
Future of Older Person's Provision

Report

By: Christy Holden – Project Manager
Date: 31 August 2010
Subject: Site investigation for Extra Care in Tunbridge Wells

Introduction:

Bowles Lodge has been identified as the preferred site for Extra Care Housing under the Excellent Homes for All Housing PFI in the Tunbridge Wells district.

The initial site identified for the Extra Care PFI was in Cranbrook and, in January 2010, an application for village green status, with over 70 evidence questionnaires, was submitted to Kent County Council (KCC) Public Rights of Way Team.

At the Public Meeting in Hawkhurst on 29th July 2010, KCC were asked to look at other sites within the local area to provide an alternative site for the Extra Care Housing. There was recognition that Bowles Lodge does not have a long term future and the view was that the Extra Care Housing could be built on an alternate site and the residents from Bowles Lodge could move there once built and Bowles Lodge could be closed and the site sold to generate any capital needed to fund the purchase of any alternative site.

KCC has made it very clear, both at the meeting on 29th July and through other communications, that Extra Care is not always going to be suitable for those currently living in residential care.

In order for the PFI credits to be agreed, a site needs to be confirmed by January 2011. There is a high risk currently attached to this element of the PFI project due to the uncertainty of the site. At this late stage, the element of funding for Tunbridge Wells is at risk.

Criteria:

The criteria for an eligible site includes:

- Must be owned by either KCC or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- To be vacated by September 2011
- To be large enough to accommodate a 40 unit Extra Care facility
- To have no restrictions for Planning

- To be highly likely to obtain Planning Permission

Alternative sites to investigate:

A search was undertaken prior to both the Cranbrook site and Bowles Lodge being selected. The site needs to be owned by either KCC or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to avoid third parties being able to prevent the delivery of the whole project across the Kent, it needs to be large enough to accommodate a 40 unit Extra Care scheme, needs to have no planning restrictions and be highly likely to get planning permission by April 2011.

The sites suggested to investigate are:

- Hawkhurst Castle/Babies Castle
- Cranbrook Highway Depot
- The Swattenden Centre, Cranbrook
- Long Field, Cranbrook (as there is a view that the village green application can be withdrawn or processed quickly)

Sites were investigated by the Project Manager, the KASS Property Officer and in consultation with the owners of each site and with advice from Planners.

Findings:

Hawkhurst Castle/Babies Castle

The site is advertised for sale or lease with planning permission for a 65 bed care home and 11 extra care units. The Owner has made contact with KASS who has every intention of building the care home and wants to enter into discussions regarding block contracting arrangements once the home is built within 18 months. He is looking at a range of services including nursing care and EMI. He has met previously with officers of KASS while obtaining planning permission. Because the owner has every intention of developing services, we would not be able to consider this for the development of 40 Extra Care apartments under the PFI.

This site is discounted as an option

Highways Depot, Cranbrook

This is a Brownfield site owned by KCC. There is possible contamination and will be occupied until September 2011 but is dependent of the Aylesford Depot being ready. Planning is likely to be granted as a single storey development only. The site is outside the curtilage of the village.

This site is discounted as an option

The Swattenden Centre, Cranbrook

This is an operational site for Youth and Communities and Asylum, owned by KCC. It has lots of fields which some are used for sports. It is in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is believed that there is a Covenant on the site that restricts the use for Children's services only. This is a Greenfield site and there are no suitable buildings to knock down and build on. Planning would be extremely difficult. The site is isolated.

This site is discounted as an option

Long Field, Cranbrook

This site was previously the preferred option for the development but a Village Green application was submitted. The timescales of this take it past the deadline for confirmation of site. There is a strong case in support of the application with 70+ testimonies, one dating back to having free use of the site from 1930. There is too much of a risk to consider this site on the basis of the application (which cannot be withdrawn and will need to be referred to the Planning Inspectorate due to the potential conflict of interest of KCC both developing the site and considering the merits of the application.)

This has been discounted as an option

Implications:

The Project Director for the Excellent Homes for All PFI Project considers that a change of site from Bowles Lodge, Hawkhurst will create serious risks that will threaten both the delivery of 40 extra care apartments for the people in the Tunbridge Wells Borough and potentially for the 180 apartments for older people and other vulnerable people across the four other Districts in Kent.

This is because the two remaining bidders are already undertaking detailed designs for Bowles Lodge and to seek to replace or drop the Tunbridge Wells element would cause many months delay and lead to the project as a whole breaching the timetable agreed with the Homes and Communities Agency and the Treasury.

Given the Government review of Building Schools for the Future and many other PFI projects, such a delay, and the resulting increased costs for the project, could potentially lead to a withdrawal of £75m of PFI funding.

Therefore the Project Director and the projects professional advisors would strongly advise against changing any of the sites or scope of the project. This of course is subject to the final decision by KCC members following the consultation.

Conclusion:

Bowles Lodge remains the preferred option for the Extra Care PFI site as it is in the ownership of KCC, can be vacant by September 2011, is likely to get Planning Permission for a 40 bed extra care scheme and has the lowest risk for the PFI scheme.

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