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New Staploe Building Planning Application Frequently Asked Questions

5 February 2024

Version Change Summary

VERSION	DATE	KEY CHANGES MADE
1.0	10 Jan 2024	First complete version
1.1	5 Feb 2024	Final adjustment to structure prior to publication. Updated table showing facilities provided.



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What is being proposed?

Being able to provide good quality primary care services to our local community is our key priority. Staploe Medical Centre, operated by Mereside Medical, requires a major upgrade to the facilities it uses to serve its patients and to support the recent and future growth of the residents in Soham and surrounding areas including Barcham, Isleham, Barway, Red Lodge, Chippenham, Upware, Fordham and Wicken.

The scheme being proposed is a sustainable (BREEAM excellent), fit for purpose building which is approximately double the size of the current building and the capacity to serve around 32,000 patients.

Who is making the proposal?

The detailed planning application for the new medical centre is a joint application between Mereside Medical and This Land. This is because the proposal includes land owned by Mereside Medical (the current site) and This Land (the new site).

What facilities will the new medical centre provide?

The proposed new medical centre is approximately twice as large as the current building, allowing us to more than double the capacity for face to face consultations. The number of staff that can be accommodated will also double, providing suitable facilities for staff to carry out remote consultations or any other aspect of the patient care journey. There will be two dedicated rooms to support trainee clinicians (GP registrars, nurses, advanced practitioners).

As an accredited Training Organisation this is hugely important to us, the student experience, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the clinical workforce. The table overleaf summarises the key facilities that the new building will provide:



Table summarising key facilities provided by the new Staploe Medical Centre

Feature	Now	New building
Total space (m ² / sq. ft)	952 / 10,247	1,948 / 20,968
Pharmacy / Dispensary shared space (m ² / sq. ft)	90 / 968	160 / 1722
Digital rooms (multi-user, remote consultations only)	2	8
Face to face consultation rooms	16	20
Dedicated clinical training rooms	0	2
Maximum face to face appointments per day	378	822
Maximum face to face appointment hours per day	99	203
Clinical staff accommodated	23	44
All staff accommodated (excl. Pharmacy & Dispensary)	45	96
Parking spaces	74	107
Electric charge point spaces	0	10
Disabled parking spaces	3	7

How many patients will the new facility serve?

The current centre was designed for 13,000 patients, although we are currently serving around 24,000 people. The new facility has been sized to serve approximately 32,000, and importantly, with land available to further increase the building as required.

Where will the new facility be located?

It is essential that the new Staploe Medical Centre be central to Soham, and as close to the current building as possible. This is to ensure that the practice meets the NHS requirement to remain as accessible to patients as it is currently.

The size of plot required is also quite large (0.9ha / 2.2 acre). This is based on the size of the current plot (0.5ha / 1.2 acre) plus the extension area prescribed in the East Cambs Local Plan (0.4ha / 1 acre).

As we found during our Options Appraisal in 2021, there is no suitable plot in central Soham outside the Soham Eastern Gateway envelope or even on the outskirts, that is available and has the necessary supporting infrastructure (power, water, drainage, telecoms) within the urgent timeframe driven by our expanding patients' needs.



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How will the medical centre be accessed by patients?

We appreciate this has been a big concern to residents so we have had extensive discussions with all parties involved to understand how we can make the new centre be as accessible as the old one. An over-riding priority has been to ensure that the medical centre is operational and open to patients as quickly as possible whilst avoiding the risk of interrupting existing services.

The access to the medical centre is best summarised as follows:

1. Immediate term: Brewhouse Lane vehicular and pedestrian access.

The detailed planning application for the new medical centre shows how we will provide vehicular and pedestrian access to the medical centre by making use of the existing Brewhouse Lane access, extending it through our current site and joining up to the new location. This is the fastest way to ensure that patients can access the medical centre as soon as we are ready to open.

For this planning application to be successful, we must demonstrate a viable access plan that does not depend on the Soham Eastern Gateway roundabout and 'spine road'.

