



Planning

Planning Statement

Client:

Storyy Group and Homes

69 Eastcourt

Avenue,

Earley, RG6 1HH

*Change of use to children's home
(C2).*

Gareth Jones **BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is produced to support a planning application for the use of the property as a children's home.
- 1.2 This planning statement will cover the background to the application and provide the necessary information to enable its determination by officers at the Council. It will consider the proposal in light of relevant planning policies and other material considerations. The conclusion reached is that key material considerations and the wider objectives of National and Local planning policy support the grant of permission.
- 1.3 In addition to this planning statement, the application is accompanied by the appropriate planning application forms and ownership certificate, duly signed and completed, and the following documents prepared by Magic Plan and the Planning Portal:
- Site Location Plan
 - Existing and Proposed Floor Plans
- 1.4 The relevant application fee will be submitted by the applicant separately.

2. The Applicant

- 2.1 Storyy Homes and Group was established in 2022.
- 2.2 The company have 4 other supported accommodation properties (16+) and 1 children's home across the wider region, with a certified OFSTED registration. This was passed following an inspection in the first quarter of the year.

- 2.3 The company aims to provide high quality homes for children and young people so that they have a stable and nurturing environment to enjoy their childhood and achieve the best possible outcomes for their future.
- 2.4 In this respect, the applicant aims to create a home that replicates the typical functioning of a nuclear family dwelling so as to give the young people who live there as normal a life as possible especially for when they are unable to live with their parents through no fault of their own.

3. Site Location and Description

- 3.1 The application site comprises a 6-bedroom detached property located on Eastcourt Avenue.
- 3.2 The surrounding area is characterised by dwellings of a similar built form and architectural style.
- 3.3 The site benefits from being in a sustainable location with bus stops along Church Road which provide onward connections to the surrounding area.
- 3.4 The site is in close proximity to a number of amenities including Bulmershe Leisure, Goals Reading and Bulmershe Park.
- 3.5 The site is located within the defined settlement of Wokingham.

4. Development Proposals and Contextual Information

- 4.1 The site relates to an existing 6-bedroom dwellinghouse which is in Class C3 use.
- 4.2 The proposal is a children's home for 5 young people age 16-18 under the ward of the Local Authority to live at the property. For the purposes of OFSTED, children are classified as such up to 18. Regardless of their age, the intended occupants would live together as one nuclear family akin to a typically family home.
- 4.3 There will be a maximum of 2 no. permanent members of staff at the property during the day with one staff member present overnight. There are 6 bedrooms at the property and dedicated office for staff to use during their time at the property.
- 4.4 Whilst the duration of the stay for individuals will vary as this will depend on the needs of the individual, it is anticipated that the property would be the long-term home for the individuals, where the minimum stay will likely be one year. The property would be the individual's primary living accommodation for the duration of their stay.
- 4.5 In terms of staffing there will be a rota system with no more than 2 members of staff at the property at any one time. The rotas are planned to ensure minimal changes the occupants and a consistent 'parenting' group. Once the staff member arrives in the home, they do not leave for at least an 8-hour period which reduces staff movement in and out of the home.
- 4.6 No staff will permanently reside at the property. The proposed shift times are:
- Day staff 1: 8am- 4pm

- Day Staff 2: 12:30 pm – 8:30 pm
 - Waking night staff: 8:15pm – 8:15 am
- 4.7 The shift pattern identified meets OFSTED regulations and working time regulations for the care sector. The rota pattern is very common across such proposals to ensure a consistent group of staff and limited changeover whilst also providing a degree of independence in line with the aims of the proposal.
- 4.8 No external changes are required to the property.
- 4.9 The property will provide a much-needed family style home for vulnerable individuals who are unable to live with their families but have the capacity and skills to live alone albeit with some support. The proposed accommodation is much needed in the area.

