

**Supported Apartments at Ashford Disability Opportunities Service, St Stephen's Walk, Ashford – AS/09/102**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 18 August 2009.

Application by Kent County Council's Adult Social Services Directorate for 12, 1-bed supported apartments at Ashford Disability Opportunities Service, St Stephen's Walk, Ashford – AS/09/102

Recommendation: Planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member: Mr J. Wedgbury

Classification: Unrestricted

**Site**

1. The Ashford Disability Opportunities Service (DOS) is located off St Stephen's Walk, approximately 1.5 km to the south of Ashford town centre. The facilities provide a training, support and day activities for people with learning disabilities. The Centre was built in 1962, is single storey with a flat roof and has an internal floor space of approximately 1080m<sup>2</sup> within the one extended building. The current facilities provided at the Ashford DOS offer a Service Level Agreement for 50 placements per day, employing 26 staff, and are open Monday to Friday.
2. The remainder of the 0.47ha site includes a car park and a small outbuilding to the west of the centre, and an open landscaped area to the east. Some 27 trees of varying size and species line the boundaries of the site. The land itself is relatively flat with some localised modelling varying the contours across the site.
3. The Ashford DOS is located within a residential area of South Ashford. A recently constructed medical and community centre is to be found to the north, opposite the application site across St Stephen's Walk. Land to the north east beyond the Medical Centre is designated open space. The application site has roads on three sides and residential property to the east, south and west. *A site location plan is attached below.*
4. There are no site-specific Development Plan Policies identified in connection with the application site itself, although general policies are set out in paragraph (11).

**Background**

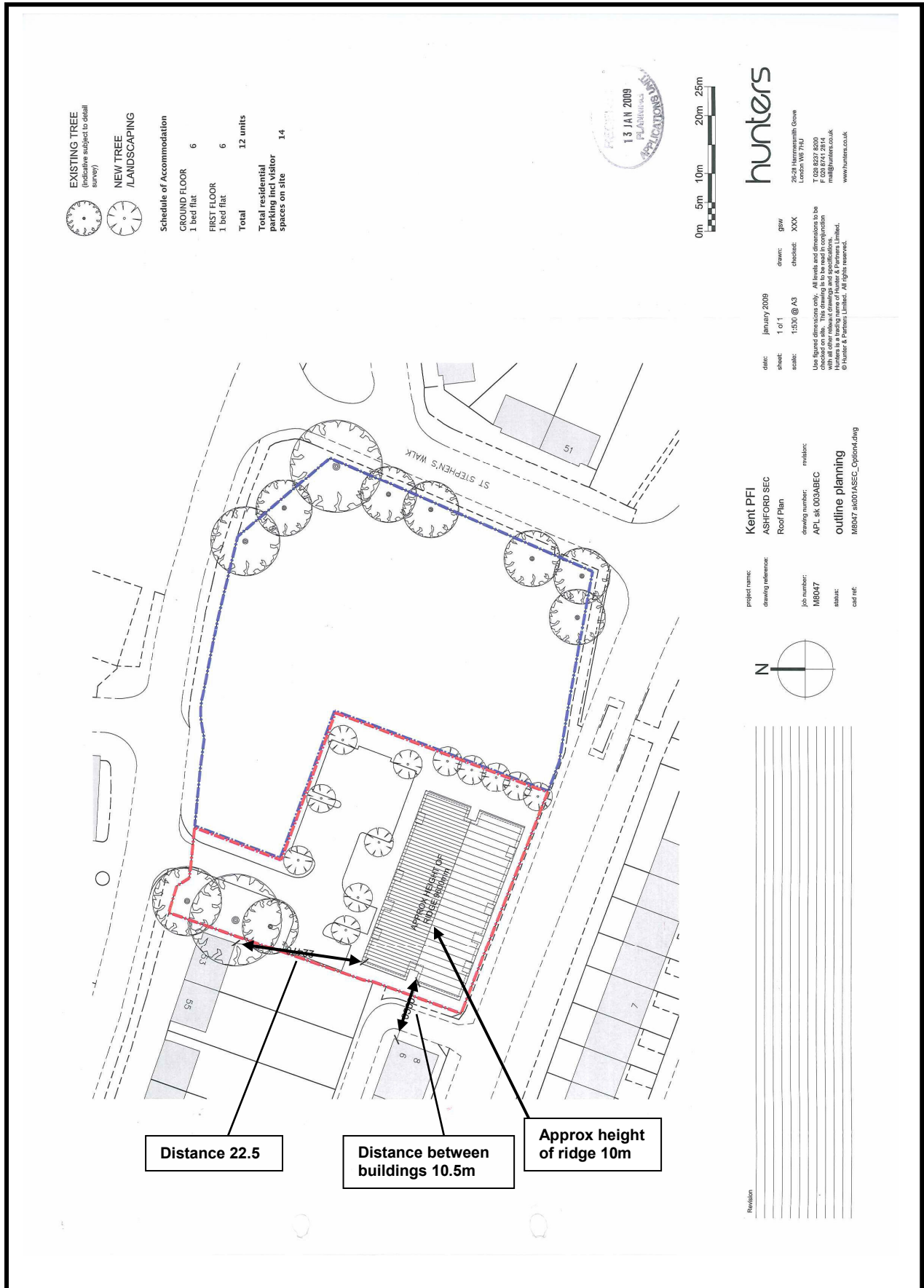
5. This outline planning application is one of a number of proposals being considered by the County Council, submitted on behalf of Kent Adult Social Services (KASS). The application is being made to establish if the site can be considered acceptable in principle for supported housing; if this principle is established, KASS aim to include this proposal within the next wave of the Excellent Homes for All Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI). This initiative seeks to develop 228 apartments for vulnerable people in Kent including young people and the elderly. Outline planning permission is required on all sites across the County as a precondition to accessing central government consent for the PFI scheme to progress.

