

Borough Green **560710 156939** **27 November 2006** **TM/06/03828/FL**
Borough Green And
Long Mill

Proposal: Extension to existing doctors surgery to provide three additional consultation rooms, a minor surgery suite and associated offices and car parking
Location: Medical Centre Quarry Hill Road Borough Green Sevenoaks Kent TN15 8RQ
Applicant: Borough Green Medical Practice

1. Description:

- 1.1 The proposal is an extension to the existing Medical Centre to provide a minor surgery room, recovery room, three additional consulting rooms and additional ancillary office space. In addition, it is proposed to provide a further 19 car parking spaces within the curtilage of the site. The proposed extension is 1½ storeys which links into the existing building; the design and detailing will match the existing.
- 1.2 The extension is proposed to be located to the north side of the building adjacent to adjoining open land. The land rises to the north, therefore it is proposed to excavate this part of the site to accommodate the extension, which will be “dug into” the bank. A pedestrian bridge link will be provided from the new car park to the front floor of the extension.
- 1.3 There are a number of trees on the site. The proposal would involve removing 9 oak trees, 1 ash tree and 6 conifer trees. It is proposed to plant 6 replacement oak trees and 5 common laurel bushes.
- 1.4 The applicants have submitted a statement with the application seeking to justify the proposal. This is based on a shift in the Government protocol for training junior doctors. Once they have left medical school it is now a requirement for them to do two foundation years, with four months of this being spent in General Practice. The existing building allows for no extra doctors, relying on absence due to staff holidays or sickness for available rooms. There are three partners eligible for training, which means that there may be three additional doctors employed.
- 1.5 The total number of doctors has also increased since 1994, from five doctors and a registrar to seven partners, two retained doctors (two days a week each), one registrar and up to three training doctors. This is partly due to a shift in Government policy bringing services into the community from hospitals, to increase the services available locally, including minor/ moderate surgery.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The site lies to the south of Harrison Road and to the east of Quarry Hill Road. The site lies within the MGB, SLA and ALLI.

3. Planning History:

TM/96/01697/FL Grant With Conditions 13 March 1997

Extension to medical practice.

TM/98/00004/ORM Grant 27 January 1998

Minor amendment to the position of the velux window in the dispensary storage area pursuant to permission TM/96/1697/FL (extension).

TM/92/0700FL Grant 28 September 1992

Erection of medical centre with car park, vehicular access onto existing private road and provision of new footpath to Harrison Road.

4. Consultees:

- 4.1 PC: Screening along the north and west boundaries of the proposed car park is requested.
- 4.2 KCC (Highways): I am satisfied that with the operational procedures as described in the Design Statement that the proposed additional 19 spaces is a suitable level of additional parking. I am satisfied that a vehicle can turn as shown to leave in a forward direction should all bays be found to be occupied.
- 4.3 Private Reps + Article 8 Site and Press Notice: 11/6R/0X/0S. Six letters of objection received, objecting on the following grounds:
- The additional traffic that would be generated would be unacceptable.
 - The proposed extension to the car park should be considered elsewhere on the grounds of the Medical Centre, such as the area to the side nearest to the approach road to the Housing Association at Basted House.
 - Existing hospital facilities should be made better use of.
 - The area to the north of the practice boundary is "Green Field" and protected from a significant change of use.
 - Additional traffic is experienced up and down Quarry Hill Road, as well as noise from those using the car park and youths congregating in the car park.

- It is possible to view the proposed car park from adjacent properties rather than a pleasant field.
- It is unclear why a minor injury unit or surgery facility is necessary. There is a minor injury facility where minor/ moderate surgery is undertaken at Sevenoaks hospital. The future of Sevenoaks hospital is under review. There is duplication for service delivery. It is not clear whether the wider picture has been fully reviewed.
- Perhaps if Hanson had not approached the applicant this application would not have been submitted.
- There is no mention in the application of the impact of the application on those living near to the practice.
- The proposed car park extension is of a poor design and as a result will have a detrimental impact on the surrounding green belt environment and will be poor in terms of operation.
- The proposed car park is remote from the main car park as it needs a linking access road.
- The proposed car park has been designed without circulation and therefore at peak times this will lead to a significant pedestrian/ driver conflict.
- The proposed car park does not allow drivers to drive around the car park in a forward direction to find a space without being trapped in a dead end and then being forced to make a multi-point manoeuvre in an aisle between parked cars.
- The car park takes its single aisle through a right angle corner. When this is heavily parked up the far view to drivers deciding whether to enter this area will be obscured. Drivers will have to make multi-point turns or reverse, resulting in serious safety issues.
- There has been no attempt to use the natural topography to advantage. The proposed car park can be graded for drainage and still cut into the hillside. The soil could be used to provide bunding around the car park.
- Beneath the trees fronting Quarry Hill Road there are orchids. Most of these would be lost as a result of the proposal.
- Because the car park has been located unnecessarily close to Quarry Hill Road, the removal of 4 conifers will make the proposed car park more visible for 6 months of the year.

