DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Single storey rear extension to frontage building, single storey link between the 2 buildings
and single storey front and rear extensions to rear building



The Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living
Hitchin Road
Letchworth Garden City
Herts
SG6 3NA

1.0 The Proposal

1.1 This application seeks the following:

- The erection of a single storey rear extension to the 2 ½ storey frontage building.
- The erection of a single storey link access to join the front and rear buildings (to include a centralised reception area).
- Single storey front extension to the rear (Sadie) building to provide toilet facilities.
- The demolition of the existing garden room and a single storey rear extension to facilitate the erection of two classrooms on the rear of the Sadie building.
- Further vehicle parking, to include disabled spaces.

1.2 The application is accompanied by the following plans and supporting documents:

- Location plan
- Existing ground floor plan
- Existing elevations
- Proposed ground floor plan
- Proposed elevations
- Proposed site plan
- Arboricultural Report
- Topographical Survey
- Strategic aims of the Centre

2.0 The Site

2.1 The application site, known as the Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living, is located on the eastern side of Hitchin Road, to the south- west of the town of Letchworth and to the north-east of the town of Hitchin. The site is located within the Green Belt.

2.2 The Centre contains a number of buildings constructed originally as a hospital (formally known as Rosehill Hospital) around a central grassed courtyard area. The buildings comprise:

- a frontage two and a half storey building where the reception area is currently located along with a number of treatment rooms;
- the single storey Sadie building set to the rear of the frontage building which accommodates larger classrooms and the Nourish café;
- a former nurses' home which is not currently in use but is structurally sound;
- storage buildings.

In addition, two dwelling-houses with associated outbuildings in separate ownership, are located adjacent to (north of) the site.

2.3 Access to the Centre is via Hitchin Road to an internal roadway within the site which is currently utilised as a one-way in and out system. The larger parking area is located adjacent to the northern boundary of the site and can accommodate 51 vehicles. Further parking areas are located to the south-west of the buildings and adjacent to the frontage building. Approximately 80 vehicles can be accommodated on the site.

2.4 The site is level but there is a distinct ground level differential between the road and the grassed central courtyard in the eastern corner that approximates 80mm at the highest point in the eastern corner and declines gradually in a southerly and northerly direction.

3.0 Background

3.1 There have previously been a number of planning applications at the site which have included an extension to the Sadie building, the use of part of the Sadie building as a café, an extension to the car park, addition of lighting to the car park and a building for horticultural use (a community facility).

4.0 Proposed Development

4.1 This application seeks permission for single storey extensions to the rear of the 2 main buildings, along with a central link to join the buildings through the central grass courtyard, which includes the creation of a centralised reception area. The development would also involve the re-design of the internal access road to remove the one-way system, additional parking and the creation of 6 disabled parking bays.

4.2 The single storey rear addition to the frontage building would be set in from the side elevations and would project 9.2 metres from the rear of the building. This would create a community room and office, a further office, a staff room, store and toilets.

4.3 Extending from this addition would be the glazed link, in which would be a centrally set reception and office, leading to additional toilets.

4.4 To the rear of the Sadie building, the existing garden room would be demolished and replaced with a single storey rear extension which would accommodate two classrooms. These would be 10.6m wide by 6.9m deep (marginally deeper than the existing garden room).

4.5 In terms of materials, the new toilets on the front of the Sadie building would be bricks and tiles to match, including detailing around openings; the glazed link would have glass walls and roof; and the rear addition to the frontage building, the reception area and classrooms are based on a modular construction. The reception would likely be a stone clad, with the remaining being timber clad which is easier to maintain under the trees.

4.6 The proposed development has been designed to create a central access into the Centre. This will provide improved safeguarding of children and vulnerable individuals and make the Centre more accessible to all.

4.7 The Centre is growing and evolving and requires the additional classrooms and space to accommodate the increasing numbers of services and people who wish to use the Centre.

5.0 Relevant Policies

5.1 The site is located within the Green Belt and as such, the following policies are relevant to the proposed development:

5.2 National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that:

"A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

-the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

-limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development."