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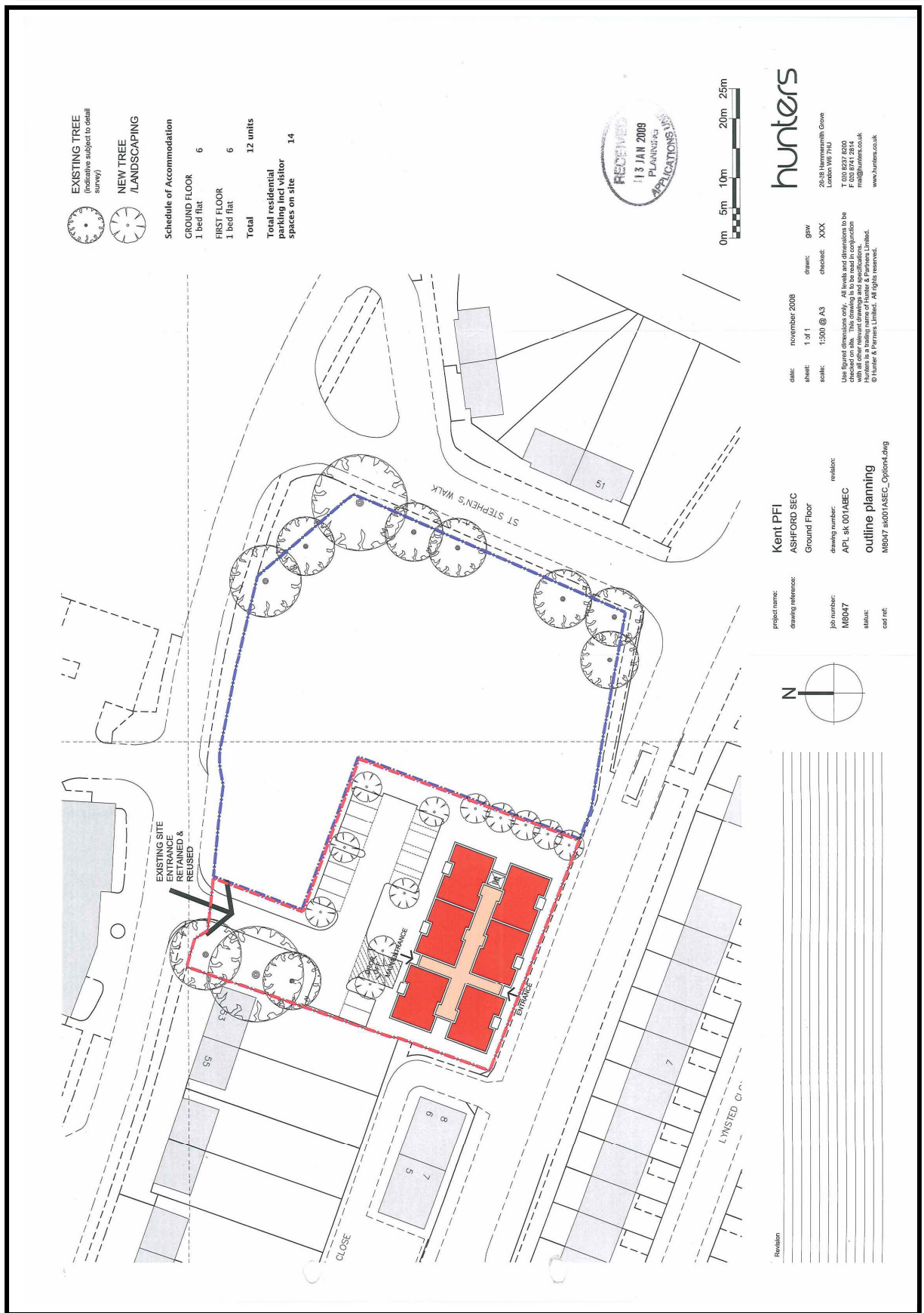


