

Planning, Design & Access Statement



**Proposed change of use from 6 person HMO
(Class C4) to a 11 person HMO (sui generis)**

**Site at 2A Christian fields Avenue
Gravesend
DA12 5NF**

November 2023

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Allen Planning Ltd on behalf of the site owners to support an application for the change of use of this property from its current use as a six person house in multiple occupation (Class C4) to become a 11 person house in multiple occupation (SG use).
- 1.2 The application does not propose any further alterations to this building and simply seeks to make best use of what is an existing HMO use to provide further much-needed accommodation in the local area.
- 1.3 This Statement sets out the approach adopted for the site's development in accord with the advice contained within the recently revised National Planning Policy Framework and the relevant policies of the development plan.
- 1.4 This Planning Statement should be read in connection with the submitted drawings prepared by the scheme's architect and in addition, although no further development is proposed, the scheme would increase the number of residents on site and therefore in terms of transportation matters a detailed Transport Report accompanies this application.
- 1.5 The revised application would provide for 6 letting rooms five of which could be occupied by 2 people with a further letting room which could be occupied a single person.
- 1.6 In addition, the proposed communal areas would be increased to provide a communal kitchen of 17m² and also a communal dining area of 17m².

2.0 Site Location

- 2.1 The application site is located at 2A Christian Fields Avenue in Gravesend and comprises of a former detached bungalow with 5 ensuite bedrooms plus a communal kitchen on the ground floor and a further single ensuite bedroom in the eaves.
- 2.2 The site has 1 car space on site served by a single crossover. The building has permission to be used as a Class C4 HMO.
- 2.3 The immediate context of the site is entirely residential with the property surrounded by dwellings predominantly of two-storeys at the sustainable attributes of the site in terms of public transport opportunities set out in the accompanying transport statement.
- 2.4 The site is not listed and nor does it lie within a defined Conservation Area and comprises of a large bungalow with a single-storey rear and side extensions set in a relatively large plot and surrounded by other residential properties predominantly of two-storey.
- 2.5 The site has a relatively deep rear garden and a hard surface area to the front which allows the parking of a single vehicle and the storage of refuse as well as further landscaped garden areas.

3.0 Planning History

- 3.1 The planning history of the site from the Council website identifies that under reference 20180523 that a prior approval application was granted in 2018 for a

single storey rear extension to this property with a depth of 6.5 m, a maximum height of 2.95m, and an eaves height of 2.95m. This has been constructed.

- 3.2 A search also identifies that this site under reference 19/00586/HMO is registered by the Council as an HMO and has been so since December 2019 with a licence until December 2024.

4.0 Planning Policy

- 4.1 For the purposes of Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan is made up of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 and the Development Plan for Gravesham currently consists of:

- Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and Local Plan Policies Map (2014)
- Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994) – saved Policies

- 4.2 National policy relating to new housing and design issues etc are contained within the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supported by the NPPG. Whilst the NPPF does not supersede existing development plan policy, such policies should now be read in conjunction with it.

- 4.3 Turning first to national guidance **Paragraphs 8 -10** of the NPPF advise:

8. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, 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):

*a) **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;*

*b) **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 well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*

*c) **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.*

9. These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies in this Framework; 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.

*10. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development** (paragraph 11).*

- 4.4 **Paragraph 11** identifies the fundamental thrust of the guidance which states that Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development which for decision taking means:

- c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
- d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date⁸, granting permission unless:*
 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed⁷;*
 - ii. 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*

Housing/Best use of land

- 4.5 Paragraph 69 advises that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built-out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites local planning authorities should:
 - a) identify, through the development plan and brownfield registers, land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare; unless it can be shown, through the preparation of relevant plan policies, that there are strong reasons why this 10% target cannot be achieved;*
 - b) use tools such as area-wide design assessments and Local Development Orders to help bring small and medium sized sites forward;*
 - c) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes; and*
 - d) work with developers to encourage the sub-division of large sites where this could help to speed up the delivery of homes.*
- 4.6 In addition paragraph 119 adds that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land
- 4.7 Finally, Paragraph 124 also adds that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account:
 - a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;*
 - b) local market conditions and viability;*
 - c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;*
 - d) the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and*
 - e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places*

Design

4.8 In terms of design paragraph 126 advises that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

4.9 Paragraph 130 adds that planning decisions should ensure that developments:

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users⁴⁹; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience

4.10 Paragraph 134 notes that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings

Highways/Parking

4.11 Turning now to matters of car parking the revised NPPF in matters of sustainable development, transport and car parking advises at paragraph 110 that: -

“110. In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that

a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location;
 b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;
 c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code 46; and
 d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.”