- Lighting would be a further detriment.

Three alternative schemes of additional car parking have been suggested by consultees.

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 The site is located just outside the built confines of Borough Green and within the Metropolitan Green Belt where there is a presumption against permitting inappropriate development. The site also falls within a SLA and ALLI in the TMBLP.
- 5.2 The existing Medical Centre was granted planning permission under TM/92/0700/FL as an exception to the normal policies of development restraint which apply within the MGB. Planning permission was then granted to extend the building (TM/96/1697/FL), on the basis that the proposal would provide an improved level of patient care and service. The principal issue in this case is whether there are further very special circumstances to justify this additional new development notwithstanding the policy designations.
- 5.3 The applicants have submitted a supporting statement which seeks to demonstrate that the proposal is required for two main reasons. Firstly, there has been a change in the Government's protocol for training junior doctors, whereby it is now mandatory for doctors to spend time in General Practice following medical school.
- 5.4 Secondly, since 1994, the practice has expanded. The total number of doctors has increased from five doctors and a registrar in 1994, to seven partners, two retained doctors (two days a week each), one registrar and up to three Foundation Year 2 doctors now.
- 5.5 This increase in staffing is partially as a result of a shift in Government policy to move some services into the community that would previously have been dealt with in a hospital setting. The surgery now provides physiotherapy, counselling, Social Services for the elderly, chiropody, phlebotomy (blood taking), asthma and chronic disease clinics. Some minor/ moderate surgery is also carried out that would not have been carried out in General Practice previously.
- 5.6 Undoubtedly, the provision of more extensive, locally-based medical facilities, sited within the community it is intended to serve, constitutes a net benefit, as does accommodation to facilitate the expanded medical practice. I note the concerns about the future and location of the minor injury unit at Sevenoaks. However, the purpose of the Government Policy is to make certain services and doctor specialities even more localised than that, so that people do not need to use a car/ bus to access these facilities. It is not the purpose of the planning

system operating at a local level, to seek to override the change of Government policy on health services. Indeed, in a broad sense, these policy changes might be seen as supporting sustainability objectives. In my view this represents very special circumstances that would enable the policy presumption against new development within the MGB and rural areas to be set aside, so long as the physical and highway impacts can be accommodated in a way that satisfactorily overcomes any specific harm that might be identified.

- 5.7 Policy SS8 of the KMSP permits the provision of a public facility for which a rural location is justified. Policy P6/22 of the TMBLP also refers to new buildings for community purposes which will be permitted outside the settlement confines where it can be demonstrated that no alternative accommodation is available within the village confines, or, through the conversion of existing buildings and where the proposal is essential to serve the settlement to which it relates.
- 5.8 The justification for a rural location was accepted when the Medical Centre was first permitted. Whilst I appreciate that the surgery has had a previous extension since the original was permitted given the analysis is set out in paras 5.3-5.6 above, I am of the opinion that the provision of further facilities to support the accepted use does not now raise any further fundamental policy objections. It therefore remains for the detailed design, siting and highway issues of the proposal to be considered.
- 5.9 Although the proposal will increase the amount of built development on the site, I am of the opinion that due to its scale, siting, bulk and design (especially in relation to the topography) the proposal will not have a significantly adverse impact on the function of the Green Belt or the rural character of the immediate area. I am satisfied that in design terms the proposal is in keeping with the design of the existing Medical Centre.
- 5.10 Some of the trees that are proposed to be removed are semi-mature. Although the trees to the west of the site are protected by a TPO, the trees that are proposed to be removed are not protected. Those trees within the proposed car park extension site are not in such good health on the whole, suffering from some disease and drought conditions. Whilst their proposed removal is regrettable I consider it to be acceptable as none of the boundary trees will be affected and replacement planting is proposed elsewhere to compensate. It is also proposed to plant five common laurel bushes to screen the new parking area from Quarry Hill Road. I am of the opinion that the proposed car park extension will not have a considerable impact upon the character or amenity of the surroundings and will not significantly harm the openness of the rural locality.
- 5.11 It is proposed that the new car parking area and access drive would follow the existing ground levels. I have noted the suggestion that the car park extension could be excavated and surrounded by a raised bund, but I consider that this would actually be potentially more harmful to the open character of this part of the