**Site Location Plan – Ashford Disabilities Opportunities Service**  
Scale 1:2500

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**Proposal**

6. This outline planning application has been submitted on behalf of Kent Adult Social Services (KASS) Directorate and falls to be determined by the County Planning Authority due the Social Services aspect of the proposed accommodation. Outline planning permission is being sought for the construction of a new two storey apartment block providing 12 one bed supported apartments for young adults, including people leaving care or with learning difficulties. Due to the outline nature of the application details of the layout of the proposed development (including the number of apartments) and the means of access are included for consideration at this stage; further details relating scale, appearance and landscaping are being reserved for future consideration.
7. The application proposes to use approximately 0.16 ha of the west side of the total 0.47 ha site area available; the remainder of the site would be retained in KCC ownership. The proposed building is shown toward the south-west corner of the plot, adjacent to the Stanhope Road frontage. The application includes details of the maximum height of the building at the ridgeline of the roof (10m) and a general indication of the footprint of the building (measuring approximately 31m by 12.5m). The closest residential property would be approximately 10.5m to the west on Steddy Close, 22m to the south across Stanhope Road and 22m to the north fronting St Stephen's Walk. Vehicle access would remain as existing, with a driveway and new car park (including 14 spaces) off St Stephen's Walk. The application states that none of the trees identified on site would be removed as a result of the proposed development.
8. The application states that Ashford Borough Council has identified a need for supported housing for young people who are settling out on their journey to become as independent as possible and learn how to live in their own home. The supported housing is proposed to add to the community infrastructure to support vulnerable people.
9. The proposed development would require the demolition of the existing training centre on site, the Ashford DOS. Information received in support of the application from KASS indicates that the proposed sheltered apartments would not drive any changes to the services provided at Ashford DOS. KASS confirm that the existing services are envisaged to be modernised and potentially relocated to more suitable facilities which would allow the closure of the current facilities. The process of change to the existing service provision is independent from the planning application and would be subject to a separate consultation with stakeholders. The applicant confirms that, if after consultation, the County Council decides to continue to provide Ashford DOS on site then an alternative location for the supported apartments would need to be found.

**Additional information provided by the applicant**

10. In response to comments raised during the consultation process, including the objections summarised below, the applicant has provided the further information in support of the application, including a Desk Study into ground conditions, a tree survey, and additional statements on behalf of Kent Adult Social Services seeking to clarify the existing use and alternate service provision to be provided if a decision is made to modernise the Ashford Disability Opportunities Service. Copies of the statements received are included in full within appendix 1, including comments from the Director of Kent Adult Social Services. *A brief summary of this supporting information is included below.*

The information received from KASS confirms that no decision to close services currently delivered from Ashford DOS has been made and this would not happen until a through consultation process with stakeholders had taken place. However, in line with the

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national agenda, KCC has a policy to move towards Self Directed Support, Person Centred Planning and Personal Budgets, enabling people with learning disabilities to have more equal access to a wider range of services in their local community, moving away from institutional barriers.

The County Council's Cabinet approved the document "Better Days for People with Learning Disabilities in Kent" at its meeting of 16 June 2008. The document defines the Council's countywide framework to support local programmes of change and improvement of existing service provision for people with learning disabilities. The policy seeks to ensure access to mainstream services allowing choice on when and where support is needed. This includes community services / improvements proposed at Ashford Gateway Plus, Stour Leisure Centre, Tenterden Leisure Centre and Tenterden Gateway.

**Planning Policy**

11. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to consideration of the application:

(i) The adopted 2009 **South East Plan**: the most relevant Regional Planning Policies are:

**SP3** (Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance), **CC1** (Sustainable Development), **CC6** (Sustainable Communities and Character of the Environment), **H5** (Housing Design and Density), **T4** (Parking), **BE1** (Management for an Urban Renaissance) and **S6** (Community Infrastructure).

(ii) The adopted 2000 **Ashford Borough Local Plan**: the most relevant saved Local Plan Policies are:

**Policy HG5** Restricts residential development (of five or more dwellings) to sites shown on the proposals maps, except on 'windfall' sites which come forward where: the location allows easy access to sustainable transport, community and leisure facilities; the development does not displace other uses such as employment, leisure or community uses for which there is a need in the area;

(iii) The adopted 2008 **Ashford Borough Council Local Development Framework: Core Strategy**: the most relevant Framework Policies are:

**Policy CS1** Seeks sustainable development and a high quality of design that respects the local character and sense of place.

**Policy CS9** Seeks proposals that are of high quality design and demonstrates a positive response to character, ease of movement, legibility, mixed use, continuity, public space, flexibility, efficient use of natural resources.

**Policy CS15** Seeks new development to be provided with good access to public transport, adequate provision for walking and cycling and maximum parking standards in line with national policy.

**Policy CS18** Seeks to prevent the loss of community facilities, unless they are no longer required.

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**Consultations**

12. **Ashford Borough Council** – raises objection to the proposal on the following grounds:-

*'The proposal would be contrary to Policy HG5 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan, Policy CS1 of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and to Government advice in PPS1, and would therefore be harmful to interests of acknowledged planning importance for the following reasons:*

*The proposed development, in the absence of any evidence to demonstrate that there is no longer a need for the community facility in this location, would result in the loss of an important community facility to the detriment of the area, residents that use the facility and the community at large.'*

Following receipt of further information from the applicant in support of the proposals, which outline potential future plans to modernise the existing service provision on site, the Borough Council continues to maintain its objection. The Borough Council's Planning Department considers that, *'the proposal would result in the loss of an important community facility in South Ashford for which a clear need appears to still exist. If the centre is to be closed for its current use then alternative community uses should be considered. Failure to do so results in the loss of a community facility in an existing 'Hub' of such facilities which would be unacceptable'*

The Borough Planning Officer also states that, *'the offer of a condition on the grant of any outline planning permission would not work as it would fail the 6 tests<sup>1</sup>.'* An alternate community facility in South Ashford (of a similar size) would first need to be secured before planning permission for the flats could be granted to ensure no overall loss. The Officer considers that *'the current site is ideal for continued use as a community facility and there appears to be little justification for its relocation.'*

**Divisional Transportation Manager** – no comments received, any views received prior to Committee meeting will be reported verbally.

