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Staffordshire Moorlands District Council,
Development Services
Moorlands House,
Stockwell Street,
Leek,
Staffordshire Moorlands
ST13 6HQ

25 June 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE:PP-09903141 Proposed additional parking spaces and associated landscaping and external lighting at The Woodhouse Hospital, Lockwood Road, Cheadle ST10 4QU

On behalf of our client Elysium Healthcare Ltd, we have pleasure in submitting a full planning application for an additional car parking area on land at The Woodhouse Hospital, Lockwood Road, Cheadle.

This application follows discussions with the Council on an alternative site within the hospital estate which was deemed unsuitable for car parking for various reasons (Application Reference SMD/2019/0599). In recognition of the acute need for additional parking spaces for existing staff and visitors, officers invited the applicant to consider alternative locations within their ownership that would overcome previous concerns.

Introduction to Applicant

Elysium Healthcare launched in December 2016 and further acquisitions have enlarged the group giving a portfolio across mental health care, neurological care, education, children's services, and private patient services.

At the core of their operation is the importance placed upon the individual and ensuring that Elysium deliver evidence based personal care. This allows service users to move through 'pathways' of care as their condition improves. Furthermore, Elysium are committed to making relatives an active part in each person's recovery process with the aim of offering more independent living where this is possible.

What makes Elysium unique is the fact that it is a young, dynamic company with an enthusiasm for the delivery of individualised centred care. This is led and delivered by a management team with significant industry experience who bring knowledge, clinical expertise, quality services, good governance and operational efficiency to all their services.

The Woodhouse

The Woodhouse is located within open countryside approximately 1.9 miles to the north west of the settlement of Cheadle and approximately 1 mile south of the village of Kingsley Holt. The application site is located to the south east of the main buildings within the wider hospital estate and immediately abuts existing parking provision serving this facility. Other business uses are located north of the hospital complex.

In the context of The Woodhouse, the hospital offers specialised rehabilitation for up to 39 men and women living with a learning disability / autism and associated complex conditions. Elysium offer a variety of specialised services and provide a tailored response to the specific needs of each patient, their families, and individual circumstances.

The Woodhouse is fully registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and whilst a national service, it primarily supports both men and women over the age of 18 from the surrounding area who have profound and severe needs in relation to challenging behaviours. These often relate to their learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, personality disorder, self-injury and aggression. People with these needs have often experienced a breakdown of numerous placements as providers have been unable to meet their complex and interconnected needs and risks.

The services offered at The Woodhouse are specifically designed to provide small group or single person environments, bespoke apartments and cottages replicating an ordinary living setting. The benefit of such being that it allows for service users to simulate general day-to-day living skills as they progress towards more independent living. The service successfully delivers psychologically informed therapeutic treatment and outcome focused rehabilitation, to enable a timely discharge back into the community.

The service is staffed 24/7 by a dedicated team of nurses and support workers. A holistic, psychological treatment programme is provided by a multidisciplinary team which includes Consultants, Psychologists and Occupational Therapists. The Woodhouse provides a relaxed local environment to enable patients to engage in their therapeutic programme, with an emphasis on accessing mainstream primary care services and resources within the local community, providing patients with the opportunity to access facilities and develop their skills.

The foundation of the facility is in providing a truly flexible model of care to create a tailor-made package for service users that is unique and not readily offered by many of their competitors. The Woodhouse provides a 'homely' rehabilitation service and does not 'feel' like a hospital, which is traditionally what many rehabilitation facilities can resemble. This makes the service distinctly different and helps with adjustments as they continue with their recovery and eventual discharge back into the community. Furthermore, Elysium offer shorter lengths of stays, where appropriate, to promote and incentivise patients being able to move back home.

Elysium have quickly established a reputation for individualised care and have become a valuable addition to healthcare service provision nationally.

Existing Situation and Need for the Development

There are currently two existing surface car parks which are used to serve the site, both accessed via two separate points off Lockwood Road. To the north (rear of the site), there is a small, unmarked gravel car park that has capacity for 18 vehicles located on steep rising

ground screened by mature vegetation, meadow pasture and self-seeded trees enclosed by a low-profile timber boundary fence. Rear access via Lockwood Road comprises a two-way in / out arrangement and is also the principal access route for deliveries and emergency vehicles.

