrounding homes.

The anticipated operation is modest. Two carers will ordinarily remain at the property throughout a 48 hour shift. Staff changeover will generally occur once every two days during the school day and will last approximately 30 minutes. Aurora will coordinate staff travel through its office, with the intention that only one operational staff vehicle is parked near the home at any given time.

The proposal retains a vacant residential building in active residential use, provides a home for one child and secures investment in a property which is currently in need of substantial improvement. Having regard to the scale of occupation, the domestic daily routine, the limited pattern of vehicle movements and the absence of material external works, the proposal will not cause unacceptable harm to residential amenity, highway safety or the character of the area.

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1.0 Introduction

This Planning Statement accompanies an application submitted by Aurora Children's Homes for the change of use of 35 Torrington Street, Heywood, OL10 2EZ, from a dwellinghouse within Use Class C3 to a residential children's home within Use Class C2.

The proposed development will provide a home for one child, supported by two resident carers. The application also includes internal alterations and domestic refurbishment. No extension or material external alteration is proposed.

The existing and proposed arrangements are illustrated by drawing 101 Existing, and drawing 300 Proposed. These drawings form part of the application.

Aurora Children's Homes will be both the applicant and operator. Benjamin Stenton is identified as the applicant's representative. The home will be registered with Ofsted before becoming operational, following the grant of planning permission and completion of the refurbishment works.

The application should be determined by reference to its land use effects. The central question is whether the occupation of this existing dwelling by one child and two resident carers will remain compatible with the residential character of the property and surrounding area. The assessment set out below demonstrates that it will.

2.0 Site and Surroundings

The application property is an existing end terrace building occupying a corner position at the junction of Torrington Street and Robert Street. Its western elevation addresses Torrington Street and its southern elevation addresses Robert Street. The building is positioned directly against the pavement on these elevations, reflecting the established urban form of the surrounding terraced development.

A small enclosed yard is located to the north of the building, with gated access from Torrington Street. The yard provides private external space and domestic refuse storage. The property has no off street parking.

The surrounding area is predominantly residential, with a varied housing stock including traditional terraced properties, semi detached dwellings and flats. Torrington Street is a one way road and on street parking is characteristic of the area. Robert Street has residential properties on its northern side, while its southern edge adjoins the boundary of the Bay Horse public house beer garden.

The property is understood to have been vacant for some time and is presently in a poor condition. Internal strip out works have begun and have confirmed that the building can be refurbished to provide generous and functional domestic accommodation.

The site is in an established urban location with shops, cafés, parks and everyday services available within walking distance. Newhouse Academy is approximately 0.7 kilometres from the property. The accessibility of the site allows a future child to participate in education, recreation and community life without unnecessary journeys.

3.0 The Proposed Development

Planning permission is sought for the change of use of the existing dwellinghouse to a residential children's home providing accommodation for one child. The formal description of development is:

Change of use of an existing dwellinghouse within Use Class C3 to a residential children's home within Use Class C2, providing accommodation for one child, together with associated internal alterations.

The proposed plans illustrate the internal reconfiguration of the building. The ground floor will contain a living room, a kitchen with dining space, an ancillary office, a utility room and a separate WC.

At first floor, the accommodation will provide three bedrooms for the child and two resident carers, together with two bathrooms, one for the child and one for staff.

The existing arrangement is shown on drawing 010, Existing. The proposed internal layout and unchanged elevations are shown on drawing 212, Proposed.

The office will be ancillary to the residential care use. It will principally provide a secure location for official and confidential records. It will not operate as a separate administrative workplace, public reception or base for visiting staff.

No extension is proposed. No external CCTV, additional lighting, signage or specialist security measures will be installed. The elevations and enclosed yard will be cleaned, repaired and improved. Any replacement doors and windows will reflect the existing uPVC character of the property and surrounding homes.

Refuse will continue to be managed through the existing domestic collection arrangements. Bins will be stored within the enclosed yard and moved to the appropriate collection point on collection day.

4.0 The Applicant and Residential Care Model

Aurora Children's Homes intends to provide therapeutic residential care within safe, stable and nurturing domestic environments. Its approach is centred upon positive relationships, emotional security, education and the personal development of each child.

Aurora specialises in solo residential placements for children who require highly individualised care. Each home is intended to accommodate one child at a time. This model allows the care team to provide a stable domestic routine for a child who may not be suited to a conventional group living environment.

The intended Ofsted registration will cover children and young people aged 6 to 18. Aurora expects to support children who may have experienced emotional and behavioural difficulties, complex trauma, attachment difficulties or emotional dysregulation. The care model is therapeutic and trauma informed, with an emphasis upon stability, structure, positive relationships, education and longer term emotional development.