**Environment Agency** – confirm the application has low environmental risk and due to workload prioritisation are unable to make a full response to the application.

**Local Members**

13. Mr. J. Wedgbury, the local County Member for Ashford South was notified of the application on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

**Publicity**

14. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice and the notification of 31 neighbouring properties.

**Representations**

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<sup>1</sup> Circular 11/95 on The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions states six tests for a lawful condition – necessary / relevant to planning / relevant to the development to be permitted / enforceable / precise / reasonable in all other respects.

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15. Two letters of representation commenting on the application have been received, one from a local resident and one on behalf Ashford Mencap. The main points raised can be summarised as follows:
- Considers that the consultation period set by Kent Adult Social Services on the future of the existing services is ongoing and planning applications, speculative or otherwise, should not be accepted or advertised until the consultation period has expired;
  - Ashford Mencap raises concern at the way this delicate matter has been handled; they suggest that the County Council is not listening to what people who use the facility want;
  - Raises concern that local people had been told no decision on the closure of the Day Centre would be made until suitable alternatives were in place;
  - Raises concern for the vulnerable people using the facility whose lives revolve around the Day Centre, many of whom have attended the facilities for the past forty years;
  - Raises concern that the proposed facilities are not large enough to accommodate the existing clients of the Centre, and that a permanent base is essential, where they can meet and interact together;
  - Considers the New Gateway Plus Site proposed on the Ashford Library site to be inappropriate, raising concerns about the proposed use of the top floor including fire safety considerations, does not consider this provision to be a decent alternative to the current facilities.

**Discussion**

16. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. In considering this proposal, the Development Plan Policies outlined in paragraph (11) above are particularly relevant.
17. In my opinion, the main determining issues relate to the following points:
- Land use and community facilities considerations;
  - Layout;
  - Access and parking;
18. The application seeks outline planning permission for 12 one bed supported apartments for young people. The proposed development would potentially result in the demolition of an existing County Council building that houses the Ashford Disability Opportunities Service. This Social Service is currently under review and is proposed to be modernised and possibly relocated. The application is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee as a result of objections received from Ashford Borough Council, Ashford Mencap and a local resident, as identified in paragraphs (12 & 15) above.
19. As this is an outline application, it is the principle of the proposed development that the applicant is seeking to establish. The application includes details of the layout and access for formal consideration at this stage. Should Members be minded to grant planning permission detailed matters of scale, appearance and landscaping would be reserved for consideration at a later stage.



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**Land use and community facilities considerations**

20. One of the key determining factors in the context of this application is the use of the site and the provision of community facilities, including the impact the proposed development could have on existing uses. Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development seeks proposals that promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban development through making suitable land available for economic, social and environmental objectives to improve quality of life, protecting and enhancing natural and historic environments, ensuring high quality development, and ensuring development supports existing communities with equal opportunities and access for all citizens to jobs, health, housing, education, shops, leisure and community facilities. South East Plan Policies CC1 and S6 seek sustainable and socially inclusive communities, encouraging a mixed use of community facilities, ensuring appropriate provisions are made available to all sections of the community. Ashford Borough Local Plan Policy HG5 seeks to ensure residential development on windfall sites has good access to sustainable transport, community and leisure facilities, does not displace other uses such as community uses, and does not result in town cramming. Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Policies CS1 and CS18 seek sustainable development that prevents the loss of community facilities.
21. Views received from Ashford Borough Council, alongside Ashford Mencap and a local resident raise objection to the application on the grounds of the potential loss of the Ashford Disability Opportunities Service as a community facility. Should the proposed apartment blocks be afforded planning permission and subsequently delivered on site the development would necessitate the demolition of the existing building.
22. The applicant, Kent Adult Social Services, who are also the service provider for the existing facilities provided at the Ashford DOS, has clearly indicated that no decision on the future of the Ashford DOS has been taken at this stage. Under national and local government policy and priorities, the Kent Adult Social Services Directorate is committed to modernising services for people with learning disabilities across the county. The aim of this process is to provide opportunities for people with a learning disability, as full citizens, to have access to mainstream services including leisure, education and work opportunities. The applicant states that should a decision be made to modernise and potentially relocate the Ashford DOS, the existing service users that attend the site would remain supported by trained staff in activities tailored to individual person centred plans. New and improved facilities are proposed at Ashford Gateway Plus, Tenterden Gateway, alongside a commitment to make Ashford Borough's Leisure Centres more accessible and usable for people with a learning disability and other people with physical disabilities.
23. It should be noted that the supported housing proposed in this outline application would provide an improvement to the community infrastructure available to the Ashford area, providing starter homes for vulnerable young adults, including young adults with learning disabilities. Whilst the facilities proposed would not be a like for like replacement for the existing use, the supported housing would benefit the local community. The proposed flats would form part of a countywide PFI proposal to provide an additional 228 apartments for vulnerable people across Kent.
24. I note concerns raised by Ashford Borough Council and Ashford Mencap about the potential loss of an existing community facility that there is a demonstrated need for. The Ashford Local Plan and Core Strategy Policies outlined above presume against the loss of existing community facilities. The delivery of social services including the Ashford DOS comes under the responsibility of Kent Adult Social Services and any decision to