5.3 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan

Policy 2 - Green Belt: "In the Green Belt, as shown on the Proposals Map, the Council will aim to keep the uses of land open in character. Except for proposals within settlements which accord with Policy 3, or in very special circumstances, planning permission will only be granted for new buildings, extensions, and changes of use of buildings and of land which are appropriate in the Green Belt, and which would not result in significant visual impact."

5.4 Proposed Submission Local Plan

Policy CGB4- Existing rural buildings: "Planning permission for the re-use, replacement or extension of buildings in the Green Belt or Rural Area beyond the Green Belt will be granted where: a. Any existing building to be converted does not require major extension or reconstruction; b. The resultant building(s) do not have a materially greater impact on the openness, purposes or general policy aims of the Green Belt or Rural Area beyond the Green Belt than the original building(s); and c. Any outbuilding(s) are sited as close as possible to the main building(s) and visually subordinate to them."

5.5 Due to the form of the proposed development and position on the site, it is not considered that the extensions would constitute disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The floor area of the proposed development is approximately an additional 39.5% of the existing buildings on the site. As such, the proposed scheme is appropriate for the site. The scheme has been designed to sit between the width of the 2 buildings so as to fit neatly into the courtyard area and the size has been kept to a minimum for the purposes required.

5.6 Due to the position of the majority of the development between the two main buildings on the site, the development would not result in a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt nor the purpose of including land within it than the existing development. It is not considered that the development would affect the character or appearance of the site and there would be no adverse impact upon the character or openness of the Green Belt. There would be very limited impact on the character or appearance of the area.

5.7 In addition, the following policies are relevant to this proposal:

NPPF

Core Planning Principles- Paragraph 17

Section 4- Promoting Sustainable Transport

5.8 Within paragraph 17 of the NPPF, one of the core land-use planning principles is as follows, to *"..take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural*

wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs."

5.9 It is clear that the Centre is an important community facility which provides valuable services to meet local needs; it aims to improve the health and wellbeing of all who wish to use its services.

5.10 Paragraph 32 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe. In this case, there is considered to be sufficient parking provision within the site for the additional internal space created.

5.11 <u>District Local Plan</u>

Policy 55: Car Parking Standards

5.12 <u>Supplementary Planning Documents</u>
-Vehicle Parking at New Developments
-Design

5.13 <u>Proposed Submission Local Plan</u>

SP1- Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire

D1- Sustainable Design

SP10 Healthy Communities – "Support the retention of existing community, cultural, leisure or recreational facilities;
Work with NHS Trust, the CCG and other relevant providers to ensure appropriate coverage of healthcare facilities across the District…"

HC1 Community Facilities- "Appropriate in scale having regard to local context;
Accessible by a range of transport modes;
Meets an identified need in the local community.."

5.14 It is clear that the Centre is a community facility which provides valuable complementary healthcare approaches to improve health and wellbeing. In addition, the site is positioned in a sustainable location being accessible to a range of transport modes, it meets an identified need in the local community and the development as proposed is appropriate in scale having regard to the local context.

6.0 Car Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport

6.1 The site can currently accommodate 80 vehicles and the plans as proposed would enable the site to accommodate 97 vehicles. The provision as proposed is sufficient for the additional people who would use the site (resulting from the additional classroom and community room proposed). In addition, 6 disabled spaces are also proposed.

6.2 The number of spaces available to those visiting the site is considered to be sufficient. In addition, some organisations use the site travel by minibus or car share, which reduces the demand for car parking provision.

6.3 The site is located in a highly accessible position between the towns of Letchworth Garden City and Hitchin. A bus stop is located on Hitchin Road, at the frontage of the site. As such, visitors to the Centre are able to walk, cycle or travel by bus. Access to the site from further away is via the train stations in Letchworth or Hitchin, which are only a short bus, cycle or walk from the Centre.

6.4 There would be no change of the access on to the classified Hitchin Road.

7.0 Trees and Landscaping

7.1 There are a number of mature trees within the site, some of which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) as shown on the plan below:



7.2 As can be seen from the above plan, T5 (a Pine tree) would be in closest proximity to the proposed development. The grassed central courtyard is currently surrounded by an asphalt drive that provides vehicular access to car parks to the north and south of the courtyard: it is bisected down the middle by a gravel path linking the two buildings to the east and west, as can be seen in the photograph below.



