

## **Planning Statement - Westfield Community Centre SEN School**

### **1. Introduction**

This Planning Statement has been prepared to support an application to change the use from Use Class F2 to Use Class F1 (Special Educational Needs school). The proposal includes formalisation of the parking layout and landscaping. While internal alterations are proposed to facilitate the intended educational use, these works are not considered to constitute material development for planning purposes.

The applicant, Hopedale Children and Family Services Limited, is a leading provider of specialist education for children with additional and complex needs. The organisation currently operates six schools, typically accommodating between 60 and 120 pupils, serving areas including Stoke, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Derby City, Walsall, Warrington, Halton, Cheshire West and Cheshire East.

Hopedale's schools provide specialist provision for pupils with autism spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication needs, and learning difficulties associated with behaviours that challenge. The proposed use of the site will follow the same model, delivering tailored support through appropriate facilities and specialist environments.

Hopedale Children and Family Services Limited has been operating specialist schools for over 13 years, developing strong and sustained relationships with Education Commissioning Teams across the North West and West Midlands. These partnerships span the local authorities in which Hopedale's six existing schools are located (see Figure 1 for mapped locations). The schools are well regarded by commissioners, who recognise the significant and positive contribution they make to the quality of life and long-term outcomes of the children they serve.

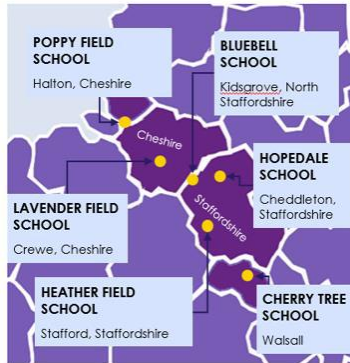
All Hopedale schools have been rated Outstanding or Good in their most recent Ofsted inspections. The provision is particularly focused on meeting the needs of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and a range of cognition and learning needs.

Hopedale operates a therapeutic model rooted in community values, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and extensive family support. Its distinctive curriculum offer includes:

- Pod provision for pupils with highly complex profiles
- Access to speech and language therapy and occupational therapy
- The Hopedale 50, a programme designed to ensure access to a broad range of core childhood experiences
- Practical life skills education delivered through a dedicated home skills room
- Music therapy and opportunities to develop hobbies such as pottery and woodwork
- Careers support, including college partnerships and structured work placements

This holistic and highly individualised approach is designed to meet not only academic needs, but also therapeutic, social and emotional development, equipping pupils for meaningful and successful futures.

**Figure 1 – Existing six school locations**



We take pride in being a local employer, prioritising the recruitment of staff from the communities surrounding our schools. In developing and operating SEN provisions, Hopedale seeks to contribute positively to the local economy as well as the lives of the pupils it supports.

This application relates to a site considered well-suited for use as a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school. The proposed change of use retains an employment function on site and does not result in the net loss of employment within the local area.

The purpose of this planning statement is to provide an understanding of the application site and to consider the planning merits of the proposed establishment of a SEN school in a highly sustainable location.

## **2. The Site and Surroundings**

Westfield Community Centre is located on Rosemary Way in the Westfield area of Hinckley, Leicestershire (LE10 0LN), approximately one mile west of Hinckley town centre. The site is positioned within a mixed residential and educational area and is readily accessible via Coventry Road (B4666) and Rosemary Way. Public transport connections are available nearby, with local amenities and schools within walking distance.

The site comprises two main structures within a plot of approximately 0.87 acres (0.35 hectares), with tarmac-surfaced car parking to the front, side, and rear:

### **Main Building (Front)**

Originally constructed in the 1930s as a school, the primary building is a two-storey brick structure with a basement, pitched roof, and later single-storey flat-roofed extensions. It includes a range of flexible internal spaces used for adult education, community functions, and training provision. The building also features a timber annex and a brick-built workshop area.

### **Rear Nursery Building**

Located at the rear of the site is a detached single-storey building that previously operated as a nursery. It includes dedicated external play space, secure fencing, and is accessed via the main entrance drive.

The centre is set within a well-established residential suburb, characterised by family homes and local schools, notably Westfield Infant and Junior Schools. The surrounding land use reflects the site's educational and community origins, with a strong emphasis on local access to learning and childcare provision. Play areas, open green spaces, and community infrastructure are situated nearby, reinforcing the site's suitability for inclusive, accessible services.

