

Mrs Claire Turner
Planning Officer
Wealden District Council

Sent electronically

17 May 2021

Dear Ms Turner

Letter of support and supporting information on the proposed new medical centre
Planning ref: WD/2021/0594/MEA

We are working in partnership with the local GP practices and the CCG to deliver a desperately-needed new medical centre for the local community and write to confirm our support for the planning application. We would also like to take this opportunity to answer some of the questions that have been raised by the public and local councillors in respect of the proposed development.

What is being proposed?

The proposal is to develop a new, state-of-the-art primary care resource centre, which will enable the two GP local practices—Downlands and Manor Park—to co-locate. The new facility will replace the two existing surgery buildings and will increase capacity in primary care, accommodate other healthcare professionals and give their 19,000 patients better access to a wide range of services.

Further details will be provided in due course but we will be focusing our design efforts on the patient journey, the sustainability of the development, the promotion of health & wellbeing and making it dementia-friendly. The development will be an important step towards achieving net zero carbon and will include solar panels, electric vehicle charge points and other environmentally-friendly features.

Site search background

The search for a new site has been ongoing since around 2005 but since our appointment in 2011 we have actively investigated 18 possible site options across the Polegate and Willingdon area. No stone has been left unturned and an open mind has always been kept on any possible opportunities.

All of these sites have been evaluated in respect of their availability, suitability and financial viability for the NHS. In respect of suitability, factors which have been at the heart of the assessment include the location within the patient catchment area, accessibility for patients, planning constraints, size and long-term sustainability for primary care provision.

Why has the Danescroft site been chosen?

Having exhausted all possible alternatives, the Danescroft land is only site that is (i) readily available (subject to planning), (ii) suitable for a primary care building of this type and size, and (iii) financially viable for the NHS. The site is located at the heart of the patient catchment area, on the main road and bus route, and highly accessible to patients.

What about the ESCC site next door?

This site has been investigated in considerable detail. Notwithstanding that the site is not freely available for us to purchase, there are some fundamental issues in terms of accessibility, ecology and viability that make it unsuitable.

Pedestrian access – the site sits several metres above the Eastbourne Road level. This means that patients would have a steep walk up to the building. For disabled and elderly patients this would be a major challenge.

Ecology – gaining pedestrian access to the site via a ramp would necessitate the removal of many mature trees on the frontage of Eastbourne Road. These trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

Vehicular access – a direct vehicular access off Eastbourne Road would not be feasible. Instead, access would need to be from Courtland Road, which is a cul-de-sac. Whilst technically possible, the option of having a directly accessible site as part of the Danescroft proposal seemed far less contentious.

Financial viability for the NHS – the abnormal costs associated with the above, combined with the NHS's need to achieve value for money and affordability, means that development of the site is likely to be unviable.

Why is there a medical centre proposed on the Mornings Mill Farm site?

We can confirm that no discussions have taken place with the applicants of the Mornings Mill Farm site and we are not involved in that application which is completely separate to this application.

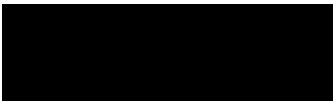
Who would develop and own the medical centre?

Assura would develop the new building and would look after it over the long term. The GPs would run their practices from the new facility, which would give them the space to provide a wide range of health services for local residents.

For answers to other questions and up-to-date information on the project, please visit the project's microsite: www.polegateprimarycareresourcecentre.co.uk

In summary, given the lack of suitable alternative sites and the long history of attempts to secure land, we feel this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the local community. On the basis that a planning consent would guarantee the provision of land for a new medical centre, we confirm our full support for the application.

Yours sincerely



Ashley Seymour
Senior Development Manager