

The Hesley Group

Low Laithes Village – Proposed Development

Business Case and Development Considerations

Background

January 2010 – 8,064,000 young people were enrolled in education in England; 1,470,900 (18.24%) of whom were identified as having a Statement of Educational Needs; 220,890 (1.78%) had a Statement of Special Educational Needs and a total of 7,350 (0.09%) were receiving education in an independent special school, either on a day or residential basis.

The Special school sector is highly fragmented and generally immature with the vast majority of providers operating from a single site. The barriers to entry into the independent special school sector are significant due to a number of factors such as; the onerous regulatory backdrop, the high cost of acquiring suitable premises, the relatively small number of experienced and senior individuals in managerial and leadership positions to operate such facilities, the high level of referrals which are made primarily on reputation and established purchaser relationships with trusted providers.

In recent years a number of factors have contributed to a growth in the demand for care facilities in the private sector for adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems. These include;

- The Care in the Community Act enabled placement of individuals in non-institutional settings – this continues the established Governmental policy of reducing reliance on hospital based long-term accommodation
- In common with other areas of the care industry, the number of local authority facilities is in decline

The independent sector now accounts for 86% of bed capacity in the learning disability and mental health illness sectors which represents a complete reversal of the situation pre-1989. Apart from the transfer of beds from the NHS to the private sector, the most obvious recent trend has been for the

placement of residents into various forms of supported living, to take advantage of the Supporting People Grant in England.

While some local authorities may seek to apply a general policy objective to repatriate individuals to their local area of origin, the specialist nature of the services provided by the Hesley Group is such that few local authorities, or even consortiums of local authorities, can support a specialist facility and the specialist services provided by Hesley Group have assumed a national significance in provision of this type of care.

Hesley Group

Based in Yorkshire, Hesley Group is a long established provider of high quality education and care services to children and young adults with complex needs, severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour, arising mainly from Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

The Company began to operate from Hesley Hall in 1975 and established a well-reputed service in provision of residential care for children with various behavioural difficulties. During the early 1990s, and in direct response to a significantly increased demand from local authorities for these more specialised services, Hesley Group began to focus increasingly upon developing care services in South Yorkshire for younger people with severe autistic disorders.

Gaining an increasingly acknowledged expertise in this field, Hesley Group embarked on an extensive redevelopment programme to provide residential schools and homes for the more complex cases which saw the opening of further special schools at Wilsic Hall at Wadworth and at Fullerton House, a converted hospital at Dovenby. These schools provided single bedroom accommodation for 36 and 46 children and young people respectively in small living groups together with all associated classrooms, recreational and therapy facilities.

Operating from these facilities, Hesley Group quickly developed a strong reputation with placing authorities and families alike and has enjoyed a significant and ongoing demand for places. This reputation has been founded upon a philosophy to provide a personalised, dedicated service based in high quality environments. Experience and good practise had proven that smaller groups of young people and students in personalised living groups can achieve

tremendous improvements in their development, behaviour, habits and potential. Similarly, the homely atmosphere engendered in each Hesley Group establishment is structured to avoid the institutionalised approach and faults apparent at many alternative care providers.

Young people cared for by the Hesley Group are given every opportunity to achieve their full potential in a safe and secure environment. In order to encourage a more independent and self-sufficient lifestyle it is necessary to create an environment within which they can continue to practise and experience positive risk-taking to gain the living skills which will allow them to progress gradually, wherever appropriate, into a less closely supported and more independent setting. As they progress and develop their skills there is a need for them to move into more "normalised" settings with the ultimate goal of eventually moving towards a life closer to or within the wider community.

Overall the level of acuity on admission is very high and this is indicated by the average length of stay of residents - which is 5.5 years for the School services and 6.5 years for the adult services and indicates the essential long-term nature of the care service which Hesley Group operates.

A high ratio of staff to residents is reflective of the complex and demanding nature of this work with the young people / residents. Care staff are on duty 24 hours of every day, 365 days of every year. This involves the operation of several duty teams for each group of residents. The work is often of a highly personal nature requiring a minimum of one staff member (sometimes more) caring for one resident at any given time. The majority of staff are employed to work on a rotating shift system of days and afternoons with some working on a separate night shift pattern.

Although residents / students within the establishment receive education, training and therapy from suitably qualified teachers, lecturers, psychologists, physiotherapists, OTs, etc the majority of the care is provided by support staff, who will be involved as an essential enabling part of every activity in which a resident is involved.

Low Laithes Village

Low Laithes Village was developed from a traditional farmstead and includes the original farmhouse now converted to offices, stone barns and outbuildings primarily used to provide communal facilities and a series of new buildings

arranged in courtyards providing living accommodation. The premises were registered in the later part of 2007 and provides a residential campus for younger adults with complex needs, challenging behaviours and severe learning disabilities arising from autism.

The property is ideally situated in a semi-rural characterful and discrete location well suited to the services and care provided. Access is via a private road which only serves Low Laithes Village (and occasional agricultural access) which provides a degree of privacy but is also close enough to local amenities and the transport network for residents and staff to use the local facilities. It is located approximately one and a half miles from Wombwell and three miles from the centre of Barnsley.

The Village complex includes a mixed range of flats and bungalows with a total registered capacity of 30 residential places. On site facilities include a village hall for general activities and indoor sports; an area providing residents with the opportunity to learn activities for daily living (ADL) including basic laundry, catering and domestic tasks; an activities suite with provision for IT work; a pottery kiln and an arts room; a dedicated area for horticulture including a poly-tunnel, planting beds etc. and an internal potting room/activity area.