The present application is deliberately limited to one child. The age, gender and individual care needs of that child will be determined through the statutory placement process and the operator's assessment of whether the home, staff team and Statement of Purpose can meet those needs safely and appropriately.

The proposed care model provides a minimum staffing ratio of two carers to one child. Two carers will ordinarily be present at the property and the planning assessment is based upon that day to day arrangement. The anticipated rota is 48 hours on duty followed by four days off. The carers will remain at the property overnight during their shift, reducing routine journeys and ensuring that the child receives consistent support.

The Applicant has engaged with Rochdale Children's Services regarding the proposed accommodation. The Applicant understands from those discussions that additional suitable residential accommodation for individual children in care would be welcomed within the Borough. This engagement provides helpful context, although the application is submitted to be determined on its own planning merits.

Aurora has also undertaken preliminary engagement with local authority commissioning and placement services across the region. The Applicant reports a growing demand for solo placements for children whose needs cannot be met successfully within shared residential settings. Suitable local accommodation can provide greater stability and reduce the need for children to be placed significant distances from their home communities. This evidence provides further context for the proposed model, while the application remains to be determined upon its land use effects.

5.0 Planning History and Site Constraints

A review of the Council's publicly available planning register has not identified any planning decisions which are directly relevant to the present application. The property is currently in residential use within Use Class C3 and the application seeks permission for its change of use to a small residential care home within Use Class C2.

The site is not within a conservation area. There are no known protected trees within the property and no identified flood risk affecting the proposed use. No extension or significant external development is proposed.

The principal planning considerations are therefore the compatibility of the proposed use with the residential area, the effect upon neighbouring amenity and the limited parking and vehicle movements associated with the home.

6.0 Planning Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The adopted Rochdale Core Strategy remains the lead local plan document. Places for Everyone was adopted in March 2024 and also forms part of the development plan for Rochdale. The Council has consulted upon a draft Rochdale Local Plan for the period 2025 to

2039. As that document remains at an emerging stage, it can attract only such weight as is appropriate to its progress and the extent to which relevant policies are consistent with national policy.

Core Strategy Policy C3 supports housing on appropriate sites to meet the needs of specific groups, including vulnerable groups. Policy P3 requires development to respect its context, reuse existing buildings where appropriate and maintain a high standard of design. Policy T2 seeks development in accessible locations and prioritises pedestrians, public transport and the safety and amenity of local residents.

Policy DM1 is the principal development management policy. It applies specifically to changes of use and requires proposals to be compatible with surrounding land uses, protect residential amenity, address noise and traffic where necessary, provide satisfactory access and parking having regard to the proposed use and location, and demonstrate access to community infrastructure.

The National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration. Paragraph 63 recognises looked after children among the groups whose housing needs should be assessed and reflected in planning policy. Paragraph 116 states that development should only be refused on highway grounds where there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

There is no adopted policy which prevents the use of a dwelling as a small residential children's home. The proposal should be assessed on its actual planning effects, particularly its scale, residential character, relationship with neighbours and transport implications.

7.0 Principle of Development

The principle of the development is acceptable. The proposal retains an existing residential building in residential occupation and provides a home for one child within an established residential neighbourhood.

There will be no physical loss of housing stock. The building will continue to provide bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen and dining accommodation, a living room and private external space. It will continue to look and function as a home. The material distinction from the current C3 use is the relationship between the child and the adults providing care, rather than a fundamental change in the physical use of the building.

The proposal responds positively to Policy C3 by providing accommodation for a vulnerable member of the community. It also brings a vacant property in poor condition back into active use and secures investment in the existing building.

The proposed solo placement also responds to the Applicant's identified need for specialist accommodation for children who may not be suited to group living. The one child model provides an individual home environment while ensuring that the scale and intensity of occupation remain particularly modest.

The site is appropriately located for residential occupation. Local shops, cafés, parks, education and other services are within walking distance. The proposal therefore accords with the spatial and accessibility objectives of the development plan.

8.0 Residential Character and Intensity of Use

The scale of the proposal is particularly modest. The home will accommodate one child, supported by two resident carers. This is a smaller household than could reasonably occupy a three bedroom dwelling within Use Class C3.

The carers will live at the property throughout each 48 hour shift. Their presence will not create a continuous pattern of employees arriving and leaving during the day. Staff changeover will generally occur once every two days and will last for approximately 30 minutes.

During changeover, up to four carers may briefly be inside the property. The changeover will ordinarily take place while the child is at school. Aurora will coordinate travel through its office, limiting the normal parking demand associated with the home to one operational staff vehicle.

A senior member of staff may attend occasionally to review records, monitor progress and provide management oversight. These planned visits will not ordinarily coincide with staff changeover. Social care and healthcare professionals may also visit where required by the individual needs of the child, but the frequency is not expected to be greater than the pattern of guests and professional visits associated with many households.