Elsewhere, the principal access to the site is taken off Lockwood Road leading, via a tree lined internal drive to a larger staff car park which has capacity for 51 vehicles, including 4 disabled bays. The main staff car park is tarmac surfaced and lined out accordingly, enclosed by a low-profile timber fence with open aspect views on its eastern and southern boundaries to the countryside beyond. A small area for visitor parking is located closer to the hospital complex and reception building. The total car parking capacity across the site is 69 spaces.

Elysium confirm that the current staff / visitor breakdown across the site on an average day who typically travel via car is as follows:

- 61 clinical day staff on shift at any one time;
- 51 clinical night staff on shift at any one time;
- 28 administration and senior staff;
- Up to 15 support services staff, including cleaning and maintenance (working in shifts though not on site at all times);
- Up to 16 visitors on a typical busy day (pre-Covid).

Other existing parking commitments include:

- 2 patients have access to their own personal vehicles; and
- 7 Elysium owned company vehicles.

Based on the above breakdown, and in the context of 69 available spaces, it is clear that there is an under provision in parking capacity. At any one time, during a typical day there are more than 100 staff and visitors on site. Movement across the site at shift change / handover time is challenging as day staff leave and night staff start to arrive who need to find somewhere to park. Attempts by Elysium to mitigate this critical period of movement within the site and stagger start time for the clinical team are unfeasible due to staffing requirements.

The resultant effect is that invariably vehicles are not parked in designated bays, often leading to opportunistic double parking, partly on footways, along key access routes and generally causing an obstruction and impediment to the day-to-day running of the site and on occasions vehicles left on the highway causing a clear highways safety concern. Elysium confirm that they typically receive multiple complaints from visitors and external professionals who are not able to park their cars safely.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the current car parking issues, removing any possibility of car sharing (where this previously might have been feasible with certain staff members) or using public transport. The above analysis demonstrates that the requirement for additional car parking at the site is acute and requires a considered solution in the interests of all parties involved.

Proposed Development

The proposed development seeks to extend the existing main staff car park to the south of the facility by providing an additional 41 no. standard parking spaces (4.8m x 2.4m). The extended car park is required to meet existing staffing requirement at the site and ease current parking pressures, and it is not the intention that the extra parking will equate to additional staff requirements. It follows therefore, that there will not be any additional traffic movements on the surrounding local highway network. The proposed development will provide greater control and governance over cars accessing the site and where they park.

The car park proposes 41 parking bays surfaced in permeable asphalt, low level louvered bollard lighting and raised kerb edges. The northern boundary of the car park will remain open with long range views out over the countryside beyond Lockwood Road preserved. Landscaped planting is proposed to the north eastern boundary, including new trees and shrubs native to the area which will knit with the existing boundary treatment that currently borders Elysium's extent of ownership around the existing staff car park.

An existing underground propane tank will be retained in situ and simply fenced off to enable access for future maintenance.

Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework Policy (NPPF), paragraph 11, advises that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that development in accordance with the development plan should be granted without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

NPPF paragraph 83 highlights policy to support a prosperous rural economy and states that policies and decisions should enable the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities. Furthermore paragraph 92 (b) states that policy should take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all sections of the community.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act confirms that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The development plan for the area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020) and provides a framework for delivering development for the period 2014 to 2033. Key development plan policies and guidance against which this application will be determined against are set out below.

Policy SS1 (Development Principles) sets out the Council's expectations that development and the use of land should contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering quality local services, including local healthcare.

Policy SS2 (Settlement Hierarchy) defines the settlement hierarchy within the District, confirming that rural areas are suitable for appropriate development or redevelopment.

Policy SS10 (Other Rural Areas) states that in land designated as 'open countryside' these areas will provide for development which has a need to be located in the countryside and supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the areas. The policy recognises that there can be cases where some development and diversification of use in the countryside can be beneficial and sustainable. One such an exception is to enable the expansion or development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified. The policy encourages community and healthcare facilities where that need cannot be met in a settlement within the hierarchy.

The site falls within the wider Churnet Valley Masterplan boundary. Policy SS11 confirms that consideration of landscape character will be paramount in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities and sense of place and to maximise opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features.

Policy DC3 (Landscape and Settlement Setting) seeks to protect and where possible enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and enhances the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape.