site, and involve more extensive works, thus impacting upon the landscaped character to a greater extent. It is proposed to provide one additional light column as a result of the proposal, in the new parking area. This would be a 4m high tapered tubular steel column with an opal polycarbonate sphere luminaire with a 50 watt SON/T lamp, to match the existing car park lights. Given the position of the proposed additional light, I am of the opinion that the illumination will not significantly harm the amenity of adjacent residential properties nor the openness of the surrounding countryside.

- 5.12 It is proposed that the operating theatre will result in a full time doctor and nurse being taken away from their other duties. Training doctors will consult for 30 minutes per patient and because they are so junior a more experienced GP or Partner would need to be available for advice. Therefore, I am of the opinion that overall, the proposal is unlikely to result in significant traffic generation that would be considered unacceptable.
- 5.13 Each of the proposed consulting rooms could attract up to a maximum of 4 car parking spaces each (i.e. 12 spaces), along with a requirement for 1 car parking space per 2 members of staff. The office element could attract 1 car parking space per 20 sqm (i.e. 5 spaces). I am satisfied that, with the operational procedures detailed within the Design Statement, in terms of the type and length of surgeries, the proposed number of spaces is a suitable level of additional parking.
- 5.14 The applicant has submitted additional information showing a swept path for car turning. This indicates that room is available for the turning of a vehicle within the proposed arrangements. I am satisfied that a vehicle can turn to leave in a forward direction should all bays be found to be occupied.
- 5.15 Whilst I note that suggestions of alternative schemes have been made, full consideration must be given to the submitted scheme and the application must be considered on the basis of the details, as submitted. In the light of the comments received from KCC(Highways) I am of the opinion that the submitted scheme is acceptable on highway grounds.
- 5.16 In terms of the impact that the proposed car park would have upon the residential amenity of the adjacent properties, the proposed car park would be located 25m from the nearest adjacent property. To the west, the site is screened by mature trees. I am of the opinion that the proposal will not have a significantly detrimental impact on adjacent residential properties as a result of additional noise. I note the concerns relating to crime and disorder. However, I do not consider that there is any justification to suggest that the extension of the existing car park would result in additional opportunities for crime and disorder as opposed to the existing grassed area.

5.17 I am therefore of the opinion that, taking into account the important community function which this Medical Centre serves and the continued need to provide improved locally based services, this proposal is justified as a further exception to the normal policy presumption against further development in the MGB and rural area generally.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 Grant Planning Permission

This was approved in accordance with the following submitted details: Letter dated 27.11.2006, Design Statement dated 27.11.2006, Design Statement dated 27.11.2006, Location Plan dated 27.11.2006, Floor Plan 2618/01 dated 27.11.2006, Floor Plan 2618/02 dated 27.11.2006, Site Layout 2618/03 dated 27.11.2006, Floor Plan 2618/04 dated 27.11.2006, Floor Plan 2618/05 dated 27.11.2006, Elevations 2618/06 dated 27.11.2006, Plan 2618/07 dated 27.11.2006,

Conditions / Reasons

1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2 All materials used externally shall match those of the existing building.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the character and appearance of the existing building or visual amenity of the locality.

3 The use shall not be commenced, nor the premises occupied, until the area shown on the submitted layout as vehicle parking space has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking or re-enacting that Order) shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved parking space.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate accommodation for the parking of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous on-street parking.

4 All planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved scheme of landscaping (as detailed on plan no 2618/03), shall be implemented during the first planting season following occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the earlier. Any trees or shrubs removed, dying, being seriously damaged or diseased within 10 years of planting shall be replaced in the next planting season with trees or shrubs of similar size and species, unless the

Authority gives written consent to any variation. Any boundary fences or walls or similar structures as may be approved shall be erected before first occupation of the building to which they relate. (L003)

Reason: Pursuant to Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and to protect and enhance the appearance and character of the site and locality.

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