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change / modernise the service provided across the county is beyond the direct control of the planning system and is subject to a separate consultation and decision making process. It is clear from the information provided that KASS are clearly seeking to improve the quality of the services provided to people with learning difficulties through a modernisation process by providing a more individual service, moving away from the more traditional institutional approach. This approach accords with the provisions set out in PPS1 and the South East Plan that seek to create socially inclusive communities, providing equal opportunities for all. I am satisfied that acceptable provisions would be put in place to ensure any decision on the future of the Ashford DOS would safeguard the needs of the people attending the site providing suitable alternate arrangements where appropriate. The application indicates that if after full consultation it is decided that the existing services provided at the Ashford DOS should be retained then, as applicant for the proposed supported apartments (KASS) would seek to find a suitable alternate location for the apartment development. The applicant has also stated that they would be prepared to accept a condition on any decision notice that restricted the redevelopment of the site until such time as appropriate replacement facilities for the existing community use are made available.

25. The Ashford Borough Council Planning Officer's views (included above) are that to place a condition on any planning permission restricting the use of the land until such time as alternate facilities for the provision of the Ashford DOS are made available would be unlawful. This comment is made on the basis that the condition would fail the six tests set out in Circular 11/95 on the Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions. Guidance on the interpretation of this Circular issued by the *then* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in November 2002, offers advice on conditions worded in a negative (Grampian) form, prohibiting development until a specific action has been taken. The advice in Circular 11/95 on conditions depending on other's actions (Annex paragraphs 38 and 39), says that it is unreasonable to impose a condition worded in a positive form which developers would be unable to comply with themselves, or which they could comply with only with the consent or authorisation of a third party. Although it would be *ultra vires* to require works which the developer has no powers to carry out, or which would need the consent or authorisation of a third party, it may be possible to achieve a similar result by a condition worded in a negative form, prohibiting development until a specified action has been taken. This is appropriate only if there are at least reasonable prospects of the action in question being performed within the time-limit imposed by the permission.
26. Ashford Borough Local Plan Policy HG5, and Local Development Frame Work: Core Strategy Policy CS18 seek to preserve existing community uses where there is a proven need. On this basis, should Members be minded to permit this application, I would suggest that such a condition would be necessary, relevant to the development being permitted, enforceable (in that tangible new facilities would need to be provided before use of the land could taken place), precise and reasonable. Given that the applicant is also the existing service provider and has accepted the possibility of such a condition, in my opinion, the use of a negatively worded condition would be appropriate. In this case, I therefore consider that such a condition would pass the six tests set out in Circular 11/95 and recommend that an appropriately worded condition be placed on any outline planning permission.
27. Subject to the inclusion of a condition as advised above, I consider that there would be no detrimental impact on the social service provision to the Ashford area as a result of the proposed development. Arguably the modernisation of the Ashford DOS and the

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provision of new supported housing would enhance and broaden the community facilities being made available to the community.

28. As well as raising concerns over the loss of an existing service, the Borough Council has indicated that if the Ashford DOS were to be relocated the existing building on site should be retained for an alternate community use, particularly given the proximity of other community services opposite the site. These facilities include a medical and community centre that form a 'hub' of services for the local community. Whilst the supported housing proposed would not provide facilities that are directly accessible by the wider general public on a day to day basis (enhancing the 'hub'), arguably this is also the case with the existing Ashford DOS; both uses provide specific services that benefit vulnerable people within the community. The provision of supported housing would assist in creating a mixed and socially inclusive community that seeks equal opportunities and a better quality of life for all in line with the principles of sustainable development. On this basis, I am not in a position to support the Borough Council's argument that the existing building should be retained for an alternate community use, and conclude that the changes in the use of the site would be acceptable, subject to the agreed condition that the site should not be redeveloped until suitable alternate facilities are made available for the Ashford DOS.

**Layout**

29. No objections have been received concerning the specific layout of the proposed apartment building. In considering this aspect of the application, South East Plan Policy SP3 seeks proposals that are consistent with the principles of sustainable development; Policies H5, BE1 and S6 seek to improve the built environment by ensuring the provision of community infrastructure and housing in accessible locations that build upon local character. Ashford Borough Local Plan Policy HG5 seeks a good standard of design that does not result in 'town cramming'. Local Core Strategy Policies CS1 and CS9 seek sustainable development with a high quality design that respects local character.
30. On this basis, consideration should be given as to whether the proposed layout respects the character of the locality in terms of general size and location of the building, compatibility with neighbouring buildings and open spaces, including whether the proposed apartment building would be likely to impact on residential amenities through loss of light, overlooking, or creating an unacceptable sense of enclosure.
31. Although the building is proposed approximately 10 metres to the east of the nearest flank elevation of residential property, the apartments would be of a similar scale to the existing development, shown over two floors with a pitched roof rising to approximately 10 metres. Whilst the building would have a greater mass than the residential property in the vicinity, the size of the building would not be unacceptable in this location. The layout proposed would respect the character and arrangement of the existing street scene by following an established building line fronting onto Stanhope Road. Provided the final design of any building took account of the surrounding properties, there should, in my view, be no detriment to residential amenities. The façade of the closest residential property to the north-west on St Stephen's Walk would be approximately 22m away at an angle to the proposed building. The combination of the distance, and the retention of a number of trees on the site boundary, would ensure there would be not be an unacceptable impact on privacy through overlooking.
32. I therefore consider that the proposed layout would respect the context of the site, would not be harmful to the street scene, or to the residential amenities of nearby dwellings and