2. Medium term: A142 roundabout and SEG 'spine road'

Separate to the detailed planning application for the medical centre, the Soham Eastern Gateway outline plan details how – upon approval – work will start immediately to construct a new roundabout on the A142 and a 'spine road' passing through the entire SEG area and connecting to the medical centre car park. This is estimated to take 2-3 years from the start of construction of the roundabout and will reduce the traffic flow through Brewhouse Lane of patients, staff, ambulances, and delivery vehicles. This will be a permanent vehicular and pedestrian access road.

3. Longer term: secondary permanent vehicular and pedestrian access road connecting SEG to Brewhouse Lane.

The latest revision to the SEG outline plan shows that in addition to the main vehicular access via the new A142 roundabout, a secondary permanent vehicular and pedestrian access road can be installed through the current medical centre plot, connecting Soham Eastern Gateway to Brewhouse Lane and then Soham Town Centre. The SEG outline plan does not include a detailed application for this access road purely because the land that the road will be built on is outside of the SEG outline plan boundary and therefore cannot be considered by the ECDC planning office at this stage.



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What is the benefit of this approach?

Our detailed planning application for the new medical centre, including the vehicular access through Brewhouse Lane, makes it easier for everyone – patients, staff, District and County Councillors, and the East Cambs District Council planning office - to see how a permanent secondary vehicular and pedestrian access (the Staploe “Gateway”) can be delivered so that the policy requirement for East Cambs Local Plan is met AND patients will have maximum choice and accessibility to the new medical centre from the centre of town.

Will more staff be recruited for the new centre?

The existing medical centre was designed to serve 13,000 patients. The patient list has grown to around 24,000 now, and the staff to care for those patients has grown along with it. Through a combination of creative use of space and staff working remotely, we are very proud that we have been able to keep our patient list open to new registrations during this time.

We have the staff to care for this number of patients; we just do not have the space to accommodate them all in the current building or provide the space to deliver as many services and face to face appointments as we would like to. The number of staff needed is constantly under review and adjusted as required by the demand for services. This will continue with the new facility.

Being able to offer a modern, fit for purpose, and healthy workspace is a key pillar of successful recruitment and retention. We hope that having state of the art medical premises will further improve our recruitment offering, and Mereside Medical will become an even more attractive prospect for future staff.

What approvals are required to get an operational new medical centre building?

There are a number of approvals and other matters that require positive action, including planning requirements as well as NHS approvals. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Planning approval of the overarching Soham Eastern Gateway Outline Plan.
2. Planning permission for the full detailed plans for the new Medical Centre.
3. Community Infrastructure Levy support (CIL, i.e. capital funding from East Cambs District Council to support build costs). We can't apply for CIL without planning permission or commitment from our developer (Assura) to cover the rest of the build costs.
4. NHS Outline Business Case approval (secured in 2021).
5. NHS Full Business Case approval. This builds on the Outline Business Case, and includes a number of strict requirements, including NHS commitment to the long-term financing of the premises.



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What will happen if the new Medical Centre isn't built or is unduly delayed?

We know that the only plot of land that is large enough to accommodate a fit for purpose, future-proofed health care facilities is the plot that has been reserved within the Soham Eastern Gateway proposals. We must take action now to start the process to secure all the approvals required to deliver a new building as quickly as possible. In order to expedite this process, we have decided to submit a separate, planning application for the medical centre, in parallel with the Soham Eastern Gateway Outline application.

It is important to emphasise that:

- Soham Eastern Gateway must obtain planning consent in order for the land to be transferred to our developer, and the construction (haul) road to be built.
- We will not be able to apply for the Community Infrastructure Levy and NHS Full Business Case approvals until we have obtained planning permission for the Medical Centre.
- Building cannot start without NHS Full Business Case approval.

Should all of this not happen, or one of more of the approvals are unduly delayed, the implications for new patient registrations are almost unimaginable as we would have to look seriously at closing our list to new patients.

