

Overview of Athena Care Group Ltd

Athena Care Group are an established, family-owned company providing residential care to children in care, with a well-distributed portfolio of homes throughout South Wales. We have an ambition to provide the best homes to our communities most vulnerable children, in order to give them the childhood they deserve. Children in our care have often experienced significant trauma and adversity, and it's our responsibility to ensure that they receive the care and support they deserve. We must recognise and address the root causes of their trauma and help them develop resilience and coping mechanisms to navigate life's challenges. They have been removed from their family homes as it is not safe, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they grow up in safety and experience normalised childhoods. The teams within our homes enable our children to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential.

The Company consists of a board of directors, our Responsible Individual, and a management team overseeing Operations, Finance, Human Resources & Recruitment, Health & Safety and Maintenance, which provides support to the care staff and children in our homes. We currently employ 65 people across the company.

Our homes are committed to transforming the lives of young people who have experienced trauma through our comprehensive, theory informed, and legislatively compliant model of care. The aim of therapeutic residential care is to provide a safe and stable environment that promotes healing, growth, and development, involving the use of evidence-based therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, and trauma-focused therapy.

Our residential homes are governed by a range of national and European legislations, including but not limited to the Children Act 2004, the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These legislations provide a robust framework to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of the children in our care. Our homes operate within these legislations, and we work closely with the Care Inspectorate Wales to ensure our compliance with the regulatory requirements. By adhering to these legislative frameworks, we can provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in our care.

Our homes also support the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014 which focuses on the long-term social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being of Wales in all decision-making. Our homes have a vital role to play in promoting the well-being of future generations by providing high-quality care to children and young people in a safe and nurturing environment. By working collaboratively with others in the community, we can help to ensure that the needs and rights of children in our care are protected, and that they are supported to reach their full potential and contribute positively to their communities.

The Company currently owns and operates 5 established residential homes in South Wales, one in Cardiff, one in Morriston and three in the Neath / Port Talbot area. Each of our homes are situated in well established, residential communities. They are all large, detached properties set in their own gardens with onsite parking spaces for company vehicles which are used by staff to facilitate the needs of the children living there.

The homes are decorated & furnished like any typical family home to provide a nurturing, safe environment for the children we care for. Externally they present as a typical family homes.

Each home, when fully staffed, is run by a qualified Home Manager with support across shifts from a Deputy Manager, senior care workers and social care / key workers who look after the daily needs of our children 24 hours a day.

Craig Y Rhedyn, 9 Uplands Road, Pontardawe is advertised for sale as a substantial property with 7 bedrooms, 4 large reception rooms, a kitchen/diner as well as a double garage with outbuildings, set in large gardens to the front, side and rear of the property. As a functional building this meets our company requirements in providing up to 4 separate bedrooms for children and two bedrooms for our staff to sleep in. It also provides the indoor space for the children to live and grow with several sizeable communal areas. The garden is large and mature, providing privacy and outdoor space for our children & staff.

There appear to be three main areas of concern raised in most objections to this planning application.

The first issue relates to traffic congestion, access, parking and danger to pedestrians and other road users at the house location, and Uplands Road in general.

The second issue raised relates to public & personal safety for residents in the area, and an increase of anti-social behaviour.

The third issue relates to any prospective changes the company may make to the property and gardens which may have a detrimental impact to the residential setting.

Additional traffic / parking / pedestrian safety.

The double garage at the property is accessed via a driveway, which leads from the road along the side of the house to the rear. There is a wider turning point at the front of the garage which allows vehicles to manoeuvre in and out of the garage unhindered.

In line with the highways officers request, we propose to extend the hardstanding to the west of the garage, thus allowing all vehicles space to be independent

The company intends to provide two small saloon cars (such as Kia Rio) for use by the staff and residents of the home and, generally, these would be the only vehicles using the driveway daily. None of the children in our care own or drive a vehicle to or from the home. There is space at the end of the driveway for vehicles to turn thereby negating the need to reverse out from the driveway onto the carriageway.

As a company we have a duty of care to our staff and the children who live with us, as well as contributing positively to the safety of other residents, pedestrians, and users of Uplands Road. This includes leaving or returning to the home in company vehicles

Additionally, there is access to the rear garden of the property from the road via a set of double gates adjacent to the 'stable' building, leading to a hard-standing area within the grounds.

Currently, the shift patterns we employ at our homes mean that there are generally two shift changes per day, one at 7.30am and another at 7.30pm. At these times traffic on the roads is usually lighter, allowing for minimum disruption to other residents.