Central Courtyard



Asphalt vehicular access road

7.3 The site is characterised by the number of large Pines and Cedars that was typical of the grounds of Edwardian hospitals.

7.4 The Cedars are more peripherally located to the central courtyard area and the Austrian Pines are largely located within the courtyard.



Central courtyard

7.5 As stated in the arboricultural report submitted with the application, the Pine and Cedar trees are considered to form an impressive backdrop to the site and create a distinct and calming atmosphere here. As such they are viewed as an extremely important and highly appropriate element to the whole fabric of the site.

7.6 It is understood that shade from trees can cause issues when trees are located close to developments so the design and layout takes this into consideration. It is the case that the proposed usable areas (reception, toilet facilities and the access link between the buildings) are all areas that do not require minimum standards of daylight (such as habitable rooms). It is also the case that, with the exception of the Yews, the crowns of the adjacent trees are all very high and allow through reasonable levels of daylight.

7.7 Much of the area of the proposed development is located within Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of the trees. Certain approaches to design can be used to mitigate against the type of damage envisaged by building over RPAs. Avoidance of root severance and ground levels changes can be achieved by an entirely no-dig foundation and this is the chosen method of construction of the development proposed. The other recommendations of the arboricultual

report shall be complied with and as such, there will be no detrimental impact upon the trees protected by a TPO.

8.0 Need for the development

8.1 Due to the future aspirations of the Centre, it is felt that a remodelling of the reception area, additional space and an improved link between the buildings is necessary to take the Centre forward. As such, the proposed development would:

- Unite the currently disparate units and thereby ensure improved safeguarding of children and vulnerable individuals.
- Provide adequate access and facilities for disabled users
- Provide office and meeting space for small charities and community groups
- Provide additional classroom space to meet current need

8.2 The Letchworth Centre constitutes a unique resource which contributes significantly to the wellbeing of the population of North Hertfordshire. Its services include:

- A programme of more than 80 weekly classes teaching a broad range of approaches which people can use themselves to improve and maintain good health
- A large counselling service with a low cost arm which over the past 12 months delivered more than 6,600 sessions
- A clinic offering therapies which complement existing NHS provision
- A Hertfordshire-wide programme, *Positive Movement,* to improve the mobility of older people
- An initiative spearheading the introduction of Yoga and Mindfulness in schools, nurseries and children's centres – with 10 programmes currently in place in North Herts. Both Mindfulness and Yoga have been shown to contribute significantly to the wellbeing and academic achievement of children and young people.
- Its facilities provide a permanent base for other voluntary organisations including *Growing People* (a horticultural therapy charity working with people with dementia and severe mental illness) and *Angels* (a charity which supports families of children with ADHD and autism)
- Its rooms provide space for a range of small community and statutory organisations to hold meetings and away days.

8.3 The proposed development would enable better utilisation of the existing buildings through remodelling and would provide a user-friendly Centre, which would be better equipped to widen the scope of how it serves the community. Please see the attached document titled Strategic Aims for further details of the future goals of the Centre.

9.0 Summary

9.1 The site is a well known community facility which is located within the Green Belt. The proposed extension would provide a centralised reception area as well as additional classroom space for the growing numbers of people who utilize the facilities provided at the Centre.

9.2 The development would be an extension of the existing buildings and be set between the front and rear buildings, so would not extend outwards, into the wider site. The rear addition to the Sadie building would project only marginally further from the rear of the building than the existing garden room.

9.3 The design and construction of the development takes into account the trees set within the central courtyard, some of which are protected by a TPO.

9.4 It is considered that the proposed development would not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building and would be appropriate in scale to the existing buildings on the site. The proposed extensions would not result in significant visual impact nor would they have a materially greater impact on the openness, purposes or general policy aims of the Green Belt.

9.5 The site is positioned in a sustainable location and can be accessed by a range of transport modes. It is considered that there would be sufficient parking spaces on site to cater for those visiting the Centre.

9.6 Overall, it is considered that the proposed development complies with the relevant planning policies and would support the continued use and expansion of a highly valued existing community facility.