Westfield Community Centre is recognised as a community facility within the Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council Local Plan. The site is not located within an industrial or commercial zone and is not allocated for residential development. It is included in the borough's Community Facilities and Services Assessment, which identifies such facilities as essential to maintaining social infrastructure and cohesion.

As such, the site benefits from policy protections against redevelopment or loss of use, with strategic support for its ongoing role in lifelong learning, early years education, and community engagement.

The site offers on-site parking with tarmac-surfaced bays to the front, side, and rear. The layout supports pedestrian access and provides suitable facilities for users of all ages.

### **3. Proposal**

This application seeks a change of use of the site from Use Class F2 (Local Community Use) to Use Class F1 (Learning and Non-Residential Institutions) under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

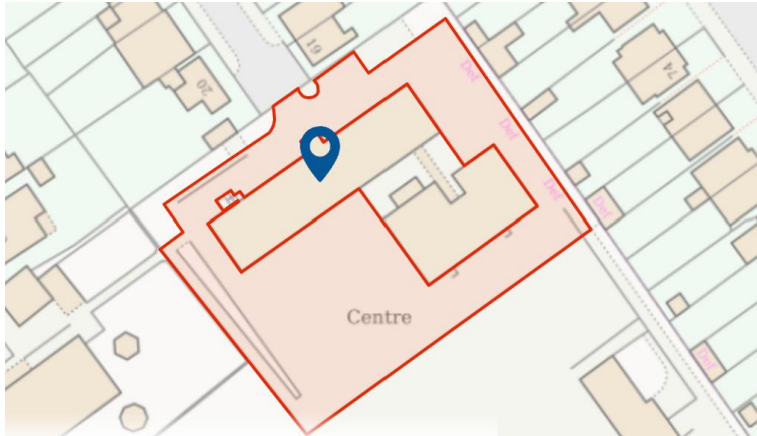
The development seeks to create a specialist SEN school in this location to service the need and demand for these services in the local and adjacent LPA community.

The SEN school will accommodate 75 pupils and 40 staff on site over a three-year staged intake period. The incremental increase will occur gradually over the next three years, starting with 30 pupils in the first 12 months rising to 75 pupils in year three, allowing operational procedures to be properly applied to the site.

The existing building would remain unaltered externally, with all proposed works limited to internal modifications to create a fit-for-purpose Special Educational Needs (SEN) school facility.

A formalised parking plan providing 40 spaces (including 3 disabled) for staff and taxi collections is proposed, fully meeting the transport needs of the school. The existing vehicular and pedestrian access from Rosemary Way would be retained as the principal entrance, and the established one-way traffic flow system within the site would be maintained to ensure safe and efficient circulation for staff, pupils, and visitors.

### **Figure 2 - Location Plan**



## 4. Site Planning History

### Origins as a School (1967–2001)

Originally Westfield Junior School, closed in the mid-1960s. Reopened in 1967 as a community centre offering pre-school, youth, adult education, and community support.

### Formal Integration & Expansion (1974–1990s)

Became an annex of Hinckley Further Education College in 1974, with significant curriculum expansion, including youth and adult education.

Late 1980s–1990s: Launch of Westfield Children's Centre (pre-school), community kitchen, IT suite, and minibuses funded by community development initiatives.

### Ownership & Community Independence (2001–present)

In 2001, the centre became independently owned by the Westfield Community Development Association, following a community-led purchase and refurbishment activities including accessible transport and heating.

In 2008, partnered with Sure Start to become a hub for early-years services and borough-wide community transport.

Gained charitable status in 2012 and celebrated a 50th anniversary in 2017, employing 32 staff and benefiting around 1,500 users weekly.

### Within Local Planning Context

Identified in the 2013 Community, Cultural & Tourism Facilities Review as a valued community centre. Protected by the Hinckley & Bosworth Local Plan 2020–2039, reinforcing its role as a key community institution such as a school.

## 5. Planning Policy Context

### Key Policy Documents:

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023). National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (2009). Core Strategy 2009–2026
- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (2013). Community, Cultural and Tourism Facilities Review
- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (2021). Emerging Local Plan 2020–2039: Regulation 18 Draft Plan
- UK Government / Planning Portal (2020). The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended)
- Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (2020). Good Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

### **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places strong emphasis on the importance of sustainable communities and the need to retain and enhance community infrastructure. Relevant paragraphs include:

**Paragraph 93:** Planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as schools), and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities.

**Paragraph 95:** It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, including supporting proposals for the development of state-funded schools.