4.12 Importantly Paragraph 111 of the Framework advises that:

“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.”

4.13 In terms of the use of parking standards paragraph 108 of the recently revised NPPF advises:

108. Maximum parking standards for residential and non-residential development should only be set where there is a clear and compelling justification that they are necessary for managing the local road network, or for optimising the density of development in city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport (in accordance with chapter 11 of this Framework). In town centres, local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking so that it is convenient, safe and secure, alongside measures to promote accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.

Development Plan

4.14 The Development Plan is made up of the for Gravesham currently consists of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and Local Plan Policies Map (2014) and the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994) – saved Policies

4.15 **Policy CS11** in terms of Transport advises:

“5.5.38 New developments should mitigate their impact on the highway and public transport networks as required. As appropriate, transport assessments and travel plans should be provided and implemented to ensure the delivery of travel choice and sustainable opportunities for travel. Transport assessment work is required to be undertaken in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and to identify detailed highway and public transport network requirements and management arising from the development.

5.5.39 Sufficient parking in new development will be provided in accordance with adopted parking standards which will reflect the availability of alternative means of transport and accessibility to services and facilities.

5.5.40 The Council will support proposals which improve public transport provision and facilities in the Borough. In particular, it will:
seek to maintain and expand, where justified, segregation lanes for Fastrack and •
existing bus priority measures elsewhere;
require Key Sites to include provision for buses; •
support the development of transport hubs at Gravesend Town Centre and •
Ebbsfleet (in Dartford Borough Council area) to provide high quality interchange facilities between bus, rail, walking and cycling; and

Ensure an adequate supply of public car parking.

5.5.41 The Council will seek improvements to walking and cycling facilities and networks in the Borough including provision in new development as appropriate. These should provide improved access to Gravesend Town Centre and Ebbsfleet and to other services and facilities in the Borough. In particular, the Council will seek the provision of pedestrian and cycle links between Northfleet and Ebbsfleet stations and along the River Thames, as part of the proposed Thames Estuary Path.

5.5.42 Land required for the possible future extension of Crossrail and to protect the High Speed 1 (HS1) railway is safeguarded on the Policies Map and proposals that would prejudice these will be refused.

5.5.43 The Council will support proposals which improve the efficiency of freight transport and provide opportunities for alternatives to road transport where possible. The Council will safeguard wharves, as shown on the Policies Map, subject to the provisions of paragraph 5.1.36 of Policy CS07 (Economy, Employment and Skills).

5.5.44 The Council will support proposals which facilitate the use of the River Thames for passenger transport and enable cruise liners to visit the Borough.”

4.16 Policy CS14 in terms of housing type and size adds:

“5.10.8 The Council will protect the mix of housing in the existing housing stock and will resist the conversion of family sized residential units to smaller properties.

5.10.9 The Council will expect new housing development to provide a range of dwelling types and sizes taking into account the existing character of the area and evidence of local need to create sustainable and balanced communities.

5.10.10 Sheltered housing and extra care housing for people with special needs will be supported on suitable sites in areas with access to a range of services that provide for the needs of future occupants.”

4.17 Policy H5 of the saved policies of the Local Plan states:

In considering proposals for the conversion of existing properties to provide flats, maisonettes, bedsitters, hostels, homes and other forms of multiple occupancy, the Borough Council will have regard to the following criteria:-

(i) The building shall be in an appropriate area for conversion to flats, maisonettes, bedsitters and multiple occupancy. Unless there are special or overriding circumstances, conversions will not normally be permitted in an area comprised for the most part of single family dwellings. Conversely, conversions will not normally be permitted in areas which are environmentally unsuitable for young families and which already demonstrate a predominance of multiple occupation.

(ii) The building shall be of such a size and arrangement as to be generally unsuitable for single family occupation.