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that the maximum scale of the development would respect the suburban character. In my opinion the layout of the development is acceptable in the context of the Development Plan Policies in place.

**Access and parking**

33. The South East Plan Policy T4 encourages integration with public transport networks and provision of cycle parking, and seeks residential development to apply guidance set out in Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing with regard to vehicle parking provisions. PPS3 encourages efficient use of land coupled with parking standards that reflect local circumstances. Policy CS15 of the Ashford Borough Local Development Framework: Core Strategy seeks parking standards inline with national guidance.
34. The site is located off St Stephen's Walk an unclassified local distribution road. The proposed apartments would use an established vehicle access point, providing parking spaces for 10 cars with an additional 4 disabled access bays and a drop off point. The site is located in a residential area of South Ashford and has good access to the local footpath network and bus routes.
35. The provision of 12 apartments at this location is likely to generate substantially fewer movements than the existing Ashford DOS that provides for 50 service users per day plus staff. I am satisfied that the off street car parking provision proposed would be acceptable considering the proposed land use. On this basis, I raise no objection to the application on the highways or access grounds, subject to conditions ensuring the provision of the car parking prior to completion of the development and details of appropriate facilities to accommodate cycling.

**Conclusion**

36. In conclusion, I consider that the outline planning application for a proposed apartment building would not have a significant detrimental impact on the character or amenities of the surrounding built environment. I note that the changes proposed to the existing use of the site are subject to an independent review process and that these changes are not driven by this application. The applicant has agreed to accept a condition that restricts any redevelopment of the site until such time as appropriate replacement facilities have been provided to the community. I therefore have no objection to the application on the grounds of loss of existing community facilities. The replacement supported apartments would provide supported housing for vulnerable young people which would offer a benefit to the community in meeting a need established by Ashford Borough Council's Housing Department. I therefore do not consider that the use of the land would change to the detriment of the community or local environment. The proposed apartment building would result in a reduction in people attending the site, which should reduce traffic in the area and I am satisfied that the car parking provision would be acceptable. Taking into account the provisions of the Development Plan and material considerations raised by consultees, I recommend that outline planning permission be granted subject to the conditions set out in the recommendation below.

**Recommendation**

37. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions, including the following:
  - standard time conditions for an outline permission;

## Item D4

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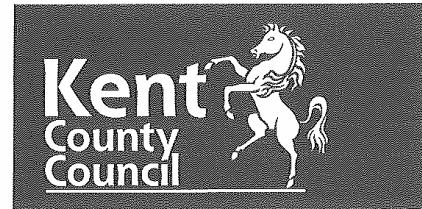
- the submission of reserved matters relating to scale, design and landscaping;
- the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted layout and access arrangements;
- no development to occur on site unless suitable alternate community services are provided, as set out in the statement received from Kent Adult Social Services;
- the height of the building not to exceed 10 metres;
- measures to be taken if contamination not previously identified on site is found;
- tree protection measures;
- details of all hard landscaping including fencing proposed on site;
- details of foul and surface water drainage;
- hours of operation during construction;
- dust suppression measures;
- measures to ensure no mud is deposited on the public highway;
- no external lighting to be installed without prior approval;
- the provision of vehicle parking spaces prior to first occupation;
- the provision of cycle parking; and
- the use of the building be restricted solely for the use applied for.

Case officer – James Bickle	01622 221068
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Background documents - See section heading
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Statement received from Kent Adult Social Services in support of the planning application.



James Bickle  
Planning Officer  
Planning Applications Department  
IH-1 Invicta House  
County Hall  
Maidstone  
Kent  
ME14 1XX

Kent Adult Social Services  
Brenchley House  
123 – 135 Week Street  
Maidstone  
Kent  
ME14 1RF  
Telephone: 01622 694898

Ask for: David Weiss  
Your ref:  
Our ref:  
Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2009

Dear James,

**Planning Application - Ashford SEC - AS/09/102**

I have been asked to provide a clear commitment that the Kent Adult Social Services Directorate will continue to develop services for people in Ashford with a learning disability including those who attend the Ashford Day Opportunities Service (DOS) Centre.

I also endorse the Additional Statement to the application made by David Weiss, Head of Public Private Partnerships & Property Team, which is attached.

Kent Adult Social Services Directorate in line with national and local government policy and priorities is modernising services such as Ashford DOS across Kent.

