

We strongly object to this proposal on a number of grounds:

1. Public Protection & Community Safety

There are serious concerns regarding the risk to local residents and community safety. The Humbles Wood estate is home to a large number of young families with an abundance of young, small children who play in and around Ferndene and the estate. Under Medium secure categorisation, NHS England states in order for admission, patients MUST present a serious risk to people of direct violence, sexually aggressive behaviour or arson. The risk to children, women or the wider public is gravely increased with this application and the consequences of a patient posing these risks escaping amongst small children needs not be exaggerated. As we know, the NHS do a brilliant job day in day out. However, on regular occasions there have been a number of potentially violent patients absconding from the already secure hospital, often into the estate and surrounding area. A recent FOI shows since 2010 police have been called to detain someone who has escaped on average over once per month. Whilst this application will add new security measures, no-where within the application does it state that there is no risk to the public. Unless we can be assured that young children, residents and the wider public are fully protected then this application should be rejected. We only need to look back to 2013 at St Nicholas Medium Secure ward when Phillip "Black Dog Strangler" Westwater escaped from the hospital, which had all the relevant security in place, thus evidencing the possibility. Ferndene is serviced 24/7 by Hexham police station, meaning resources would need to travel over 15 miles to any potential incident. Current experience, local knowledge and a lack of specific plans provide no confidence to local residents who have expressed considerable concern around this issue.

2. Highway Safety/Provision of Parking

The travel plan provided is wholly inadequate and unrealistic. The site is inaccessible other than by car/motorbike, with no public transport and steep gradients discouraging the use of walking or cycling. The referenced bus stop being 900m away is misleading; this rural service runs 5 services per day. In reality, the nearest regularly serviced stop is 1.2 miles away at Dr Syntax, nearly double the distance. The travel plan does not provide a viable solution to support alternative, environmentally friendly options which discourage the use of personal cars. As a country, we are trying to move towards more sustainable methods of transport, this plan in reality does not align to this. We would also like you to consider the fairness on any service user who may have mobility issues or be vulnerable and no access to a personal vehicle and the expectation on them to get to the hospital.

There is currently a serious issue with the amount of parking to cope with the volume of users each day, resulting in high volumes of vehicles parking along Beechwood Drive, the pavement, side entrance road and kerbs into the car park. A wealth of photos evidence this. The report references staff, however there are a wide range of other users alongside shift

staff which haven't been taken into consideration. The application does not resolve the parking problem but rather makes it worse. The current situation is dangerous and poses a risk, people cannot see out past the cars and are stepping into the road blind. The parking is also forcing vehicles to travel in the wrong carriageway round a blind bend as you travel down Beechwood Drive, countless residents could provide examples of having to take evasive action. Children play around the entrance to the car park on the grass, and cycle and play on the path, there is a real risk that a child will end up being hit by a car. We should be working to remove such risks for our children, not increasing them.

3. Visual Impact

The erection of a 5.2m prison style fence will have a significant negative impact of the landscape and contradicts the original approval for Ferndene . A beautiful historic garden is being restored a mere number of meters away for which the setting will be harmed by the fencing. The move of the facilities compound, moving a high number of bins, skips and medical waste containers from the rear of the hospital to the front next to the estate provide further unwanted impact.

There are lots of strong grounds to reject this application, the safety of children and public must come first.