There is currently no on-site provision of short-term accommodation for visiting families and given the national catchment and significance of the services provided, many visitors travel large distances to visit relatives and friends. Clearly an on-site provision for accommodation would be a significant benefit.

Low Laithes Village provides accommodation within single person apartments and bungalows including communal facilities such as lounges, kitchens and dining rooms. Due to the complexity of their condition and demands of many residents it is impossible for some of them to share more communal facilities and there is an increasing pressure and demand for more single person accommodation to be provided.

The increasing expectation that single person accommodation is provided has had a collateral effect of reducing availability of effective bed capacity at Hesley Village as several specifically demanding individuals have had to be accommodated within a two or even three bedroom property with the result

that other people are “blocked” from using those apparently spare beds and the effective overall bed capacity is reduced.

There is a further need for low rise (i.e. single storey) accommodation in view of the fact that a high proportion of the people being cared for have significant mobility constraints and issues of staff safety can be far better accommodated without having to negotiate stairs and achieve direct egress possible from various points around the building.

The proposed accommodation at Low Laithes Village is seen as a vital step towards maintaining and improving operational capacity across South Yorkshire and the wider area, and has been designed to give each resident their own separate and distinct living accommodation whilst retaining the opportunity for appropriate interaction with their neighbours within the Communal space. The new properties will all be single storey with their own front doors and garden areas in order to create a sense of space and well-being and is in keeping with the highly personalised nature of the care that is provided to individuals.

The Proposal

This proposal aims to enhance and build upon the services provided by the Hesley Group and address an identified need for additional single person accommodation, flexible respite care and accommodation for visiting families.

There is a need to provide additional living units to provide accommodation for both permanent residency and respite care. There is also a desire to provide on-site accommodation for visiting relatives. These improvements will require addition staff facilities, storage, and enhanced car parking.

The proposals include:

- The erection of a new building to provide 6No single storey one bedroom living units with a communal space,
- Staff facilities,
- The change of use of an ancillary building to form 2No one bedroom living units,
- The erection of 2No one bedroom living units to provide respite care,
- The erection of 2No 2 bed cottages which will provide temporary accommodation for visiting relatives,

- The extension of an existing maintenance workshop to provide storage, and
- Realignment of the access road and alterations to the existing car parking.

Low Laithes Village is located within the Green Belt as identified by the current Barnsley MBC Local Development Plan which forms part of the Local Development Framework.

Initial discussions have taken place with members of the Local Authority Planning Department and it has been agreed, subject to final design that the proposals are not inappropriate development and can be considered to be 'limited infilling' within the Green Belt.

As such there is no requirement to demonstrate that very special circumstances apply to justify development within the Green Belt. However, great care has been taken with design, location and scale of new buildings so as to ensure this infill development does not harm open character or appearance of the Green Belt in this location.

- The proposed new development is of limited scale and extent and is closely contained within the established curtilage of existing buildings and former buildings which occupied the site prior to the development of Low Laithes Farm in 2007 , comprising only a limited infill to existing areas of development. There will be no encroachment whatsoever into the open country-side.
- The proposed new buildings are all of single storey, low rise construction and are of a discreet appearance consistent with the local vernacular as is befitting for their intended purpose. Materials and construction will be of a high quality and will be sympathetically designed to match and enhance the existing buildings and environment.
- As a principle, the general "appropriateness" of such development as is proposed in this case has already been previously acknowledged by consents granted to the Hesley Group for similar works at Hesley Village Nr Tickhill in Doncaster and Wilsic Hall at Wadworth.
- This proposal is in accordance with the principles established by the precedent consents and will allow Hesley Group to consolidate and

preserve the acknowledged depth of expertise and knowledge-base that has been established over recent decades.

- The proposed buildings will be set in areas already screened by established planting and landscaping and will benefit from further localised planting.
- As such the proposed development will not harm the openness and character of the green belt in this location, being effectively invisible to the public or other land-owners. Existing car park provision will be improved to serve the demands of the proposal with improvements to the access road including the provision of additional passing places where required.
- Hesley Group has been providing specialist residential services from the Hesley Village site for almost forty years and this proposal will allow it to expand its provision of care within the wider area. The proposal would complement the existing facilities which are available at Low Laithes Village and would provide essential additional resources and capacity to serve the needs of younger people with autistic and related conditions.
- There is an acknowledged shortage of suitable accommodation to care for younger people with conditions and the proposed new accommodation will allow scope for more personalised care and development of individuals in a dedicated environment which will continue the opportunity for them to make a significant improvement to the quality of their lives.
- On an economic basis alone, the continuation of this progress makes good sense given the resources which have been invested in achieving present results.
- If implemented, the proposal would provide a mix of approximately 50 full/part time jobs with the potential to inject around £600,000 per annum into the local economy improving the sustainability of the site which is in addition to those already employed at Low Laithes Village. These new jobs would encompass a variety of activities from care and support workers to managerial and secretarial/administrative roles, together with catering, domestic and housekeeping staff and would include opportunities for further employment in therapeutic professions

including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, etc.

- It is important that the care provided by Hesley Group is not viewed as an alternative to “living in the community” but is part of an integrated and essential step towards it. It is essential that the successful work carried out and the consequential advances made by this client group can be maintained and the current expansion proposals of the facilities provided at Low Laithes Village and the Hesley Group as a whole will help to achieve this.

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