

Agenda Item A15	Committee Date 15 March 2010	Application Number 10/00046/FUL
Application Site Oaklands Pathfinders Drive Lancaster Lancashire	Proposal Refurbishment and alterations of existing building and construction of new access road to create an in-patient adult unit (Use Class C2) with "Section 136" suite, a facility for police to use should they believe someone needs immediate care and assessment in a safe environment (Use Class C2A)	
Name of Applicant Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust	Name of Agent De Pol Associates Mr Paul Walton	
Decision Target Date 17 March 2010	Reason For Delay None	
Case Officer	Mrs Jennifer Rehman	
Departure	None	
Summary of Recommendation	Approval, subject to conditions	

1.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 1.1 The site that is the subject of this application forms part of the Pathfinders Drive complex off Ashton Road, Lancaster which has been used some considerable time by the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust (LCFT). The LCFT complex is accessed off the western side of Ashton Road, close to the junction onto Cherry Tree Drive south of the built-up area of the city. The complex consists of a number of buildings including two converted listed barns. The Oaklands Unit (the application site) is situated in the south western corner of the site bound by agricultural land to the south and west. North of the proposed building stands Derby Home, a vacant stone building separated from the application site by the internal road layout and parking. North and East Barns are situated to the east of Oaklands.
- 1.2 The Oaklands Unit is largely single storey with some basement accommodation where the building adapts to the site contours. This is more apparent on the eastern elevation which is two-storey in appearance. The building is relatively modern, built in 1999 and constructed using reconstituted stone masonry blocks, feature cills and lintels under smooth interlocking concrete tiles.
- 1.3 The site relates to the former Royal Albert Site; an unallocated parcel of land on the Local Plan proposals map. Beyond a small allocated housing opportunity site, the land to the north and east enjoys protected Urban Greenspace and Key Urban Landscape designations. This area extends up to the southern boundary of Haverbreaks Estate.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 The application is in two parts:

- (i) A change of use from Class C2 use class to a mixed use of C2 (Residential Institution) and Class C2A (Secure Residential Institution); and,
- (ii) Proposed extensions and alterations to the access.

2.2 The proposals are to provide a modern in-patient unit for local people, catering for adults of all ages (18+) with functional mental health illness, together with a new Section 136 Suite (see paragraph 2.5 of this report for clarification). The scheme involves the refurbishment of the building; three small extensions and the construction of a short length of new road to provide a vehicular access to the Section 136 Suite. The out-patient and day care services currently located at the Oaklands Unit will eventually be re-located in the Community Mental Health Resource Centre which is to be developed in the derelict Derby Home adjacent to the application site. The overall effect of the proposals and the reorganisation of services on the site are to provide people of Lancaster and Morecambe with a Mental Health facility catering for adults of all ages.

2.3 The three extensions consist of the following:

1. Garden room extension to the south elevation measuring 4.2m x 6.5m splayed corners with a ridge height of 4.5m. This shall be finished in stone to match and a solid tile roof to match;
2. Internal courtyard extension to proposed the Section 136 Suite measuring 4.2m x 7m again with a ridge height of 4.5m and finished in stone with a tiled roof;
3. Extension to the northern elevation to provide visitor café and reception area measuring 7.5m x 7.8m with a ridge height of 3.9m This extension has a gable parapet façade with a pitched roof consisting of large areas of glazing to both the roof and walls.

2.4 The access road extends from the existing turning facility to the north western corner of the building wrapping around the western elevation to provide direct access to the Section 136 Suite. Two enclosed and secure gardens shall be formed on the southern elevation consisting of solid close boarded timber fences.

2.5 For clarification, the reference to Section 136 relates to Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983, which allows a Police Officer to remove a person who they think may be suffering a mental disorder and needs direct care and control in the interests of their own protection and the protection of others. Such persons are transferred to a safe environment, generally referred to as a Section 136 Suite, and usually located within hospitals. The 136 Suite is currently located at Royal Lancaster Infirmary.

3.0 Site History

3.1 The most relevant applications are listed in the box below:

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
97/00885/OUT	Outline application for the creation of a new access, conversion of listed buildings to form offices for the Lancaster Priority Trust and erection of a continuing care unit from the elderly.	Approved
98/00233/REM	Reserved Matters for the creation of a new access, conversion of listed buildings to form offices for the Priority Trust and erection of a continuing care unit from the elderly.	Approved
98/00123/LB	Listed Building application for alterations and extensions to form offices for the Lancaster Priority Trust.	Approved

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 At the time of compiling this report, the following representations have been received:

Statutory Consultee	Response
County Highways	No objections in principle, provided secure cycle storage can be provided. The application is small in scale and is unlikely to have a significant highway impact.
Environmental Health Service	No objections to the development provided an 'unforeseen contamination' condition and an hours of construction condition are imposed.
Lancashire Constabulary	No objections to the development. Recommendations include appropriate landscaping and CCTV in the interests of surveillance.
Access Officer	No objections provided details concerning the installation of a magnetic hearing loop are brought to the applicant's attention.

5.0 Neighbour Representations

5.1 At the time of compiling this report 4 letters have been received. One of these representations is in support of the proposal but with some reservations regarding parking. The other three letters raise no objections but express the following concerns:

- If the number of staff and visitors increase, the existing provision of car parking will be insufficient and could lead to an increase in on-street parking on Ashton Road – close to existing residential properties.
- Development encroaches already limited outdoor space

6.0 Principal Development Plan Policies

6.1 Lancaster District Core Strategy (CS)

Policy **SC1** (Sustainable Development) and **SC2** (Urban Concentration) of the CS emphasises the need to build healthy sustainable communities by focussing development where it will support the vitality of existing settlements, regenerate areas of need and minimise the need to travel.