The proposed use as an SEN school contributes directly to this agenda by addressing an identified and growing need for specialist education provision within Hinckley and the wider Leicestershire area.

### **Hinckley & Bosworth Local Plan (Emerging 2020–2039) & Core Strategy**

While the new Local Plan is emerging, the current planning framework includes saved policies and strategic documents relevant to the proposed development.

**Core Strategy Policy DM25 (Community Facilities)** – Supports the retention of existing community facilities and encourages the provision of new facilities where appropriate. The policy resists the loss of community buildings unless equivalent or better provision is made elsewhere.

**Community, Cultural & Tourism Facilities Review (2013)** – Identifies Westfield Community Centre as a valued community asset and recommends continued protection of its function.

**Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)** – Notes the increasing pressure on local educational infrastructure and supports the identification of alternative or expanded provision for pupils with additional needs.

The proposal ensures the continued community use of the site in a way that is consistent with its long-standing educational function, supporting vulnerable children and their families through access to tailored provision.

## 6. Principle of Change of Use

The proposed use falls within Use Class F1 (Learning and Non-residential Institutions), as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended). This class includes schools, and as such, the proposed use is lawful under this designation.

While the current use of the site may fall within Class F2 (Local Community Use), both classes are considered non-residential community uses, and a change between them does not result in a material change in character that would conflict with national or local policy objectives. The lawful development certificate route is therefore appropriate.

The proposal to change the use to an F1 educational facility would accord with Paragraph 100 of the NPPF (2024) which states:

*"It is important that a sufficient choice of early years, school and post-16 places are available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:*

*a) give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter early years, schools and post-16 facilities through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications; and*

*b) work with early years, school and post-16 promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted."*

The proposal is fully aligned with the NPPF, the Hinckley & Bosworth Local Plan, and associated evidence base documents. It ensures the continued use of a safeguarded community asset to meet an identified educational need, without adverse effect on the surrounding area or loss of community function. The application supports key strategic aims around inclusive access to education, community resilience, and the effective use of existing infrastructure.

### Public Benefits of SEN School

Leicestershire has a population of 127,654 under 15 and, like the rest of the UK, has witnessed significant need and demand for EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans). An EHCP is a legal document used in England for children and young people aged 0 to 25 who have special educational needs or disabilities and require support beyond what's typically available through the school or setting.

**EHCP Trends:** Between 2022 and 2024, Leicestershire County Council observed a significant increase in the number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued. As of January 2022, there were 4,500 children and young people with EHCPs in Leicestershire. By January 2024, this number had risen to 5,200, reflecting a 15.6% increase over the two-year period, particularly among children with autism and SEMH needs. The rise in EHCPs underscores the growing recognition and support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in Leicestershire.

**Number of Children Waiting for a Place:** As of 2023, Leicestershire had over 300 children on waiting lists for special school placements, a reflection of the growing shortage of suitable local provisions.

**Ofsted Inspection (2020):** Leicestershire was rated as "Requires Improvement" overall. Inspectors found that children with SEND often faced delays in receiving the support they needed, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The report noted concerns about insufficient specialist provision and challenges in meeting the needs of children in rural areas.

The need and demand for SEN school services in Leicestershire is clear, and the public benefit of this proposal is significant. Additionally, as disability is a protected characteristic, the provision would promote equality by offering educational opportunities for children with a range of neurodevelopmental disorders. In response to this need, Hopedale has identified the Westfield Community Centre as a suitable site and is seeking permission to change the use of the building back to its original classification as a school. The location is well positioned to serve a broad catchment area within a 45-minute radius, covering a substantial population across Leicestershire and surrounding areas.

### **Local Employment and Benefits**

The proposed SEN school would provide an employment site and actively recruit locally, subject to the identified specialism required. Hopedale Children and Family Services Limited has an award-winning recruitment, retention and training programme, often providing a fully inclusive and comprehensive training package for all employees. The company seeks to ensure that both development and progression opportunities are available to all staff across the group. With six current locations all broadly within commuting distance, this provides internal opportunities for both permanent and secondment positions.

Between 2012 and 2025, Hopedale has supported 29 employees to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), including some staff who joined with no previous experience of working in an educational setting. A further 12 are currently working towards their qualified teacher status. Hopedale strongly believes in developing and promoting from within, and as a result provides numerous opportunities for internal progression for teaching and leadership roles.