(iii) The proposal shall have regard to the Borough Council’s Residential Layout Guidelines, as set out in supplementary planning guidance.

(iv) The adopted Vehicle Parking Standards must be achieved wherever feasible.

5.0 Planning Issues

- 5.1 The site has been used as a “small HMO” under Class C4 of the revised UCO for a number of years and is indeed registered by the Council for such a land use with the current licence expiring at the end of next year.
- 5.2 This application does not seek any operational development to the site whatsoever it seeks to make a more intensive HMO use in terms of the number of occupants only.
- 5.3 As a result of such an increase in proposed residents planning permission is required for a formal change of use from Class C4 to a Sui Generis HMO use and it is submitted that if approved a condition should be imposed limiting the maximum number of occupants within the building to 11.
- 5.4 In light of the above it is submitted that the material considerations for the determination of this application relate to those matters of potential impacts on the occupiers of neighbouring properties as a result of noise and “general comings and goings” ; the quality of HMO accommodation proposed and also matters of parking and highway safety.

Proposed “more intensive” HMO use

- 5.5 The NPPF confirms that local planning authorities are charged with delivering a wide choice of high quality homes and there is no policy within the development plan dealing directly with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).
- 5.6 The Council does have published standards for HMO accommodation which identifies at its outset that:
- “Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) play an important role in local housing markets across Kent. HMOs are increasingly becoming more diverse as housing pressures, costs rise, and a wider range of residents seek some form of shared accommodation. Gravesham Borough Council wants to ensure that this existing and growing sector has clear guidance on how to develop suitable accommodation with some flexible options based on an understanding of the housing stock and the need for good quality HMOs across the borough.”*
- 5.7 The cost of housing within the Gravesham Borough is well-documented and even single professionals or indeed couples cannot always meet open market rents or sale prices for individual flats.
- 5.8 In terms of planning policy whilst the general thrust of such seeks to retain family sized housing in this case the application site is already lawfully used as a Class C4 HMO and is licensed by the Council for such a use **and as such there would be no loss of family housing as a result of this application.**

Quality of the HMO Accommodation Proposed

- 5.9 The published standards for HMO accommodation sets out specific room and communal area sizes and in light of the above this application has been designed to meet the agreed space standards both for individual rooms themselves and also for the associated communal areas shared by intended residents.
- 5.10 The application would provide for 6 letting rooms, five of which could be occupied by 2 people, with a further letting room which could be occupied a single person. In

addition, the proposed communal areas would be increased to provide a communal kitchen of 17m² and also a communal dining area of 17m².

5.11 Given the existing lawful HMO use together with the sustainable nature of the site it is submitted that this would be an ideal site to provide “further” high quality shared living accommodation for local people.

5.12 On this basis the development as proposed would make successful use of a highly sustainable site providing a form of housing helping to meet identified housing need (small units of accommodation) in a high quality development wholly in accord with development plan policy.

Impact on Residential Amenities

5.13 One of the core planning principles of the NPPF is to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupiers of land and buildings as set out in paragraph 130.

5.14 Paragraph 5.10.7 of the Core Strategy advises that *“the Council supports the provision of housing to meet the requirements of people in special need of help or supervision, where conventional housing may not be suitable. However, it is important that the concentration of residential institutional accommodation is controlled. This will ensure that the properties themselves are suitable and that the intensification of use in residential areas will not change the character of the area, nor involve a loss of amenity to residents because of the potential noise and disturbance it could create (including the impacts from service traffic) outside normal working hours.”*

5.15 In addition paragraph 5.15.3 adds that the Council will *“seek to manage new development in a way that makes a positive contribution to the built, historic and natural environment. Ensuring new development is attractive and fit for purpose, reinforces local character and safeguards people’s amenity is the key to achieving successful neighbourhoods and gaining community acceptance of changes to their local area.”*

5.16 The proposed scheme includes no operational development and as such it would not result in any matters of increased overlooking or overbearing impacts.

5.17 Additional residents as proposed would of course lead to the potential for further “comings and goings” and similar noise related activities. That being said the site is a detached plot with a reasonable sized front curtilage and also a large back garden.

5.18 Although the property is adjoined by other residential neighbours it is submitted that given the space between existing buildings that the general comings and goings and activities within what is already an HMO use would not lead to situations detrimental to residential amenity as a result of noise and general disturbance.

