

Subject: Sale of Riddings Children's home by Worcs County Council to a private children's home operator

Dear Neighbour,

We hope this letter finds you well.

We write to you today with a pressing matter that deeply affects the well-being of the community.

As a result of the meeting held by the Parish Council on Thursday 3rd August regarding the sale of The Riddings to a private children's home, members of the community who were present felt that an appropriate next step would be to contact all the residents of Bricklehampton and surrounding area collectively. Many residents could not attend the meeting but wrote to the Parish Council with serious concerns for both the children and the communities safety and wellbeing.

So what course of action can we take?

As you all know, the County Council has been operating a children's home in our village, at the Riddings, which has resulted in serious child safeguarding concerns, considerable vandalism, anti-social behaviour, and even threats to the villagers. This situation has caused considerable distress and concern among many of us. An Ofsted inspection last year resulted in 13 serious incidents since the last visit with serious shortfalls in the protection of children.

Now, the County Council intends to sell the building to a private company that also plans to continue operating it as a children's home. We understand the importance of providing support and care for children in need, but we cannot overlook the severe negative impact it has had on both the care of the children and our community. It is crucial that we unite as concerned residents and express our views on this matter to our MP, Worcestershire County Council and Ofsted. By sharing our concerns and experiences, we can emphasize the urgency of addressing these issues and finding a solution that ensures the safety and tranquility of our village.

Many of you are very aware through your own experiences how unhappy the children were at The Ridding's due to its remote location and we are advised that the best way to help prevent the new home is to petition individually.

I implore you all to take a moment to write to the contacts listed below detailing the incidents of vandalism, anti-social behaviour, and threats that have occurred in the vicinity of the current children's home. Share your fears and worries about the potential consequences if the building continues to be used for the same purpose under private ownership and your encounters with the children who confessed they were very unhappy in this location.

Please highlight the genuine concerns you have for the well-being of our community and reference **"The Riddings, Bricklehampton WR10 3HQ"** for identification.

We understand the County Council are in the process of accepting an offer to be completed by the 18th August. Therefore we urge you to submit your comments within the next days. Your individual voices matter, and together, we can make a difference in safeguarding children and our village from further harm and unhappiness. Thank you for your support and dedication in protecting our community.

For clarity the Parish Council are objecting, but their objection will be made stronger with the direct petition of individuals in the Parish.

The following information contains details of who to send your petition with objection/complaint to.

County Council – on the grounds that they have an obligation to not facilitate the same happening.

Address your letters to:

Adam Kent (akent@worcestershire.gov.uk)

Adam Spice (aspice@worcestershire.gov.uk)

OFSTED – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Government – local MP Nigel Huddleston (nigel.huddleston.mp@parliament.uk)

Police and highways

For more guidance, an example letter and further information on how to object and a copy of the OFSTED report please contact

(james.maude@elmleycastleparishcouncil.gov.uk)

Best regards

Concerned Villagers

Facts regarding the children's home and why it has caused considerable distress and concern.

In 2017 Worcester County council purchased "The Riddings" a 5-bedroom house in Bricklehampton, Pershore, Worcestershire to use as a children's home. The Parish Council and residents were informed the house was to be used for a settled unit of children with an ongoing competent management team. All concerns were allayed with assurance the home would be a benefit to the community.

The home closed in December 2022 following a damning OFSTED report citing 13 serious incidents since the last visit. During this inspection, serious shortfalls in the protection of children and the leadership and management of the home were identified. As a result, a declined effectiveness judgment was made, three compliance notices were issued and a notice restricting accommodation was served.

So what went wrong? Well, it's not difficult to understand from the OFSTED report which states that when asked the children said they felt unsafe in the home. The house is situated in a small wood, which makes it dark and unwelcoming, particularly if you're not used to this environment. There are no pavements or streetlights and no facilities or services, it is isolated particularly for

children with no means of personal transport. Inevitably the children did not want to be there, leading to persistent missing children flagging cars down asking them to help them escape. The road is not safe for pedestrians with no pavement or streetlights and plenty of blind summits and corners. As a result, there were multiple dangerous situations with children found in the road.

When unhappy the system really starts to break down. Serious antisocial behavior episodes have started with violence, assault, vandalism, drug use, frequent police presence including helicopter and dog searches, intimidation, and threat to kill. The small community has been traumatized to the extent people stay in their homes and avoid any contact. But more importantly the frustrations were often taken out on each other with violent clashes in the street outside the house.

The fact is the location is completely unsuitable for this care and put children's lives in danger on multiple occasions. Not only the roads but the safety of the building itself led to a number of roof top protests where children were again at risk of serious harm.

The final straw - the local Parish Council made a compulsory purchase request and/or for the house to be returned to its residential status - back to how the county council found it. Instead, the county council have sold subject to contract at 25% less than the asking price to a private children's home, stating residential buyers were not interested. Not surprising given the house was marketed with a children's license and at a whopping 125% premium way above the residential market value after having structural changes that would need reverting.

It's an appalling trail of failed management of a family home that never should have passed scrutiny for the purpose. For this to be continued, albeit under a different management, is negligent beyond reason. Surely the county council has an obligation to ensure the same mistake doesn't happen again.

Children's homes form a service in the UK to provide support and care for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. Homes need to be situated in a location which takes into account the safety and protection of children living there and the community.

The location has been proved to simply not be safe for the children or the community or deliver on the promise of what should have been.

To top it all last year Oxford University published (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2022-10-05-outsourced-children-s-care-homes-provide-poorer-quality-care-oxford-study>) their findings of a review of the quality of children's homes concluding those run in the private sector provide poorer quality services for children in care than homes run by Local Authorities.