The strategy set out in the Valuing People Now (Jan. 2009) states:

*"The vision remains as set out in Valuing People in 2001: that all people with a learning disability are people first with the right to lead their lives like any others, with the same opportunities and responsibilities, and to be treated with the same dignity and respect. They and their families and carers are entitled to the same aspirations and life chances as other citizens."*

Therefore, the transformation of services which includes self directed support and personal budgets with the option of direct payments will improve choice and control and increase the opportunities for people with learning disabilities, as full citizens, to access mainstream services with appropriate support.

Oliver Mills  
Managing Director

**KENT ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Current service users at Ashford DOS will have significantly improved local services, through service design and through adaptations and extra facilities in mainstream locations and these will also be assessable to a much greater number of people than currently attend Ashford DOS. The intention is that services will not be constrained to core weekday hours, as they are now, but will also be available evenings and weekends.

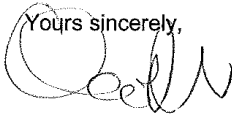
The range, volume and availability of services will therefore increase substantially in the next few years in response to individual person-centred plans, and this will include areas such as health, leisure, sport, social activities, self run services, education and employment within local communities. Examples of these areas will include the planned Ashford Gateway Plus, leisure centres and new or existing community hubs. They will remain supported by trained staff in activities as required.

Details of the service improvements currently planned are set out in the attached Additional Statement and these will be further developed following the ongoing service discussions with partners, relatives and the people who use the service.

Therefore, there will be a clear and demonstrable improvement in the services available for people with learning disabilities and others with disabilities.

My Department is fully committed to drive this improvement forward and with our partners and service users will ensure it is fully delivered in Ashford and across Kent.

Yours sincerely,



Oliver Mills  
Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services

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**Planning Application - Ashford SEC - AS/09/102****Additional Statement**

I am writing to clarify the alternative services that will be provided if and when a proposal to vary the services currently delivered from Ashford DOS is approved.

No decision to close services currently delivered from Ashford DOS has been made and this would need to go through a consultation process with all Stakeholders.

However, in line with the national agenda, KCC has a policy to move towards Self Directed Support, Person Centred Planning, Personal Budgets with the option of Direct Payments and the Kent Card, enabling people with a learning disability to have more equal access to a wider range of services in their local community and to overcome the institutional barriers that prevent them accessing community services.

Therefore, following further research, planning, consultation and agreement on the formal proposal and subject to the approval by KCC, the services will potentially be relocated from Ashford DOS. In the meantime, services will continue to be expanded in an integrated way with an emphasis on community settings.

**BACKGROUND****Current Use of Ashford DOS**

Ashford DOS Centre was built in 1962. It currently provides day activities for 63 individuals with a learning disability from the Ashford District. The service currently operates core hours Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm

The current Service Level Agreement is for 50 placements per day and the average attendance is approximately 43 per day.

In general terms people arrive at the centre by KCC transport or with family carers. They participate in a number of activities mainly at the Centre and these include media studies, short mat bowls, art and exercise.

Service users usually leave by 4pm and there are rarely any activities after 4pm or at weekends. The pattern of delivery will have been similar for the last 47 years.

There are currently 26 staff employed at the Centre. These include ancillary staff i.e. transport drivers and escorts plus a handyperson and kitchen staff. Current contracts are made up of part time and full time hours.



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The Gross Internal Floor Area of the current building is 1080 m2.

This is a service that is not open to the wider community and service users have to be assessed as being eligible for services.

This approach to day services for people with learning disabilities is considered in national and local policy documents as part of the institutional barriers where it is difficult to encourage participation in integrated community facilities.

As the Valuing People White Paper noted:

*“For decades, services for people with learning disabilities have been heavily reliant on large, often institutional, day centres. These have provided much needed respite for families, but they have made a limited contribution to promoting social inclusion or independence for people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities attending them have not had opportunities to develop individual interests or the skills and experience they need in order to move into employment.”*

Therefore, instead it is important to ensure people with learning disability are able, as full citizens, to access mainstream services including leisure, education and work opportunities.

The move away from reliance on services at Ashford DOS through the Good Day Programme:

- will give people more access to mainstream services and improve the range of services and the time people can access them with support as required, so people can choose what they do during the day, evenings and weekends
- will ensure individuals have the support they choose when and where they need it
- will ensure that they are equal citizens in their local community
- will enable them to have opportunities to lead a full and meaningful life.

In practical terms the services will be assessable to a much greater number of people than currently attend Ashford DOS and the services will not be constrained to core weekday hours but also be available evening and weekends.

**Policy Details**

The background to the policies underpinning the Good Day programme and the proposals in Ashford are set out in the following National and Local Documents.

**NATIONAL PRIORITIES**

- Our Health, Our Care, Our Say White Paper
- Valuing People and Valuing People Now

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As noted above the Valuing People White paper required a move away from large, day centres and the White paper goes on to state that:

*The Government wishes to see a greater emphasis on individualised and flexible services which will:*

- *Support people in developing their capacity to do what they want;*
- *Help people develop social skills and the capacity to form friendships and relationships with a wider range of people;*
- *Enable people to develop skills and enhance their employability;*
- *Help communities welcome people with learning disabilities.*

*These problems will be addressed through a five year programme to support local councils in modernising their day services. Our aim will be to ensure that the resources currently committed to day centres are focused on providing people with learning disabilities with new opportunities to lead full and purposeful lives. Securing the active involvement of people with learning disabilities and their families in redesigning services will be essential to the success of the programme. The Government recognises that, for many families, day centres have provided essential respite from the day to day demands of caring. The services that replace them must result in improvements for both users and their families. The needs of people with profound or complex disabilities will be carefully considered as part of the modernisation programme.*

**LOCAL PRIORITIES**

- Active Lives
- Towards 2010
- Supporting Independence Programme
- PSA 2 target 9 (employment)
- Individualised Budgets and Self-Directed Support
- Employment Strategy (LD)
- Modernising Learning Disability Day Services in Kent

The policies and statements, both public and internal, setting out the Good Day Programme of which Ashford DOS is part, are well established.