The home will not operate as a drop in centre, clinic, school, public office or place of assembly. There will be no customer activity, public reception, group meetings or regular congregation of visitors. Its overall character will remain domestic and residential.

9.0 Indicative Typical Day

The anticipated daily routine provides useful evidence of how the property will function. It is illustrative rather than prescriptive, as the precise arrangements will respond to the age, educational requirements and individual needs of the child.

9.1 Morning

Carers will begin the day at approximately 7.00 am and will support the child in preparing for school. The child will eat breakfast with the carers before leaving the property at approximately 8.30 am.

The carers will accompany the child to school. Following the school journey, staff will return to the property to undertake ordinary household duties, complete care records, prepare meals and attend to the day to day management of the home.

9.2 Staff changeover

Staff changeover is expected to take place once every two days during the school day, generally between approximately 9.30 am and 10.00 am. Incoming and outgoing carers will exchange the information necessary to maintain continuity of care.

Staff transport will be coordinated through Aurora Children's Homes' office. The intended arrangement will limit the normal parking demand associated with the home to one staff vehicle. As the changeover will take place while the child is at school, it will not interfere with the child's routine or create additional activity during the early morning or evening.

9.3 Afternoon

Staff will leave the property during the afternoon to collect the child from school. On returning home, the child will be supported with refreshments, homework and any planned individual sessions. The child may then relax within the home or take part in an organised activity appropriate to their interests and care arrangements.

9.4 Evening

The child and carers will ordinarily eat an evening meal together within the dining area. The child may attend a local club or activity, spend time relaxing in the living room, watch television, read or pursue other interests.

The evening routine will be calm and domestic. The child will be supported in preparing for bed at an appropriate time. Once the child has settled, staff will complete the necessary care records, secure the property and retire overnight.

9.5 Residential nature of the routine

The anticipated routine is characteristic of ordinary domestic occupation. Activity will principally comprise school journeys, household duties, shared meals, homework, recreation and evening relaxation. It demonstrates that the property will function as the child's home, rather than as an institutional facility.

10.0 Design and Appearance

The proposal does not include an extension or material external alteration. The existing scale, footprint, roof form and relationship with neighbouring buildings will remain unchanged.

The elevations and enclosed yard will be cleaned, repaired and improved. Any replacement doors and windows will be domestic in appearance and consistent with the existing uPVC features of the property and surrounding homes.

No external CCTV, additional lighting, signage or specialist security treatment is proposed. Nothing in the external appearance of the property will identify or advertise the residential care use.

The refurbishment will make a positive contribution to the appearance of this prominent corner property. Bringing a vacant building in poor condition back into maintained residential use is consistent with Policies P3 and DM1.

11.0 Residential Amenity

The proposal will not cause unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity. The property is an end terrace and shares a party wall with only one adjoining dwelling. There will be no extension, additional overlooking, loss of light or change to the physical relationship between the buildings.

The main amenity considerations are noise, general activity and movements associated with the proposed use. These matters should be assessed by reference to the actual scale and daily routine of the home. The property will accommodate one child and two carers. This is a small household and the principal activities will be those ordinarily associated with domestic life.

The child will ordinarily attend school during the day. Evening activity will comprise shared meals, recreation, television, reading and preparation for bed. Carers will remain overnight. There will be no late night customer activity, deliveries, public meetings or regular changes of staff.

The brief presence of up to four carers during changeover will occur once every two days, normally while the child is at school. It will not create sustained noise or disturbance. Occasional visits by a senior manager, social worker or healthcare professional will be planned and ancillary to the residential use.

No family contact is presently anticipated to take place at the property. The home will not be used for group contact sessions or as a base for visiting families.

Refuse will remain domestic in quantity and will be stored within the enclosed yard. There will be no commercial waste collections. The repaired elevations and improved yard will enhance the appearance and ongoing maintenance of the site.

Having regard to the limited occupation, settled daily routine and absence of external alterations, the proposal is compatible with adjoining residential use and satisfies Policy DM1.

12.0 Highway Safety, Parking and Access

The property has no off street parking. This is not unusual within the surrounding terraced streets, where residential parking is accommodated on street. The highway assessment must therefore consider the actual parking demand arising from the proposed use and compare it with the demand reasonably associated with the existing dwelling.

Torrington Street operates as a one way road and contains on street parking along the residential frontage. Robert Street provides further on street parking and has homes on only its northern side, with the southern edge adjoining the boundary of the Bay Horse public house car park. The application does not rely upon the private public house car park for staff or visitor parking.

Aurora intends to coordinate staff travel through its office. One nominated driver will transport the staff team, with incoming and outgoing carers collected from and returned to the office. The normal operational demand at the property is therefore expected to be one staff vehicle.

