

Regarding comments made by residents on planning application 24/01163/REG3, the applicant would like to provide clarification on a number of concerns.

The Laburnam Centre was built for purpose in the early 1990's for Age Concern, who have occupied the facility since. Last year, Age Concern chose to relinquish their interest in the property and stated that they have no intention of returning. The reason for this choice was that sadly they no longer had the interest or attendee numbers they required, meaning the franchise was not economically viable to remain.

Since Age Concern left, West Berkshire Council's (WBC) Property Team has taken over the costs of the building, which is an expense without benefit to the local community. The applicant's plans to relocate the Adult Social Care (ASC) locality team to the Laburnam Centre enable WBC to make use of an empty space, cover running costs of the building, and provide a reduction of costs compared to the building the team are currently using. The applicant would like to reassure residents that this would not be a public-facing building – it would be used as a base for the Adult Social Care team who work in the Thatcham locality, between usual working hours of 08:00-18:00. There will be a small permanent team working there daily, plus occasional drop-ins from the field-based team in between their customer visits, providing them a space to complete their administrative responsibilities and undertake team and management meetings.

Parking spaces at the Laburnam Centre are labelled on the Block Plan within the application submission. The applicant is confident that staff can fit up to 8 cars in the allocated space, parked side-by-side. The ASC team are currently based on a site with 6 spaces, which meets their needs. As such, there is no risk that staff parking would impact residents outside of the spaces allocated to the building. WBC also has responsible parking and driving policies for all employees which staff based at the Laburnam Centre would be expected to adhere to

The applicant believes the facility would be best suited as an office because this would provide stability and routine to its neighbours. Being in a residential area, it would be unsuitable for other options considered such as to convert it into a hall for hire or community events which would cause unpredictability, high-traffic, and weekend/ evening use and associated nuisance.

There are several community spaces available within Thatcham to meet the needs of the town, and other regular groups / meets which offer support to the elderly in the local area. Please see the appendix below which lists examples of these.

The applicant would also like to confirm that the corner of the plot which is green space is maintained by Housing Solutions, not WBC, and has been in contact to request that they increase their maintenance of the plot to provide a better and safer environment for residents of Stirling Way.

Appendix

The below list highlights some of the local groups providing activities for elderly residents within Thatcham and the neighbouring area, similar to those Age Concern used to run at the Laburnam Centre.

- Thatcham Baptist Church: Offering weekly Coffee Mornings for all, plus men's games afternoons and breakfasts.
- Thatcham Library: Adult colouring clubs and other events throughout the year.
- Jubilee Sensory Garden: Drop in socials to meet and chat with new people, plus an opportunity to volunteer and learn in the garden.
- Alice Bye Court, Thatcham:
 - o The Ageing Creatively team are hosting Free Art Club sessions open to anyone aged 55 or over in West Berkshire.
 - o Seated chair exercise sessions every Thursday at 2pm for all ages and abilities to popular tunes.
- The Phoenix Resource Centre: A day centre for adults
- Fair Close Centre in Newbury: Run by Age Concern & supported by WBC. They offer a minibus service for drop off & pick up.
- Befriending services by Age UK: Arranging visitors for those who find it difficult to leave the house.
- Everyone Active Wellbeing Sessions throughout West Berkshire: offering chair-based workout sessions to increase mobility and socialise.