Closing our list to new registrations would be a terrible outcome and a last resort as far as we are concerned, particularly as housing continues to develop in our practice area. We are absolutely committed to serving our community in its entirety, and we have the staff to do so. We are confident our plans will enable us to serve our community well into the future.

Where are we currently?

Whilst a separate planning application for the new medical centre offers the fastest way forward, there are some inter-dependencies with the over-arching Soham Eastern Gateway application. This relates to the transfer of land to us for our new building and the provision of a road to access the building site.

Does the Soham Eastern Gateway also need to be approved?

The land for the new medical centre cannot be transferred to our chosen developer (Assura) until the Soham Eastern Gateway Outline Plan is approved. Transfer will be achieved via a section 106 condition (i.e. a condition in the legal document which details all of the obligations attached to granting the outline permission for Soham Eastern Gateway).



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Further to this, and to keep construction traffic for the medical centre away from central Soham and Broomhouse Lane, we will need to make use of a 'haul road' which is proposed as part of the Soham Eastern Gateway outline to direct construction traffic via the A142. Work to build this haul road will begin as soon as the Soham Eastern Gateway obtains planning consent.

The approval of Soham Eastern Gateway will again save us critical time, as the haul road can be built while we are securing our final financial approvals from the NHS. This means that we will be in a position to start building as soon as we secure all of the financial approvals.

Can we deliver the medical centre without Soham Eastern Gateway Outline plan being approved?

In short, no.

In order to build a fit for the future medical centre, with room to expand over time, and that our patients can readily access, requires a large plot of land that is centrally located in Soham.

The East Cambs Local Plan clearly states that the extension land for the medical centre is included in the Eastern Gateway policy. This is both central in location and large enough to enable a 'fit for the future' healthcare premises. There is no other plot of land in Soham that can meet the needs of our patients (present or future).

As the land is owned by This Land, and forms part of the Soham Eastern Gateway as described in the ECDC Local Plan, the land on which the medical centre will be built cannot legally be transferred to our developer until the Soham Eastern Gateway has been approved and the 'section 106 agreement' (i.e. the legal document which details all of the obligations attached to granting the outline permission for Soham Eastern Gateway) has been completed and has entered into force.

Why not just extend the current building?

After a formal Options Appraisal in 2021 as part of our Outline Business Case to the NHS, including considering the option to extend and refurbish the current building, the only viable option was a new building to house staff, equipment and provide services.

Further information of the options examined can be found in Appendix A.

Why make a full planning application for the Medical Centre now?

Our top priority is to deliver the medical centre as quickly as possible. Submitting a full detailed planning application now saves us time compared to waiting for Soham Eastern Gateway to be approved, and THEN submitting a so-called 'Reserved Matters Application'.



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The sooner we have planning permission, the sooner we can apply for Community Infrastructure Levy capital funding, and the sooner we can finalise our Full Business Case to the NHS for final approval. All of this needs to be in place before we can start building.

Alongside this, there are some long lead times for the installation of key utilities and infrastructure at the Soham Eastern Gateway site. Our full detailed planning application outlines how the new medical centre can be supplied with the necessary infrastructure (power, water, telecoms, drainage) and vehicular access (utilising the existing access through Brewhouse Lane) that are all independent of the utilities described in the Soham Eastern Gateway Outline Plan.

Who is our developer?

Our developer is Assura, a specialist Real Estate Investment Trust, who design, build, invest in and manage GP surgery, primary care and community healthcare buildings so the NHS has the places and spaces it needs. Assura are at the forefront of sustainability in the sector with long-term ambitions to be net zero carbon across their portfolio by 2040. Assura are the no.1 listed property business for long-term social impact.

If you see the name Assura on planning documents, rest assured they are working on our behalf.

When will the medical centre be up and running?

That largely depends on how quickly we can get through all of the approval stages (see previous question about this). The estimated build time from first breaking ground is around 14 months.