Staff changeover will generally occur once every two days and will last approximately 30 minutes. Although up to four carers may briefly be present, the coordinated travel arrangement means that this does not translate into four staff vehicles. Changeover will normally occur during the school day, outside the busiest household departure period.

The staff vehicle will also be used for school journeys and activities. At those times the vehicle will not be parked near the property. Occasional senior management and professional visits will be planned and will not ordinarily coincide with changeover.

A three bedroom dwelling could reasonably be occupied by a household with two or more cars, together with visitors and deliveries. The proposed use does not create a parking demand materially greater than that existing residential baseline.

The scale of movement is far below the thresholds within Policy T2 for a Transport Assessment or Travel Plan. There is no evidence that the limited vehicle movements associated with one child and two resident carers would create an unacceptable highway safety impact or severe residual cumulative effect. The proposal therefore accords with Policies T2 and DM1 and with paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

13.0 Other Material Considerations

13.1 Ofsted and care regulation

The home cannot operate lawfully until it is registered with Ofsted. Registration and inspection provide the appropriate statutory framework for assessing the suitability of the operator, staffing, safeguarding, care standards and the management of individual placements.

The planning system should assess the land use consequences of the proposal. It should not duplicate the separate care regulation regime or attempt to determine matters which fall within Ofsted's statutory responsibilities.

13.2 Age, gender and individual care needs

Aurora intends to seek Ofsted registration for an age range of 6 to 18 years. The application does not, however, seek to fix the age or gender of the child through planning permission. Those matters will be determined through the placement process, taking account of whether the home and care team can meet the needs of the individual child.

Planning permission should assess the impact of accommodation for one child. It should not seek to control characteristics which do not alter the planning use or its material land use effects.

13.3 Fear of crime and antisocial behaviour

Concerns about crime, antisocial behaviour or disturbance may be raised in response to applications of this nature. Such concerns should be considered carefully, but planning decisions must be based upon evidence and the actual characteristics of the proposal.

The proposed home will accommodate one child within a supervised residential setting. Two carers will be present and the placement will be assessed and regulated through the statutory care framework. There is no evidence that this small domestic use will create an unacceptable risk to neighbouring residents.

13.4 Precedent and concentration

Each application must be determined on its own merits. Permission for this proposal will not require the Council to approve other applications elsewhere. There is no evidence before this application that the proposal will create an over-concentration of residential care uses or alter the predominantly residential character of the area.

13.5 Property values and private matters

Potential effects upon property values are not a planning consideration. Private covenants, ownership matters and civil restrictions also sit outside the planning decision. The assessment should remain focused upon land use, amenity, character and highway safety.

14.0 Planning Balance

The proposal retains and refurbishes an existing residential building, provides a home for one child and responds to the recognised accommodation needs of looked after children. The solo placement model addresses an identified need for highly individualised care within a stable domestic environment. These matters attract positive planning weight.

The building will remain residential in its appearance and day to day function. No extension, signage, external CCTV or institutional security treatment is proposed. The repairs to the elevations and enclosed yard will improve a vacant property which is presently in poor condition.

The proposed household is small. One child will be supported by two carers who remain at the property throughout 48 hour shifts. The daily routine is centred upon school, shared meals, homework, local activities and evening relaxation. It is domestic in every material planning respect.

The parking arrangement has been considered against the actual operational model. Staff travel will be coordinated through Aurora's office and the normal demand will be one vehicle. The brief changeover once every two days and occasional professional visits will not create parking or traffic impacts materially greater than an ordinary three bedroom dwelling.

No unacceptable harm has been identified in relation to residential amenity, character, design, highway safety or access to services. The proposal accords with the development plan when read as a whole and is supported by the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.

15.0 Conclusion

Planning permission is sought for the change of use of 35 Torrington Street from a dwellinghouse within Use Class C3 to a residential children's home within Use Class C2, providing accommodation for one child.

The proposal will bring a vacant property in poor condition back into active residential use. It will provide generous domestic accommodation and a stable home for one child, supported by two resident carers. The building will continue to look and function as a house, with no extension or material external alteration.

The limited parking demand will be managed through coordinated staff travel, with one operational staff vehicle normally associated with the property. This demand is not materially greater than that which could arise from an ordinary three bedroom dwelling.

The development is compatible with the surrounding residential area and will not cause unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity, highway safety or local character. It accords with the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. Planning permission should therefore be granted.

Prepared by

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References

1. Rochdale Borough Council, Rochdale Core Strategy, adopted October 2016.
2. Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted March 2024.
3. Rochdale Borough Council, Draft Rochdale Local Plan 2025 to 2039, Regulation 18 consultation document.
4. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, current published version.
5. Ofsted, Children's homes registration policy.
6. Aurora Children's Homes, Day in the Life for the Child and Day in the Life for Staff, operational information supplied by the Applicant.