It should be noted that the double yellow line on the carriageway in front of the property ends at the entrance to the driveway, preventing any parking for the length of the front boundary wall and around the bend on either side further down the hill. The remainder of the carriageway leading up the hill is

unmarked, with no parking restrictions either side. Most homes along the road benefit from offroad parking however, on my visits to the location, I have witnessed vehicles parked on the carriageway in front of homes in the street.

With regards to delivery vehicles – the home would attract no more than any large, detached family home.

Building alterations / work at the property.

If our application is successful, we propose making some minor alterations to the interior of the building to comply with Fire Safety Regulations (installation of Fire Suppressant System, fire doors, alarms etc) and to meet the needs of the residents (new bathroom facilities, removal of a set of stairs, updating decoration and carpets etc). We have no plans to carry out work to the exterior of the main house itself, other than sympathetically updating decoration to windows, etc. However, there is a crack in the rear wall of the house which may require further investigation and / or repair.

Whilst the internal alterations are being conducted any waste material is likely to be removed by waste skip. This will be placed off-road at the hardstanding area and will not impact the carriageway, except when the skip is being delivered / replaced.

The company employs 2 general maintenance workers on a full-time basis to support the upkeep of our properties and gardens. Additionally, we employ specialist contractors for electrical work, plumbing, heating & drainage, large building projects as and when required. All contractors are fully qualified to carry out their roles and any alteration work will be subject to Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2015 for health & safety purposes. All relevant risk assessments will be agreed between the company and contractors. This will include the parking vehicles at the site during refurbishment to ensure minimum disruption to other road users.

Externally, the gardens will be maintained in a proper manner. We employ a gardener on a contracted basis to maintain the outside spaces at our properties. One of the benefits of the property at Craig Y Rhedyn is the generous and mature layout of the gardens and outside spaces. We have no plans to materially change, develop or alter the gardens, the hedges, trees and fauna, apart from the extension to the hardstanding area previously mentioned. We would consider installing some sympathetic boundary fencing, where appropriate, to ensure the security and safety of the children and help prevent unauthorised access to the property.

The proposed work is no more than one would expect any new owner of a property of that age to carry out, with the building works would be completed in full before any staff / residents move into the home, which again helps to reduce traffic and disruption at the location.

Public Safety / Anti-Social Behaviour

Without wishing to diminish or dismiss the genuine concerns of residents, the company recognise this is an emotive subject. However, the comments outlined objections relating to anti-social behaviour, drug / alcohol abuse and criminality, are not a matter of fact, they represent peoples concerns and fears. Company officials would welcome the opportunity to meet and fully engage with local residents to provide information and insight on how our homes operate and address their concerns.

Environmental issues

Concerns have been raised regarding the upkeep of the house and gardens and whether granting of the application would have a significant detrimental impact on the property and landscape set within a quiet residential area.

The position of the home itself within the grounds currently lends itself to privacy for our children and staff as well as any road users and neighbouring properties. The home is set back from the roadway with hedging and a garden to the front and mature trees and a copse to the 'town' side. It is not overlooked from this side aspect nor to the rear by any neighbouring properties. The other side of the building is shielded from a neighbouring property by hedging and mature shrubs and the front of the home is partially overlooked from a property across the road.

One of the main reasons for our proposed purchase is the attraction of the traditional building itself with its original features, as well as the established gardens, mature trees shrubs & hedges and lawned areas.

The Company do not intend to change the exterior of the home or its environs in any significant aspect (hardstanding aside). Given the age of the building there will undoubtedly be restorative repair and decorative work required, but this will be carried out sympathetically, with the aim of retaining the original period charm of the property, wherever practically possible.

The proposed acquisition of Craig Y Rhedyn is a significant long-term investment by the company, adding to our already high-quality portfolio of successful homes. Any maintenance work or alterations carried out would be completed to a high standard to enhance and improve the property.

Additional issues raised

Mention has been made of a 'lack of amenities' for current residents, particularly refuse collections. Our homes generate no more waste than a normal large family home. Children in our care and our staff are encouraged to recycle household waste in the normal manner. Secure storage for refuse at the property will be installed to prevent attracting pests. Our company vehicles are licenced through Natural Resources Wales to carry waste products and any excess weekly refuse is disposed of at local council refuse tips when necessary.

Our homes do not usually generate hazardous waste. As stated, they run as a normal family home. The exception to this was during the COVID -19 epidemic where protective personal protective equipment (PPE) worn by staff was disposed of as 'clinical' waste in the correct manner. The company has a duty of care to children & staff to dispose of any such waste as

Disability access – none of the children in our care require special provision with regards to disabilities.