

TO: planning@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

11th June 2021

RESPONSE TO PLANNING APPLICATION 21/01454/F

PROPOSED BICESTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING HUB, FORMER RODNEY HOUSE PRIVATE DRIVE OFF GRAVEN HILL ROAD AMBROSDEN.

MCNP Forum is a formally-constituted body representing 11 parishes in Cherwell District, which make up the designated area covered by the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan (MCNP), formally adopted in May 2019 as part of the Development Plan for Oxfordshire. Although Graven Hill is outside the area covered by the MCNP, the Forum wishes to submit its comments on this application because of the impact it will have on the residents of the neighbourhood plan area.

We have the following comments on the application:

1. The application proposes a large new build Health Centre to meet the needs of the existing 4 GP practices which will occupy the proposed new buildings, serving a proposed practice population of 50,000, potentially rising to 60,000 in the next 5-10 years. As such it is promoting a new model of primary care which will move from a comparatively local, accessible service generally serving a practice population of circa 10-12,000 patients with approximately 10-12 consultation rooms, to a hub model serving 50,000 patients with 69 consulting rooms on a single site.
2. Reference is made to this being based on Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group's (OCCG) Premises Strategy; however, no formal strategy requiring a specific public consultation exercise on the future of primary care services in Oxfordshire has been undertaken, as is the norm for major changes to health provision in the County. We understand that most public consultations on changes to NHS provision appear to have been deferred in the last 18 months given the necessary focus on the COVID 19 pandemic. However, if major changes to NHS provision were being planned, MCNP Forum as a local statutory body would have expected to have the opportunity to comment on the principles of the proposed changes before having to respond to a specific planning application involving major changes in service provision for 50,000 patients living in Bicester and its surrounding villages. In other words we consider that this application, for completion by 2023/4, has been put forward without the benefit of an overall strategy that should have been adopted by OCCG following public consultation.
3. It is difficult, in the abstract, to judge whether this set of proposals will meet the needs of Bicester residents not served by the Bicester Primary Care Centre, which serves a practice population of around 20,000 residents and which will remain on its current site. It is also difficult to see how the Hub proposals fit with the proposals for a Health Centre on the Kingsmere development, given that CDC as recently as March 2020 reaffirmed its commitment (as agreed initially in the 2008 outline planning permission for Phase 1 to designating a site of about 1 ha. of land) to a health facility to be sited west of Oxford Road and south of

Newton Close, Bicester. While we accept that a Kingsmere location would not be suitable for residents living closer to Graven Hill, we submit that it would make much more sense to have two centres, each serving a population of about 25-30,000 people, rather than one mega-hub. It is also not clear whether sufficient professional staff will be attracted to work in the proposed Hub given the difficulties in recruiting to existing primary care vacancies.

4. What we are clear about is that the Bicester Health and Wellbeing Hub will not meet the needs of the majority of MCNP residents as it is not accessible by public transport and existing links to Bicester do not as yet extend to the Graven Hill site. There are currently no bus routes linking the growing population of Heyford Park to Graven Hill, nor are there any that serve the surrounding villages of, for example, Ardley, Fritwell, Somerton, the Astons, or Kirtlington. To require users of the proposed hub, many of them elderly, infirm or unwell, or with children to take to their cars in order to drive to Graven Hill when they could instead be using much more local health services, is patently unsustainable. Cherwell DC should not be encouraging such travel patterns at a time when climate change policies and a re-appraisal of community life following the pandemic, are uppermost in the minds of decision-makers.

5. Although not strictly a planning issue, we are concerned that given the relatively tight constraints on NHS funds, the scale of spending on the proposed Hub will adversely affect the availability of primary care funds to develop any other primary care proposals relating to the needs of residents living in the rest of the District. For example, MCNP Forum has been campaigning for the provision of healthcare facilities to be provided at Heyford Park for the last five years in line with the Planning Policy PC2: Health Facility, set out in the Neighbourhood Plan, and in CDC's Local Plan policy Villages 5. To date, the only set of proposals which have been supported by OCCG are a very limited scheme based on the creation of a new Pharmacy with GP Consulting Rooms to be run by the Alchester Medical Group Practice, with a half-promise that consideration will be given to extending this proposal to a full Branch Surgery in 3 to 4 years' time, if numbers of patients registered for this service grow to say 4 to 5,000.

6. To sum up, we think the current application is premature and ill-conceived, and raises as many questions about the future of primary care in Bicester and the surrounding villages as it claims to answer. We would suggest that a more modest-sized development capable of meeting the needs of the existing 4 practices' current patient populations would be preferable, accepting that some of the existing patients may wish to transfer to the remaining practice in Piggy Lane rather than travel to Graven Hill. In any case, we do not see this application meeting the health needs of our residents, who would prefer to see a more suitable and localised response to people living in rural areas.

We urge CDC to defer consideration of this application until there has been wider consultation on a strategy for the future of primary and community health provision in the County.

Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum, June 2021