Policy T1 (Development and Sustainable Transport) advises that the Council promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car by ensuring that appropriate parking provision is applied on a case-by-case basis.

Planning Assessment

Taking into account the national and development plan policy context outlined previously, we regard the key issues relevant to the determination of this application as follows:

- The principle of the development;
- Design and landscaping;
- Highways and parking; and
- Geotechnical considerations.

Principle of Development

Woodhouse Hospital, and the application site specifically, falls within the open countryside where Policy SS10 confirms that the Council will be supportive of development proposals which has a need to be located in the countryside in order to support the development of existing businesses.

Local health facilities provides valuable services for communities and the District Council expressly supports the provision of accommodation to meet specific needs, ensuring that future generations receive the highest quality of care. The proposed extension to the parking provision for this well-established lawful service use falls into this category. The planning history to the site provides evidence that the Local Planning Authority accept the important role in health provision this site provides.

National policy directs that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to

support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

The proposal expands upon a previous submission by SH Wilkinson Architects during 2019, whereby specific concerns were raised regarding the technical details of the proposals leading to the Council to invite assessment of other land within the applicant's control.

The principle of the use is therefore considered acceptable and embodies the presumption in favour of sustainable development outlined at paragraph 11 of the NPPF. Consideration is directed to the details of the scheme.

Design and Landscaping

The layout incorporates areas to the eastern and south eastern edge of the proposed parking area for landscaping, including low level lighting bollards within the site. The existing underground propane tank will be secured with fencing and a gated access for maintenance.

The proposed location of the car park is significantly more appropriate than the previously considered location within application SMD/2019/0599, given its enclosed position close to the existing built form and the proposed enclosed nature formed by new planting which will serve to protect the long-distance views into the site.

The development will be assimilated within the existing site through the sensitive landscaping treatment along the eastern boundary of the application site. The new parking area, which connects with the existing car park, will provide space for 41 vehicles on a flat surface. Along the eastern boundary low level native planting is proposed to the perimeter of Elysium's ownership that will knit with the existing mature vegetation screening that currently exists. The land falls away to the south east and the provision of the proposed planting will protect long distance views to the site from within Churnet Valley. The sympathetic landscaping enables the proposed development to conform with policies thus respecting the aims of DC3 to protect the character or the setting of a settlement or important views conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area.

Highways and Parking

As previously described, the requirement for the additional car parking will not translate to extra staff and vehicles, instead it is simply required to meet existing demand and to ease parking pressures that can be acute, particularly at shift change over times.

The proposal is considered to accord with Policy T1 which directs that appropriate parking is applied on a case-by-case basis. The unique staffing requirements at The Woodhouse translates to a requirement for an increase in parking spaces in order to reduce the pressures on existing spaces which result in frequent, uncontrolled and unauthorised parking throughout the site and on surrounding roads.

Geotechnical Considerations

A site investigation has been undertaken in order to determine the nature of the underlying soils, to assess their engineering properties and to assist in the design of the proposed development. The investigation confirms that the site can accommodate hardstanding for use as a car park and recommends appropriate design considerations in for surface design.

Summary

The Woodhouse is an established and well-regarded healthcare facility. The pressure on existing car parking spaces results in frequent, uncontrolled, and unauthorised parking throughout the site and on surrounding roads. This is having an adverse impact on the day-to-day operation of the site, is unsightly and causes a hazard within the site and beyond.

The development is for an important provider of mental health services within the District. It would provide existing staff and visitors with designated and safe parking facilities and clearly alleviate existing pressures for the benefit of both users of the facility and the surrounding area. Elysium are committed to delivering a sustainable solution to the current parking issues at The Woodhouse.

The proposals provide clear qualitative improvements to the facility and are required to serve a business and healthcare need. The above factors clearly represent a compelling suite of scheme benefits and are material considerations to be balanced by the Council in the determination of the application.

The following documents have been submitted in support of the application:

- Application Forms;
- Site location Plan;
- Existing Site Plan;
- Proposed Site Plan;
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment; and
- Geotechnical Report and Utilities Survey.

The application form, relevant plans and supporting documents have been submitted electronically via the Planning Portal (PP-09903141) along with the requisite fee of £234 paid online at the point of submission.

We trust that you have all the information necessary in order to determine the application, however, should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Hallett

Associate

For and on behalf of

Q+A Planning Ltd