

a fitting legacy

When the only GP in Alton announced his retirement, local people feared the end of health-care provision within their village. But the involvement of Prime resulted not just in a modern and flexible primary care centre, but a fitting legacy for a much-loved doctor.



In the Staffordshire parish of Alton, the close-knit community enjoys a range of facilities that would be the envy of many small towns.

The village hall, children's play area and even a village website have recently been built or improved with the help of regeneration grants. The nearby Alton Towers theme park draws a steady stream of visitors to the general store, Post Office and a handful of pubs and B&Bs. And the newly completed Alton Primary Care Centre ensures a full range of health provision is delivered at the heart of the village.

But before the construction of the smart new centre by the North Staffordshire LIFT team with Prime as the development partner, the future of locally-based healthcare in Alton was in some doubt. When the existing general practitioner, Dr Vin Webster, announced his retirement, it didn't just mean the end of many years' service for the popular GP. Dr Webster had run his practice single-handedly from the downstairs accommodation of his own Grade II listed village home, and understandably, he and his wife needed their house back.

As soon as Staffordshire Moorlands (now North Staffordshire) PCT became aware of the problem, they spotted an opportunity to update primary care in Alton, with ambitious plans for a building that could accommodate not only a new GP's surgery, but a base for district nurses, and clinical space for the visiting general practice in nearby Waterhouses. With a site identified in the middle of the village already in the ownership of the Parish Council, the new centre would remain accessible for patients and provide a modern standard of care. Yet, as Carol Goodwin, PCT representative for North Staffordshire, recalls, there was still some unease among residents about the project. "The people in Alton take

ownership of what they have in the village. They are very aware of the issues involved regarding developments in the area."

The answer for Prime and the LIFT team was to keep the village involved during every stage of the project, ensuring that the finished centre was entirely in keeping with the wishes of the local community. Public consultation events were run by the Parish Council and the PCT published regular progress updates on the village website. A planning complication made it imperative that the centre was sited only on Parish Council land, and not on neighbouring space that had been given to the village by a local benefactor, but the Prime team were able to reassure residents that this had been taken into account.

With site issues finally resolved, the build went smoothly and the finished centre has quickly fulfilled its promise to enhance village life. The single-storey building respects the established local environment with traditional stone quoins and a natural slate pitched roof. As it backs onto open playing fields, security has been designed into the fabric of the building, to discourage youths congregating after surgery hours.

Internally, the centre offers flexible work spaces and a quality of finish that was unimaginable in the former domestic GP premises. A large and airy reception area welcomes visitors, and promotes joint ownership of the building by two GP practices. According to Carol Goodwin, the quality of the finished building speaks for itself and has certainly allayed any doubts the locals may have had. "The residents are very pleased with it. The partnership between the GPs is working very well. And it's a real advantage to have community staff and Primary Care staff based together for the first time."



Respects the local environment

Project at a glance...

Alton Primary Care Centre, Alton

Statistics

Size 512 square metres
Value £1.79 million

Services and Facilities

- GP Services
- GP and Medical Student Teaching Facilities
- Chronic Disease Management
- Counselling Services
- Dispensary
- District Nurses
- ECG
- Health Visitors
- Minor Surgery
- Phlebotomy and INR
- Spirometry

Benefits

Flexible modern working areas provide a new standard in healthcare provision in the heart of the village.

Two general practices have been brought together on one site for the first time.

The entire project has been sensitively managed to address the needs and the concerns of the local community.

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Prime Comment

Inside knowledge from the Prime Team

“This was a project where we had to be very sensitive to local concerns. A local resident had given a piece of land in perpetuity that we needed to protect. And all of our team were conscious that this was going to be Dr Webster's legacy. We were delighted to be able to deliver on such a pivotal piece of land at the heart of the community.”

Steve Sprackling, Development Director
Prime (UK) Developments Ltd



A large and airy reception area