



Planning Services
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

31 October 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

MAIDSTONE INNOVATION CENTRE – PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE

On behalf of our client, Maidstone Borough Council, we are pleased to submit a planning application seeking permission for the change of use of the building to broaden its approved uses to cover Class E (e) (provision of medical or health services), (g)(i) offices, and (g)(ii) research and development.

The proposals seek to expand the approved uses within the existing building to facilitate the occupation of a broader range of activities related to its primary function within the wider health-care and medical services sector.

In addition to this Planning Statement, the application is supported by the following which is commensurate with the proposals and the validation requirements for this application:

- Site location plan
- Existing and proposed block plans
- Floor plans (ground – third)

The requisite planning application fee of £462 has been paid to the council under separate cover.

BACKGROUND

Maidstone Innovation Centre was first opened in March 2022 within the wider Kent Medical Campus. The building, which is four-storeys and provides 3561 sqm of accommodation, provides office and R&D space for businesses and operators specialising in the life-science, healthcare and medical sectors.

The building is currently 54% occupied, however this figure could be considerably higher potentially 65% with demand from the health services businesses wishing to take up occupancy. The centre has had enquires from December 2021 from nine medical or health services businesses.

The building was originally approved as part of the wider Kent Medical Campus outline planning permission LPA Ref. 16/507292/OUT. It was then approved in detail through reserved matters in 2019 under LPA Ref. 18/506658/REM. The original outline planning approval was subject to condition 37 which states:

“The occupation of any B1(a) office buildings and (B1(b) research and development buildings hereby permitted shall be limited only to those occupiers directly associated with the life science, health care and medical service sectors, and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class B1 of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) or permitted under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 or any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting those Orders with or without modification;

Reason: To ensure the development remains a mixed use and medical based development in accordance with draft policy RMX1(1).

The new Use Class E means that offices (old use class B1(a)) and health centre (old use class D1) uses now fall within the same use class. The changing between these uses is, therefore, no longer “development” requiring planning permission by definition of S55 of the Town and Country Planning Act. In this context, the occupation of part of the Innovation Building as a health centre facility would not be “development” and, therefore planning permission would not be required.

However, we understand that the LPA believe that the effect of condition 37 is that it restricts the occupation of the Innovation Centre Building to B1(a) office use only notwithstanding the changes to the Use Classes Order. This means that, in the LPA’s initial view, the use of the building outside of a B1(a) office or B1(b) research and development use would require planning permission.

Pre-application

A pre-application request was submitted to officers in August 2023 to discuss the proposals and seeking advice from officers as to the appropriate mechanism to secure the requisite permissions. Officers advised that it would be more straight-forward to submit a change of use application for the whole building seeking to change the use from its existing Class E (G) (i) and (ii) use as offices and R&D (as restricted by the condition) to a use including Class E (e) to allow health services to operate within the building.

Officers advised that this change would fit within the overall intention of the outline condition referenced above for the building to service the medical-based development of the wider campus.

It was also concluded that it would be preferable to submit a single change of use application rather than amending the above condition given its association with the wider medical campus.



Proposed development

In line with the pre-application advice, planning permission is sought for:

The change of use of the existing building from use as offices and research and development (Use Class E(g) (i) and (ii)) to use as offices, research and development, and medical services (Use Class E(g) (i) and (ii), and Use Class E(e)).

The application is solely for the above change of use to broaden the permitted uses within the site. The scheme does not require any alterations to the exterior of the building nor the wider site layout.

Key considerations

Principle of development

As noted above, changes to the Use Classes Order introduced in 2022 have been put forward to assist in making planning more flexible. The introduction of Class E indicates that suitability of office uses changing to health-centre uses and vice-versa.

Condition 37 referenced above, seems to serve the intended function of restricting the type of occupation within the building to the science and health sectors rather than it specifically restricting to an office-only use. The reason behind the condition is stated as:

Reason: To ensure the development remains a mixed use and medical-based development in accordance with draft policy RMX1(1).

Policy RMX1(1) of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan (2017) relates to the Newnham Park medical campus. The 2017 plan allocated the site for up to 100,000 sqm of medical facilities as well as a replacement retail centre of up to 14,300 sqm. The policy identifies how the facilities within the wider 100,000 sqm of accommodation should include 25,000 sqm of associated offices and research and development space.

The change of use of the building to widen the approved uses and allow health centre facilities within the Innovation Centre is entirely consistent and compatible with the intentions of the reasoning behind the condition and the allocated Policy RMX1(1) to provide a nexus for health and science uses. Whilst the health centre's primary purpose will be to service visitors / patients, it will be involved in supporting the wider health-care sector through thought-leadership, innovation and research activities. Ultimately, the proposed use would support the overarching ambition to create an eco-system on the KMC, working in partnership with the current occupiers (KIMS Hospital, Cygnet Hospital and the Care Home). The proposed use, therefore, fully aligns with the purpose of the building and the intentions of condition 37 of the original outline planning permission.



Transport considerations

In considering the potential transport impacts of the broadened use within the building, it should be noted that the wider medical campus was approved relatively recently as part of a wider outline masterplan application which permitted an additional 92,000 sqm of accommodation. As part of this assessment, a comprehensive Transport Assessment was undertaken and suitable mitigations were put in place to support this scale of development. In considering the reserved matters application for the Innovation Centre, the committee report notes at paragraph 6.15 “The impacts of traffic on the local area were considered under the outline application as a principle matter and cannot be re-visited”. This proposal does not alter the fundamental composition of that outline application and assessment.

In its current use the building, which is 3,482 sqm of office space is expected to generate approximately 410 movements across the day, of which 299 would be by private car. It is not expected that the wider use of the building to allow for health facilities would alter this. This trip level number is limited by the amount of parking on the site which is restricted to 78 spaces, though an additional temporary overflow car-park is currently available providing a further 42 spaces. Parking is heavily restricted across the wider site meaning the extent of parking is a limitation on the likely vehicle trips the building will generate.

The current parking arrangement is managed so each letting unit is granted one space. This would be unchanged for the health / medical services uses meaning that these small scale operations will likely operate a one-in-one out system limiting the transport and parking impacts. There is no intention to convert the entire building into a health / medical service as the modus-operandi of the innovation centre remains to support the medical industry’s research and development functions.

The Reserved Matters application was supported by a BREEAM Travel Plan which shall remain in place as per condition 6 of the original planning permission. This will continue to monitor travel patterns for the building and the effectiveness of the measures to encourage sustainable modes of transport.

Other considerations

Given the straight-forward change of use proposed, it is not envisaged that the application would generate additional technical matters that would need to be subject to detailed consideration within this planning application.



CONCLUSION

The proposed development seeks to broaden the approved uses in the building to allow some health / medical services to operate beyond the existing office and research and development restriction. This lifting of restrictions on the building will assist in securing the building's occupancy moving forward, whilst continuing to service its modus-operandi as a driver for medical research and innovation.

We trust the above and enclosed is sufficient to validate and positively determine this application but are happy to answer any questions necessary.

Yours faithfully



Michael Wood
Technical Director