Opportunities for professional development include: NPQ Qualifications, QTS, Careers Advisors, Play Therapists, Level 4 HLTA, Level 3 Teaching Assistants, Level 3 Counselling Course and many more. Hopedale funds all of the training in-house, although some of the apprenticeship schemes are funded by the apprenticeship levy. In monetary terms, Hopedale funds £7,200 per employee for TES Straight to Teach Qualified Teacher Status.

The support and progression offered by Hopedale has resulted in low dropout rates, with turnover rates amongst teachers extremely low at 8% across the group. Competitive salaries and benefits align with the principles of supporting staff and ensuring that everyone is paid fairly for undertaking the same or a similar role.

Staff benefits include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Unlimited mental health support from qualified mental healthcare professionals
- Life Assurance Cover with Unum (3 x annual salary death in service benefit)
- Employee Assistance Programme with Help@Hand by Unum

- 24/7, unlimited remote GP appointments – so you can get fast access to a doctor at a time convenient to you
- A fully integrated Employee Assistance Programme, including a 24/7 helpline for emotional and practical support, as well as financial and legal support
- 360 Wellbeing Score — six 1-2-1 lifestyle coaching sessions per year
- Physiotherapy — eight sessions a year shared between you and your partner
- Medical second opinions
- Savings and discounts for savings on weekly costs
- On-demand wellness content, plus our Wellbeing Calendar
- Blue Light Card Membership
- Free Confidential Support with a member of the in-house Therapy Team
- Free school dinner
- Free staff uniform provided
- Free flu vaccinations
- Comprehensive ongoing training package
- Group pension scheme / Teachers' Pension Scheme
- Cycle to Work Scheme
- Electric Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme
- Critical illness insurance with an option to cover partner
- Dental insurance - to offset those inevitable dentist bills
- Health cash plan - for cash back on a range of daily treatments

While Hinckley & Bosworth is not among the most deprived areas nationally, there are areas within the borough that experience notable social and economic disadvantage. Across Leicestershire, educational outcomes are broadly in line with national averages, though persistent challenges remain for pupils with special educational needs and those living in rural or economically disadvantaged areas.

The development of a specialist SEN school in this location provides valuable opportunities— not only for children requiring tailored educational support but also for those seeking meaningful careers in a growing area of teaching. SEN teaching pathways offer clear progression and respond to a critical skills shortage. Furthermore, the structure and working hours of the school environment provide a favourable balance for family life, making the proposed development both socially and economically beneficial to the local area.

## **Summary**

The proposed change of use from Use Class F2 to F1 to establish a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school at the Westfield Community Centre is clearly justified on planning, educational, and social grounds. The site has a longstanding educational and community function, and the proposal aligns with both national and local policy objectives by enhancing access to inclusive, high-quality education.

Hopedale Children and Family Services Limited brings a proven track record of delivering outstanding specialist provision, with strong partnerships across local authorities and a clear commitment to community employment, professional development, and pupil outcomes. The development responds directly to the identified shortfall in SEN placements across Leicestershire and supports the wider goals of promoting equality, addressing skills shortages, and strengthening social infrastructure.

The proposal ensures continued community use of a safeguarded site, with no external alterations required and no loss of employment function. It represents a sustainable, well-considered, and urgently needed educational development that will deliver long-term public benefit. Granting the Lawful Development Certificate will allow the applicant to meet growing local demand while preserving and enhancing the site's social value for generations to come.

## **7. Operation of SEN School**

The planned opening date would be September 2026, with the final anticipated capacity of 75 pupils and 40 FTE staff.

### **Phased Implementation:**

- **First phase** September 2026 – 30 pupils intake
- **Second phase** September 2027 – additional 30 pupils
- **Third phase** September 2028 – Full capacity
- **Age range of pupils:** 3-19

The children enrolled would have varied levels of specialist requirements including, but not limited to, autism spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication difficulties, and learning difficulties associated with challenging behaviour. The school will offer a therapeutic and nurturing educational environment for children aged 4 to 19 with complex social, emotional, and mental health needs, autism, and learning difficulties.

### **The provision includes:**

- Individual and group therapy
- Family therapy support
- Cognitive behavioural and attachment-based approaches
- Embedded therapeutic practices throughout the school

The focus is on personalised education, helping pupils to engage, grow, and thrive within a supportive setting.