5.19 Overall, it is considered that the proposal would accord with the core planning principles of the NPPF and also the provisions of the development plan in that there would be no undue loss of amenity to the occupiers of nearby dwellings.

Transportation/Highway Matters

- 5.20 In terms of transport and highway impacts this site has one off street parking space and no changes are proposed to the vehicular access points.
- 5.21 Turning now to matters of car parking in terms of guidance and policy the revised NPPF in matters of sustainable development, transport and car parking advises at paragraph 110 that: -
- “110. In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that*
- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location;*
 - b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;*
 - c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code; and*
 - d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.”*
- 5.22 Importantly Paragraph 111 of the Framework advises that:
- “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.”*
- 5.23 In terms of the use of parking standards paragraph 108 of the recently revised NPPF advises:
- 108. Maximum parking standards for residential and non-residential development should only be set where there is a clear and compelling justification that they are necessary for managing the local road network, or for optimising the density of development in city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport (in accordance with chapter 11 of this Framework). In town centres, local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking so that it is convenient, safe and secure, alongside measures to promote accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists.*
- 5.24 Christian Fields Avenue itself is a two-way road that operates broadly east to west between Whitehill Lane to the east whilst at its southern extent, it terminates at The Steve Cook Stadium. The road is free from parking controls and as such, unrestricted parking occurs on both sides of the carriageway. Traffic calming measures including speed cushions are found near the Site and the road is limited to 20mph speeds.
- 5.25 Whitehill Lane is a two-way 30mph road that operates broadly north to south between Valley Drive to the south and the Old Road East / Parrock Road roundabout to the north. The road is free from on-street parking controls.
- 5.26 In order to assess the potential implications of a highway network of increasing the “density of residents” within this HMO site a detailed Transport Assessment has been undertaken and whilst of course it is necessary to read the whole document for a sense of context for the sake of ease we provide its conclusions below:

“4.1 TTP Consulting is retained to provide advice in relation to the proposals for 2A Christian Fields in Gravesend.

4.2 The Site comprises of a 6 bedroom HMO with a maximum permitted occupancy of 6 people. This report has been prepared to support an application to increase the maximum occupancy to 12 people in the house; no other changes are proposed.

4.3 Data from the 2011 Census suggests that average occupancy levels per bedroom for 1 – 3 bedroom dwellings is 1.2 people thereby suggesting that there could be 7 to 9 people on the premises at any one time; it is not necessary that all rooms would always be let.

4.4 Notwithstanding average occupancy levels, even basing the potential increase in trips on the maximum proposed number of people would not impact on the operation of the local highway or transport network.

4.5 Surveys were conducted overnight when residential car parking levels are typically highest, i.e., when people are at home sleeping, with the results demonstrating that there is ample spare capacity to accommodate the anticipated demand.

4.6 Deliveries would take place as per existing, and although there is unlikely to be any increase associated with the proposals, even allowing for doubling the expected typical number of deliveries would not impact on the local highway network.

4.7 Refuse would be stored and collected as per existing.

4.8 The proposals are acceptable in highways terms.”

5.27 On this basis there would be no harm to any matters of transport or highway safety.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The site is sustainable and is already utilised and licensed as a 6 person HMO a land use falling under Class C4 of the revised UCO.

6.2 This application would seek to increase the permitted number of residents to 11 together with enhanced communal facilities increasing “density” on this sustainable previously developed site in the form of high quality HMO accommodation.

6.3 The provision of high quality HMO accommodation would help to meet housing needs within the Borough and such a use already exists on site so no loss of family housing would result and compliance with the development plan in such regards is met.

6.4 The Transport Report concludes that the proposed increase in HMO accommodation would not result in any harm to matters of highway safety.

6.5 The proposed development accords with the Council’s designed standards for HMO accommodation and also avoids any unacceptable impacts upon the amenities or land uses of neighbouring buildings.

- 6.6 Internally the development would provide for high quality HMO accommodation in line with the Council's adopted standards for such specialised forms of housing and would provide more "affordable accommodation" in the Borough.
- 6.7 **It is against such benefits and avoidance of harm that the Council are asked to grant planning permission for the proposed development.**