The Cabinet approved the programme at its Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2008. A copy of the report is attached as Appendix 1 and the Minute of the Decision is attached as Appendix 2.

The Good Day Programme website is accessible on

[www.kent.gov.uk/SocialCare/disability/Ashford+Good+Day+Project.htm](http://www.kent.gov.uk/SocialCare/disability/Ashford+Good+Day+Project.htm)

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**COMMUNITY SERVICES BEING DEVELOPED**

The following community based services are being commissioned as part of the delivery of the Good Day Programme in Ashford.

**Ashford Gateway Plus**

There will be five specific areas for people with Learning Disabilities:

- Two multi purpose rooms with cables for computer and internet use.
- One other area proposed as a Sensory Bath area.
- One other area proposed as a Sensory Room.
- One Kitchen area for training people to cook and prepare food.

Within the Ashford Gateway Plus there will be a Café and it is planned that this will provide work experience and employment for people with a learning disability.

**Stour Leisure Centre**

Plans are being developed with The Ashford Leisure Trust in order to make Ashford Leisure Centres more accessible and usable for people with a learning disability and others with physical disabilities.

This will include Adult Changing Facilities and other adaptations. Funding has been secured by KCC for this work.

**Tenterden Leisure Centre**

Plans are being developed so that it is fully accessible and usable for people with a learning disability and others with physical disabilities.

**Tenterden Gateway**

This is now open and Adult Changing Facilities have been included and are accessible and usable for people with a learning disability and others with physical disabilities.

In addition adaptations may be funded for new or existing Community Hubs or facilities and this will be a programme across Ashford over the next 5 years.

People with a learning disability will remain supported by staff in the community for activities they participate in as set out in their support plan.

For people currently using services at Ashford DOS the range, volume and availability of services will increase substantially in the next few years.

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The activities that people will access to in the community will depend on individual person centred plans and may include:

- Employment.
- Leisure and sport: gym, swimming, golf etc.
- Full use of the Gateway Plus: Library.
- Education and Training: Adult and Further Education Colleges etc.
- Visits and participation in areas of individual interest: cinema, pubs clubs, arts and crafts theatre etc.
- Social activities to meet friends and maintain relationships.
- Running services with support as required: community hub, advocacy, drop-in etc.
- Community groups.

People can choose the support of trained staff in participating in these activities as and when they require it.

**THE SOCIAL HOUSING PROPOSED IN THE OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION**

The application is for Outline Planning Consent for supported housing for vulnerable adults in Ashford.

Ashford Borough Council has identified a need for Supported Housing for young people and this is likely to include young adults with a learning disability who are setting out on their journey to become as independent as possible and learn how to live in their own home.

This Supported Housing development, therefore, will add to the community infrastructure to support vulnerable people including those with a learning disability in Ashford.

The Outline Planning Application is to establish if this site can be considered as appropriate for possible development at a later date.

The Outline Planning Application on all sites is a precondition to accessing central government consent for the whole Excellent Homes for All Housing PFI. There are 228 apartments for vulnerable people in the project, including seven Extra Care schemes for older people in the project.

When Outline Planning Consent is given to the project on all sites across the County the project can progress to advertise for a Registered Social Landlord Housing provider and construction partners. Following this, full Planning Applications would be made in early 2011 and if approved, actual construction need not begin until 2013.

It is important to explain that if Ashford DOS services on site are still being delivered then an alternative site will need to be found or this element of the

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scope of the PFI project reconfigured. However, at this point all the other apartments for vulnerable people across Kent would have been able to be delivered.

**CONCLUSION**

The development of Social Housing in the Excellent Homes for All PFI does not cause any change to the services carried out at Ashford DOS. Changes at Ashford DOS should they take place are the result of the national and local Valuing People agenda for services to people with a learning disability.

If, after a formal proposal is made and consultation has been undertaken, Kent County Council decides not to change the services at Ashford DOS it is accepted by the applicant that the development of Social Housing cannot take place as set out in the Outline Planning Application and an alternative will be found or the Excellent Homes for All PFI project reconfigured.

However, it is still important for the future of Housing and Services for vulnerable people that Outline Planning is secured on the site in order that the PFI project as a whole across Kent is progressed and to establish if Social Housing could be developed on the Ashford DOS site when it may be available in the future.

If a condition were placed on the application to state that no development could occur unless access to suitable alternative community services was already in place, this would be acceptable to the applicant. A robust method to measure this can be agreed with Kent Adult Social Services.

**David Weiss**  
**Head of Public Private Partnership & Property Team**  
**Kent Adult Social Services**