5. Planning History

- 5.1 97/53 – Detached house – Approved – 10.03.53
- 5.2 R/414/70 – Alterations to garage – Approved – 01.10.70
- 5.3 F/1999/70799 – Proposed single storey side extension to dwelling and conversion of garage to granny annexe plus rear conservatory – Approved – 21.01.00
- 5.4 243011 – Certificate of lawfulness for proposed use of the dwelling as supported accommodation – Refused – 27.02.25
- 5.5 251306 – Certificate of lawfulness for proposed use of the dwelling as supported accommodation – Refused – 28.07.25

6. Development Proposals

- 6.1 The National Design Guide (2019) identifies that “well-designed homes and buildings are functional, accessible and sustainable. They provide internal environments and associated external spaces that support the health and well-being of their users and all who experience them. They meet the needs of a diverse range of users, taking into account factors such as the ageing population and cultural differences. They are adequate in size, fit for purpose and are adaptable to the changing needs of their occupants over time” (para 120-121).
- 6.2 Regarding the requirements of NPPG Paragraph: 029 Reference ID: 14-029-20140306 in respect of Design and Access Statements, the proposal is described as follows:
- 6.3 **Use and Amount:** The proposed use is for a children’s home. The proposal is expressly for a registered children’s home (Use Class C2) and not supported or semi-independent accommodation. Residents will live together as a single household within a managed care environment, with staff supervision provided at all times.
- 6.4 **Landscaping:** The proposal would utilise the existing landscaping features on site. Further landscaping can be secured by condition if this is deemed necessary.
- 6.5 **Appearance:** The proposed development will utilise the existing built form on site and will not result in any changes to the dwelling façade.
- 6.6 **Access & Parking:** The proposal does not result in any changes to existing access arrangements to the property.

7. Policy Assessment

- 7.1 **National Guidance:** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a relevant material consideration to the application.
- 7.2 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. 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 39 of the NPPF states that “Local planning authorities should approach decision on proposed development in a positive and creative way” and “at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”. Paragraph 124 of the NPPF comments that planning should “promote an effective use of land” in “meeting the need for homes and other uses, whilst safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions”.
- 7.3 Paragraph 61 confirms the Government’s objective to boost the supply of housing, and paragraph 8 identifies the three objectives of sustainable development, as economic, environmental and social.
- 7.4 Paragraph 131 identifies that “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”, whilst paragraph 139 states that significant weight should be given to “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.”

- 7.5 **Principle of Development:** Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a relevant material consideration in all planning applications. In this instance, the relevant development plan documents are:
- Core Strategy (CS) (2010)
 - Managing Development Delivery Development Plan (MDD) (2014)
- 7.6 When looking at the principle of development, it is firstly important to consider NPPF Paragraph 63 which outlines how Councils should look to provide homes for a range of people and groups including looked after children.
- 7.7 A Freedom of Information Request (FOI) has been submitted to the Council during the preparation of this application and the information associated with this will follow on during the course of the application.
- 7.8 Notwithstanding this, it is clear that there is a defined need for children's homes within Wokingham. The Council's latest sufficiency strategy (**Appendix 1**) outlines that between 2014 and 2018, the number of children rose from 70 to 99, with expectations that it would rise to up to 120 children.
- 7.9 The sufficiency strategy outlines that the Council's key aims include increasing local placements.
- 7.10 Research from the Still Too Far Report from Become (**Appendix 2**) demonstrates that being moved far away can disrupt a child's education, their relationships – including with siblings who might live tens of miles away, and impact their mental health. With 1 in 5 children being moved away from their home area, this application

seeks to reduce this number within the Walsall area, providing children with a home within the same Council area to where they are being looked after.

- 7.11 A lack of supply for this type of development is a national issue. OFSTED Report 'How local authorities plan for the sufficiency of accommodation that meets the needs of children in care and care leavers' (**Appendix 3**) has shown that local planning authorities can have a number of difficulties in meeting their sufficiency needs. The lack of secure provision for children across the nation highlights the requirement for providing places for those children with complex needs. The proposal would therefore seek to provide these children with a home within their local area without the need to disrupt their routine.
- 7.12 Further to the above, recent applications in Wokingham Borough have confirmed there is still a need for this type of development. Application ref. 231453 granted permission for a children's home at 29 Stanton Close. The Officer report, decision notice and children's services response are in **Appendix 4**. Children's Services' response to this application outlines how Wokingham, like other Councils, are struggling to find children the right placements are the right time and how local children are often placed far from home. As has been detailed above, in the Still Too Far report, this has significant implications on their development.
- 7.13 Further to this, application ref. 250114 (Officer Report, and Decision Notice in **Appendix 5**) was a highly recent application for a children's home. Whilst no consultation response from Children's Services can be seen on file, the Officer report states that "*Upon consultation with WBC Children's Services, it was acknowledged that there is currently a shortfall of supported accommodation for children, and a struggle to find spaces within existing children's homes within the borough to*

meet need. Whilst the Council is expected to open two of their own homes in Wokingham which will reduce pressure, the most recent work/surveys carried out in 2023 identified a need for additional local residential provision. Based on the above, there is an identified need for this type of accommodation within the Borough." The proposed development is similar in scale, size and operation to these proposals.