Before we can start work, we must secure all the approvals as quickly as possible then the best case scenario of being operational is late 2026.

However, meeting this timeframe will require everyone (all stakeholders, decision makers, and you, our patients) to work together to ensure this becomes a reality.

How can I get more involved?

We would recommend in the first instance that you contact our [Patient Participation Group](#). Their meetings are public and you can also consider joining the group more formally.

If you have any further queries please email cpicb.mereside.estates@nhs.net. While we cannot guarantee an individual response, we will endeavour to incorporate a response to your query in any future updates, including updates to these FAQs.

Please check our website (www.meresidemedical.nhs.uk) and our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/MeresideMedical) for updates.



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Who are Mereside Medical?

Mereside Medical is the new 'trading name' for the GP Partnership that holds the contracts for Staploe Medical Centre, Cathedral Medical Centre, and Haddenham Surgery. There are currently five partners: Dr Richard Brixey (Managing Partner), Dr Anthony Gunstone, Dr Antoinette Hadida-Savvas, Dr James Howard, and Dr Elizabeth Turner.

Appendix A – 2021 Options Appraisal

As part of any business case to the NHS for new healthcare facilities, it is a requirement to conduct a detailed Options Appraisal. The options we considered in our Outline Business Case (approved in 2021) are as follows.

Option	Assessment	Conclusion
Do nothing	<p>Significant ongoing maintenance costs and liabilities</p> <p>No improvement to current Practice conditions.</p> <p>Building too small for current list size.</p> <p>No scope for future population growth.</p> <p>Risk of practice reducing service provision and / or serving notice on contract.</p>	Not viable
Do minimum – refurb current building	<p>Will require relocation / decant of surgery facilities during refurbishment (high cost, no viable alternative premises nearby).</p> <p>Existing building is of poor quality and inefficient design.</p> <p>Building too small for current list size.</p> <p>Potentially high capital cost of refurbishment</p> <p>Limited scope for future population growth.</p> <p>Risk of practice reducing service provision and / or serving notice on contract.</p>	Not viable
Extend and refurb current building	<p>Discussed at key stakeholder meeting in Jan 2021 (NHS, This Land, District and County Councillors), with unanimous agreement that this is not a viable option for the following reasons:</p> <p>Significant disruption to patients and their experience of healthcare services during extended construction works. No nearby location to decant services to.</p> <p>Poor design of current building prevents space-efficient design compared to a new build, thus lower value for money for the NHS.</p> <p>In order to keep capital costs down extension would have to be built as single storey, which undermines futureproofing / extendibility of the site.</p> <p>Undermines vision of medical centre as an integrated community hub in the heart of a new development.</p>	Not viable.
New build in Soham Northern or Soham Southern Gateways, or other areas of Soham.	<p>Less central locations mean reduced accessibility for patients compared to current, thus risk of not being approved by the NHS.</p> <p>Soham Masterplan Vision and East Cambs Local Plan do not provide for healthcare facilities in either Gateway.</p> <p>There are no 0.9ha / 2.2 acre plots of land immediately available.</p>	Not viable.
New build at redundant garden centre location in Eastern Gateway	<p>Access would depend on construction of a new roundabout off the ring road, increasing the complexity of a planning application for this site, and overall delivery costs.</p> <p>Location would be very remote with poor public transport access.</p>	Not viable.
New build on dedicated plot within Eastern Gateway	<p>Safeguards a large (0.9ha / 2.2 acre) and central, accessible plot of land for Fit for the Future development of community hub facilities in line with wider health and social care aspirations.</p> <p>Delivers a building which is affordable to the NHS now, with space to expand in the future as patient demand requires it.</p> <p>Site access and supporting infrastructure can be delivered separately from and ahead of the delivery schedule for Soham Eastern Gateway.</p> <p>This is the most realistic option to deliver within 3 years.</p> <p>Complies with planning objectives of East Cambs Local Plan.</p>	Only viable option