Policy **SC5** (Achieving Quality in Design) seeks new development to reflect and enhance the positive characteristics of its surroundings.

Policy **SC6** (Crime and Community Safety) seeks to build sustainable communities that are safe and attractive by ensuring development proposals contribute to and enhance community safety.

Policy **E2** (Transportation Measures) seeks this policy seeks to improve residents quality of life and minimise the environmental impacts of traffic by focusing development on town centres and locations which offer a choice of modes of transport and improve accessibility by walking and cycling.

Lancaster District Local Plan (LDLP)

Policy **R21** (Access for People with Disabilities) requires that where appropriate, access provision should be made for people with disabilities.

7.0 Comment and Analysis

7.1 Principle of the Development

The key issues for Members to consider in determining this application are:

- Whether the use is acceptable in principle in terms of CS Policy SC1 and SC2; and,
- Whether the extensions and access alterations proposed are acceptable in terms of design, scale, appearance and use of materials.

7.2 The Oaklands Unit already functions as an in-patient unit for older people with mental health illnesses, standing within a site which is used to provide mental health facilities serving Lancaster District. The predominant use of the building will remain for C2 residential care. The only difference with the submitted proposal is the inclusion of the secure residential facility which, due to its secure nature, falls within the C2A use class. The proposed Section 136 suite is moderate in scale and contained within the fabric of the building, located in the central courtyard where it can be carefully managed and is secure from the rest of the site.

7.3 The intention is that the facility will provide a high quality in-patient unit for all adults, replacing some of the existing facilities that will be lost as a result of the intended closure of Ridge Lea Hospital and improving facilities already provided on the Pathfinders Drive site. The use of the building for C2 and C2A uses represents an appropriate use in this location given the current use of the Pathfinders Drive site. Members are advised that the provision of this facility will enhance the range of mental health facilities and services within the Lancaster area and will be beneficial to the wider community.

7.4 Appearance and Quality of Design

The detailed design of the proposed extensions is consistent with the design quality, external appearance and general finish of the existing unit. The Section 136 Suite is located entirely within the existing courtyard built to the same form and appearance as the existing building. Few windows are proposed on this extension, other than the elevation facing the courtyard due to the proximity of other bedrooms within the Unit.

7.5 The garden room extension on the south elevation sits at an elevated position behind properties on Ashton Road. Whilst the roof may be visible from the rear of these properties, a 2m high close boarded timber fence obscures any views out towards these properties and screens the development from the surrounding area, particularly from Ashton Road. Notwithstanding this, there is a substantial separation distance between the proposed garden room and neighbouring properties.

7.6 The extension to the front is more substantial but it is sited behind a larger projection forming part of the eastern elevation. As a consequence this element of the scheme is only visible on approach to the Oaklands Unit and will not be visible from the listed barns to the east. The design and appearance of this extension represents that of the existing building. The use of extensive areas of glazing provides a more attractive entrance to the building and creates a naturally well-lit space.

7.7 The extensions are all modest in scale and in keeping with the form, design and appearance of the existing building. There would be no impact on nearby residents or the visual amenities of the surrounding area.

7.8 Parking & Access

It is proposed that the existing parking arrangements at the Pathfinders Drive site will be maintained. There is no additional parking proposed by this application on the basis that the proposals will have a negligible impact on traffic movements and parking provision. The extensions and refurbishment of the building will lead to only five additional rooms, including the Section 136 Suite. There are 19 parking spaces available in the car park situated adjacent to the Oaklands Unit. There are also a number of other spaces available on the larger car park next to the converted barns. In this regard the existing provision on the Pathfinders Drive site is considered sufficient in this case. County Highways have raised no objections to the proposal provided secure cycle parking can be provided on site. Officers are currently negotiating with the developer to secure this. The outcome of these discussions will be reported verbally at the committee meeting.

7.9 The new access road is an extension to the existing turning head and shall run along the west side of the building wrapping around the rear to the Section 136 Suite. The access involves some minor excavation of the existing grassed slope in order to construct the 3.5m wide road. A small retaining wall will be required alongside this new access road. The plans also indicate that the access road will take the form of a grasscrete type road to limit visual impact, and the precise details of this can be conditioned. The access track is well screened by the existing building and will only be occasionally used in connection with the Section 136 Suite. This raises no planning concerns.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The Oaklands building stands within a larger site which is largely given over to the mental health service. The proposed change of use and extensions to the Oaklands Unit shall contribute to improvements to this service in the interests of supporting the wider community. The extensions are modest in scale and have no impact on nearby residents or the visual amenities of the site itself and its surroundings. The slight increase in in-patient rooms will have a negligible impact on the existing access and parking arrangement.
- 8.2 Based on the above considerations, Members are advised that the proposal can be supported.

Recommendation

That Planning Permission **BE GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. Standard Time Limit
2. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans
3. Amended plans (awaiting site plan showing cycle provision)
4. External materials to match those of the existing building
5. Detail of the external paving materials, materials and finish to retaining wall and surfacing of new access road.
6. Cycle parking to be provided and retained
7. Building restricted to that applied for (C2 and C2A)
8. Standard hours of construction
9. Unforeseen contamination

Human Rights Act

This recommendation has been reached after consideration of the provisions of The Human Rights Act. Unless otherwise stated in this report, the issues arising do not appear to be of such magnitude to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

Background Papers

None.