- 7.14 A further material consideration when looking at the principle of development is the Written Ministerial Statement on Children's Homes (**Appendix 6**). This states that the planning system should not be a barrier to providing homes to the most vulnerable children in society and that councils should be supportive of new children's homes in their area that allow children to live in close proximity to where they are from.
- 7.15 NPPF Paragraph 8 outlines the three interdependent aims of the planning system. NPPF Paragraph 8a) outlines the economic objectives of the planning system. As part of this, it states that proposals should ensure the right type of land is available at the right time and in the right places. As detailed above, there is a defined need for children's homes across the UK. Alongside this, ensuring children can remain close to places that they call home is a key goal of local, regional and national policy which this proposal helps to address.
- 7.16 NPPF Paragraph 8b) outlines the social objectives of the planning system. The contribution of the home to addressing the overall need for children's homes is considered to comply with this objective.
- 7.17 NPPF Paragraph 8c) outlines the environmental objectives of the planning system. The site is located within the defined settlement boundary and is in close proximity to a number of public transport nodes provide sustainable transport options to the site.

- 7.18 Turning to local policy, CS Policy CP9 sets out that development proposals located within development limits will be acceptable in principle, having regard to the service provisions associated with the major, modest and limited categories.
- 7.19 The site is located within a major development location, as defined by policy CP9, and the proposed C2 use would host up to five children with no increase in habitable rooms on site, which is commensurate with a large family (especially given the annexe would allow for an extended family).
- 7.20 As such, the proposal would respond to the existing level of facilities as set out in policy CP9 and is acceptable in this respect.
- 7.21 CS Policy CP2 states that to ensure new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs, planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of: b) Children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs.
- 7.22 Policy TB09 of the MDD Local Plan supports the need for proposals which provide accommodation for people's needs over a lifetime, including vulnerable adults, children and young adults leaving care. This is a significant material consideration. In this case, the proposal would provide accommodation for children who require short term (or long-term as required) supported accommodation with a specialist provision of care for vulnerable children and as such, accord with this aim.
- 7.23 It is noted that the Council are not currently able to demonstrate a 5 Year Housing Land Supply and so the loss of a dwelling in this respect is a relevant material consideration. However, it is important to reflect on the findings of 2 appeal decisions It is also important to

consider Appeal decision ref. APP/D4635/W/25/3369885 (**Appendix 7**) which was for an allowed appeal in Wolverhampton.

- 7.24 Paragraph 6 – 8 are of particular relevance highlighting how it is important that a sufficient amount of housing comes forward, including for specific groups and that the appeal scheme would still retain the home in residential use *‘albeit specifically for the care of children’* and would *‘maintain housing in the area, contributing to the effective mix and types of home locally.’*
- 7.25 In addition to this, appeal ref. APP/P4605/W/24/3355736 (**Appendix 8**) echoes a number of touch points to the above appeal and this application scheme in relation to demand for housing, including for groups such as looked after children.
- 7.26 For the reasons detailed above, the loss of a traditional C3 family dwelling is outweighed by the substantial requirement for children’s homes and the proposal is found to be acceptable in principle.
- 7.27 **Character and Appearance of the Area:** No external changes are required in order to change the use of the property into a children’s home – mostly being internal work.
- 7.28 It is important for the children to live as normal a life as possible and as such external alterations to facilitate the use would not be appropriate to ‘identify’ the property as a children’s home.
- 7.29 For the reasons detailed above, the proposed development is considered acceptable in character of the area terms and as such, accord with CS Policy CP3.
- 7.30 **Residential Amenity – Impact on Occupiers:** The proposed development would facilitate the operation of a high-quality home that would mirror as much as possible the operation of a typical family dwelling.

