

Stanton Surgery

10 The Chase, Stanton, Bury St. Edmunds, IP31 2XA



Providing NHS services

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WORKING PAPER 3

9th September 2020.

Mr C Vince,
Planning Officer,
West Suffolk Council,
West Suffolk House,
Western Way,
Bury St Edmunds,
Suffolk,
IP33 3YU.

Dear Mr Vince,

Planning Application DC/20/0784/FUL – Stanton Surgery, 10 The Chase, Stanton, IP31 2XA

We write to comment on the decision of the planning committee at their meeting on 5th August 2020 as “minded to refuse” our application to extend our premises at 10 The Chase, Stanton, and the (possibly unintended) consequences of this project not being able to proceed. Our current premises consists of the surgery building at 10 The Chase, and the Portakabin situated behind it, which was added as a temporary measure following the loss of the practice’s premises at Hopton in 2017.

We understand that the justification for the planning committee’s decision was the limited on-site parking and consequential effects on highway safety.

Firstly, we note that Highways did not share these concerns as they provided no objection to the application. Importantly, nor was there any objection from neighbouring residents on this basis.

We accept that the number of 13 parking spaces available at 10 The Chase falls short of the Health Building Note guidance of 24 spaces. However, we have an informal agreement with NHS Property Services which owns Stanton Community Health Centre at 12 The Chase, allowing our patients to utilise their car park. We are currently in discussions to formalise this arrangement. There is also plenty of safe on-road parking available on The Chase. Complaints about parking mainly seem to arise due to the parking habits of a minority of visitors to our site, who choose to park inconsiderately around the junction of Parkside with The Chase. This appears to happen regardless of the availability of other safe parking space, either off-road or on-road. Unfortunately, beyond having notices up inside our building asking patients to park considerately, this is outside of our control. We have suggested to the Parish Council on more than one occasion that we would like to see double yellow lines on that junction to stop such unsafe and inconsiderate parking. We understand having met with the Parish Council again recently that they are going to take this forward and we would fully endorse this.

We are reviewing options involving the village hall car park being utilised by practice staff, and the potential for staff parking on a piece of amenity land just off the north end of The Chase.

Lastly in relation to traffic and parking, the arrival of Covid-19 has changed the way we provide services. The majority of patient contact is now carried out over the telephone and online, rather than in person at the surgery. This change is likely to persist even once the current pandemic runs its course, as in common with the majority of GP practices, we have found that remote consulting in this way works well for a lot of problems, and is more convenient for patients. A happy by-product of this change is that traffic to our site is much reduced from pre-covid levels, and is likely to remain so long term. This is an important point for the committee to consider; however, we strongly refute any suggestion that we have timed the planning application to coincide with such reduced on-site activity. As outlined in West Suffolk CCG's recent letter to you, our application was made at the appropriate point in the lengthy business case process.

Temporary planning permission for our Portakabin, which contains two consulting rooms and a waiting area, expires in October 2020. The proposed extension simply intends to replace those consulting rooms with a permanent arrangement, whilst also providing some additional space to alleviate the cramped conditions our administrative and dispensing staff are currently having to work in. We have no plans to increase patient appointments beyond our current levels.

The consequences to local healthcare provision of loss of the Portakabin with no replacement would be severe, and in our view are rather understated in West Suffolk CCG's recent letter to you. Not only would we have to close our patient list to new registrations, but with the loss of a third of our consulting space we would be unable to provide safe care in the remaining space to our current patient list. We would potentially have to de-register around 1,500 patients (and reduce clinician numbers accordingly), which would have a knock-on effect on other practices locally (already operating at capacity). This would be a very sad and unsatisfactory outcome for local residents.

We have met with Stanton Parish Councillors who now accept that there is very significant local support for our application. Those councillors who spoke in opposition to our application at the planning committee meeting on 5th August would therefore appear to have been rather disconnected from their constituents' wants and needs in this regard. At the time of writing of this letter, we have collected over 530 signatures on a petition to allow this application, which is a large number for a community of this size. The Parish Council, recognising the strength of feeling amongst their own constituents, has agreed that they will be fully supporting our application from hereon in.

This application should be determined on its own merits, and not on the basis of any future proposed project for healthcare provision which may or may not go ahead. For the avoidance of any doubt, the practice has fully investigated the viability of all potential options available, including moving to the vacant plot on Upthorpe Road, which was part of the old Blackbourne Middle School site. We had plans for a new build drawn up and costed, and the plot valued. It was clear that this project was not viable financially - West Suffolk CCG would never have been able to justify the cost of a lease on the proposed premises in relation to the size of the population they would serve. It was apparent to us, therefore, that extending our current premises would be the only option available to the practice for the medium term (we estimate the next 10-15 years). It appears that some of the Parish Councillors had been led to believe that by opposing our application, this would put pressure on West Suffolk CCG to fund new build premises for us. This notion is tragically misguided. As we have outlined above, extending our current premises is the only option which the CCG could possibly view as cost-

effective. All that would happen if this application were to be refused is that the practice would have to close its list and de-register a significant amount of patients, as we have already explained. To refuse this application on the basis that some other viable solution might appear in due course would be a high-stakes gamble indeed. It is the local population who would be very likely to lose out if such an approach is adopted.

Finally, NHS capital funding has been secured for the extension, after a prolonged and tortuous process, but this funding has to be used by March 2021, or it will be lost to the practice. We may therefore find ourselves in the unenviable position of being unable to proceed with the extension, even if planning permission is ultimately granted, if there is any further delay. Again, this would have severe consequences for healthcare provision for local people.

Thank you for considering our views, which we hope can be robustly presented to the planning committee prior to a final decision being taken.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nick Redman



Dr Sara Raton-Lunn



Dr Lucy Ross2020