**On-site facilities:** classrooms, therapy rooms, quiet rooms, play space

**School hours for pupils including early arrival/late departure options for staff:**

- **Staff:** 07:30 to 17:00 (staggered arrival and departure times)
- **Pupils:** 09:10 to 14:40 (core time)

The main activity at the site would occur in the morning, when pupils arrive at the school by taxi or minibus, and at the end of the day when the pupils leave. The school hours (open for staff) will be 08:00 - 17:00. Outside these hours there would be no activity at the site. Pupils would be on site from 09:20 to 14:40 (core time).

**Staffing of the SEN school would comprise:**

- 1 x Head teacher
- 1 x Deputy head teacher
- 10 x Teachers
- 20 x Teaching Assistants
- 1 x Therapeutic intervention specialist
- 1 x Music Tutor
- 2 x Administration staff
- 1 x Chef
- 2 x Kitchen assistants
- 1 x Caretaker
- **Total – 40 FTE staff**

Staff will already be on site before and after pupils, so there will be no overlap and/or congestion with vehicles arriving and departing. Not all traffic will be arriving/departing during peak periods.

Small PE activities will be taught on the existing playground or in an allocated indoor space (e.g. bench ball, fitness, gymnastics, yoga, table tennis), but for all other more formal sports requirements, local community sports facilities will be hired when applicable, which is standard for small SEN schools. The proposed classrooms provide sufficient internal space for the number of pupils.

## **8. Neighbouring Amenity Impact**

New development proposals, as a general planning principle, should protect the health and amenity of existing and future occupiers, as well as surrounding uses, from adverse impacts such as overlooking, overbearing built form, or loss of daylight. Proposals should also avoid unacceptable environmental impacts, including noise, vibration, odour, emissions, and dust.

The site is located within a mixed residential and community setting, with established residential properties to the east and south, and a primary school (Westfield Junior School) in close proximity to the west. The wider area is characterised by low-rise residential housing, educational uses, and community facilities, reflecting the site's long-standing role in supporting education and local services.

The proposed change of use to a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school would maintain this established character and would not introduce any built form or external alterations that could result in visual dominance, overlooking, or overshadowing. The proposed use is inherently low-impact, with modest pupil numbers, supervised arrival and departure routines, and no anticipated evening or weekend activity that would generate undue noise or disturbance.

Given the site's historic use as a school, the surrounding land uses are already well-adapted to education-related activity. The proposal therefore sits comfortably within its context and is unlikely to generate any material amenity impacts on neighbouring occupiers.

## **9. Biodiversity and Landscape Impacts**

The proposed development involves the change of use of an existing building, formerly a school and currently operating as a community facility, to a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school. The proposal does not include any external alterations to the building or significant changes to the existing hardstanding and landscaping.

The site is located within a developed, urban context characterised by hard-surfaced areas, existing built form, and established boundary treatments. There is no on-site habitat of ecological significance and no evidence of protected species. The existing site does not contain any designated wildlife sites, priority habitats, or significant green infrastructure.

Although the nature of the proposal (internal change of use) means that it is unlikely to result in any direct adverse impact on biodiversity, the applicant remains committed to supporting biodiversity enhancement where feasible. Opportunities for biodiversity gain will include:

- Installation of bird boxes on site
- Use of pollinator-friendly planting in any areas of soft landscaping
- School garden – soil to fork plan

Given the scale and nature of the proposal, it is considered that the impact on biodiversity is negligible, and any minor opportunities for enhancement can be secured through a suitable condition, if required by the local planning authority.

## **10. Conclusion**

This Planning Statement provides a robust assessment of the proposed change of use to a Use Class F1 Special Educational Needs (SEN) school and demonstrates its compliance with adopted national and local planning policies.

The proposal seeks to re-establish the lawful use of the site as a school, consistent with its original function and physical layout. The existing building and site infrastructure are well suited

to educational use, and the proposal presents a sustainable and appropriate reuse of an established community asset.

The development would deliver significant public benefits, including the provision of specialist education for children with additional needs, support for local authority placement requirements, and the creation of employment and training opportunities within a growing sector. The site is acceptable in terms of access, car parking, and circulation, and has been designed to safeguard the amenity of future pupils as well as neighbouring residents.

Given the site's planning history, its suitability for educational reuse, and the strong alignment with planning policy objectives, we respectfully request that the Local Planning Authority supports this application.

In accordance with Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, where a proposal accords with the development plan and is supported by material considerations, it should be approved without delay. On this basis, we request that planning permission be granted for the proposed development.