- 7.31 Given the difficult start to life a lot of the children who will occupy the home have had – this is considered a key amenity consideration of the scheme.
- 7.32 **Residential Amenity – Impact on Neighbours:** The property would operate akin to a typical family dwellinghouse and so the impact on neighbours is unlikely to be harmful compared to that of a typical family dwelling.
- 7.33 It is also important to note that complaints such as noise etc are also dealt with via other legislation such as statutory noise nuisance legislation. In any event, the proposal is unlikely to generate noise impacts over and above those from a typical family dwelling.
- 7.34 It is also important to consider the points raised as part of appeal ref: APP/D4635/W/25/3359517 (**Appendix 9**) in relation to amenity. The Inspector noted that *'when considering the size of the property and the number of people who can already live in it, there is little substantive evidence that the movements associated with the proposed use, even taking into consideration visits from social workers and other visitors, would result in a materially greater level of noise and disturbance above and beyond the existing use to such a level that would cause seriously harmful disruption to neighbouring residents. Additionally, the appeal property is located in a residential area where similar noise disturbances are likely to commonly occur.'*
- 7.35 The Inspector goes further at paragraph 12 to state that *'a building in C2 use is still classed as residential, and the day-to-day use of the building would be very similar to a dwelling with the care home providing a home for the children. This is not substantially different to a Use Class C3 dwelling where children with specialist needs can live. The type of noise and disturbance from this use would not be materially different from that which can occur in a dwelling.'*

- 7.36 Initially, the Applicant applied for a children's home under a certificate of lawfulness because the proposed use as a children's home would not be materially different from the operation of a typical C3 dwelling.
- 7.37 While this was refused, it remains that, on a day to day basis, the house would not give rise to any undue noise and disturbance over and above what could occur should the house be occupied by a family comprising 2 parents and 4 children, which is lawful. For the reasons detailed above, the proposed development therefore accords with CS Policy CP3.
- 7.38 **Transport and Parking:** In terms of staffing, there will be a rota system for staff ensuring there is always appropriate cover and to minimise disruption. The rotas are planned to ensure minimal changes for children and a consistent 'parenting' group.
- 7.39 The shift pattern identified meets Ofsted regulations for children's homes and working time regulations for the care sector. The rota pattern is very common across children's homes to ensure a consistent group of staff and limited changes as per the average family setting.
- 7.40 The application site benefits from a large driveway which would accommodate a house car and staff vehicles with relative ease. Staff will be encouraged to car share and utilise public transport methods where possible. Again, the proposal would operate in a similar manor to a typical C3 family dwelling in terms of trips and therefore would not give rise to any unacceptable transport impacts. Additional transport information can be provided as part of the application if this is deemed necessary.
- 7.41 For the reasons outlined above, the proposed development is considered to accord with CS Policy CP6 and MDD Policy CC07.

- 7.42 **Trees and Landscaping:** The proposal intends to utilise the existing landscaping features on site, additional landscaping can be secured by condition in the event of a grant of planning permission if the Council deem it necessary.
- 7.43 **Cycle Provision:** Cycle stores can be secured via condition in the event of a grant of planning permission.
- 7.44 **Refuse Provision:** Refuse and recycling stores can be secured by condition in the event of a grant of planning permission.
- 7.45 **Ecology:** The proposal does not involve alterations to the roof and as such, is unlikely to have an ecological impact. Biodiversity enhancements can be secured via condition in the event of a grant of planning permission.
- 7.46 **Community Infrastructure Levy:** The relevant forms have been submitted in support of this application.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 This statement has demonstrated that the proposed development is acceptable in principle and makes an efficient use of land.
- 8.2 Material planning considerations have been carefully considered and analysed, as evidenced in section 5 of this statement and the supporting plans and documents. It is considered the proposed development would constitute a high-quality children's home that directly contributes to addressing a defined need for this type of property in the area.
- 8.3 It is considered that the proposed scheme complies with relevant Development Plan Policies and is further supported by National

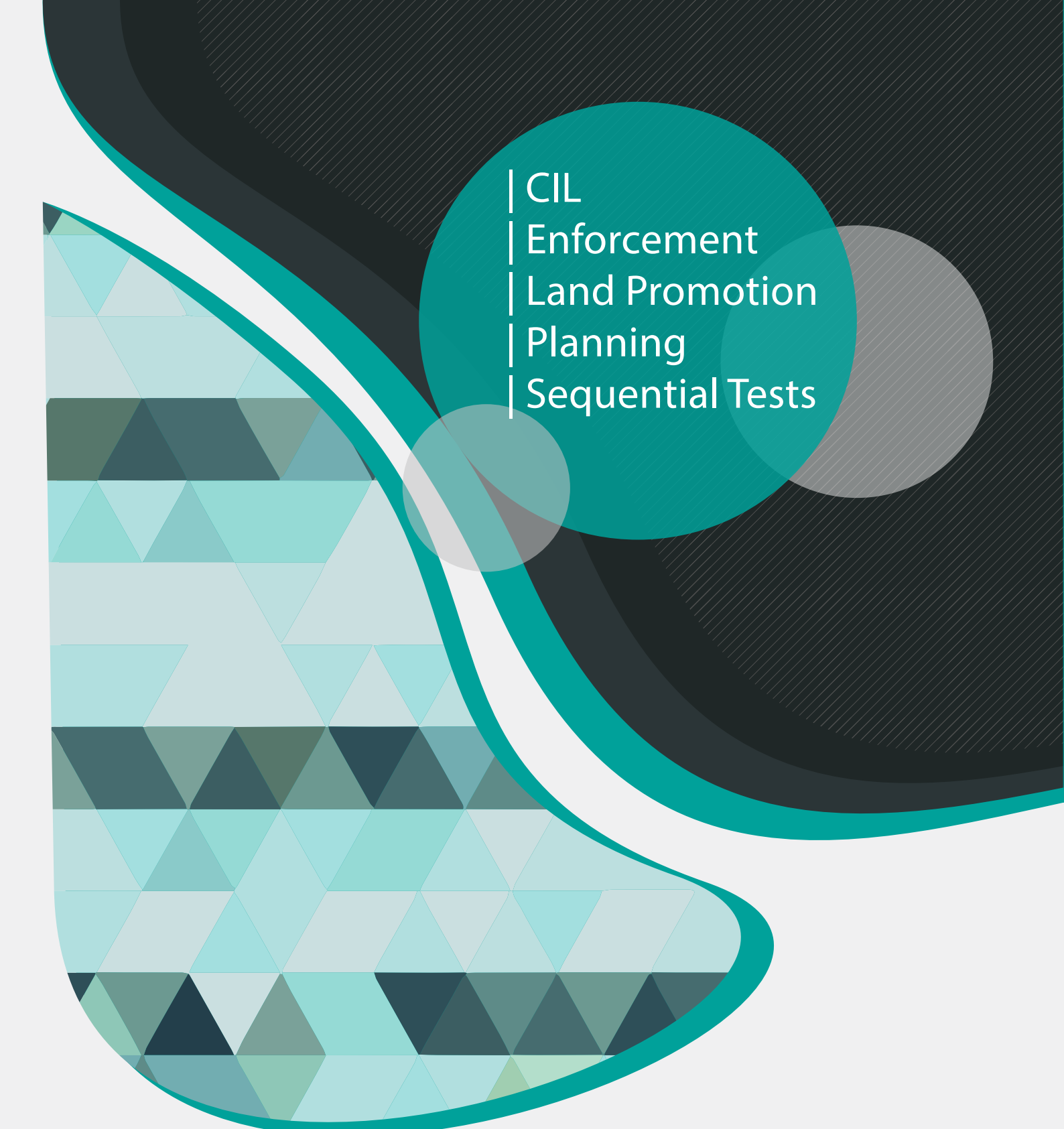
Guidance. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that planning permission is granted.

Gareth Jones BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Principal Planner | ET Planning

200 Dukes Ride Crowthorne RG45 6DS

gareth.jones@etplanning.co.uk 01344 508048



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Contact

Address

200 Dukes Ride RG45 6DS

Phone

01344 508048
01865 507265
01483 363950
01743 612043
01392 691384

Web & Mail

Email: office@etplanning.co.uk
ET Planning Ltd | 10646740

Web: www.etplanning.co.uk