

pitch perfect

The busy Audley Medical Practice needed up-to-date premises and more space to house its expanding range of services. But finding an affordable means of funding a new health centre, along with a suitable building plot proved almost impossible – until local LIFT Company Prima 200, assisted by the Audley Cricket Club, provided a winning solution...



Audley Medical Practice was faced with a common problem: it occupied a flat-roofed clinic premises built in the early 70s which, although once considered fit for purpose, had become a leaky, cramped and dispiriting place to provide modern primary healthcare services or to meet teaching obligations. With the local population and the Practice continuing to grow, a new building was essential – but this aspiration was looking increasingly out of reach.

“We’d been trying to get new premises for about ten years and had pursued various avenues,” recalls Practice Manager Julie Stokes. “We’re a semi-rural practice in a conservation area and there’s not a lot of building land around here - so finding a site for a new build was a major challenge. We also looked at various funding options including financing it ourselves but the land values meant it wasn’t viable.”

The solution was finally provided by Prima 200, the North Staffordshire Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT) charged with improving local primary and social care facilities. The LIFT’s shareholding partners include Stoke-on-Trent Teaching PCT, North Staffordshire PCT, Partnerships for Health, and Prime. As the private sector partner, Prime is responsible for undertaking all approved developments, including planning submissions, design, construction and ongoing building maintenance.

While taking the LIFT route overcame the funding problem, it was still necessary to locate a suitable plot of land for the new building. The ideal location was on the clinic’s existing site, but the footprint of the proposed building

was too large to allow phased construction alongside the old facility - which meant that interim accommodation for the Practice would have to be provided elsewhere.

This created a headache of its own – until Julie Stokes remembered a local sporting landmark. “I’d noticed a few years ago that Audley Cricket Club had a big car park next to the cricket field and so when Prime asked us about potential sites for temporary accommodation we suggested that they approached the Club.” Prime did so with the result that the Club kindly agreed to give up some of its car park short-term to make way for temporary buildings.

The Practice spent a total of 14 months in temporary units while the new premises were under construction – but this was not an unpleasant experience. “They were purpose-built units and much better than many permanent GP premises,” says Julie Stokes. “We didn’t have much circulation space but it was a really good opportunity for teambuilding and preparing for our final move into the new facility.”

When that moment came, the quality of the new health centre more than compensated for any temporary inconvenience. Welcoming, spacious and filled with natural light, the two storey building with its double-height glazed waiting area, slate roof and red cedar exterior proved an instant hit with both patients and staff. “Everyone’s delighted with it,” says Julie Stokes. “The patients love it – they can’t quite believe it when they walk in. They’re just in awe really. We struggled to offer extended services in the old building – now we’re able to provide them in the right settings. It’s what the patients in Audley deserve.”

Project at a glance...

Audley Primary Care Centre, Audley

Statistics

Size 1269 square metres
Value £3.86 million

Services and Facilities

- GP Services
- GP Training
- Chronic Disease Management
- Community Midwife
- Community Nursing
- Community Psychiatric Nurse
- Dietetics
- Health Visitors
- Minor Surgery
- Orthopaedics Clinic
- Phlebotomy and INR
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Speech & Language Therapy

Benefits

Building exterior is modern and distinctive while complementing the surrounding village conservation area.

Spacious interior with plenty of natural light provides an uplifting environment for patients and staff.

Purpose-designed working areas enable an extended range of services to be provided in appropriate settings.

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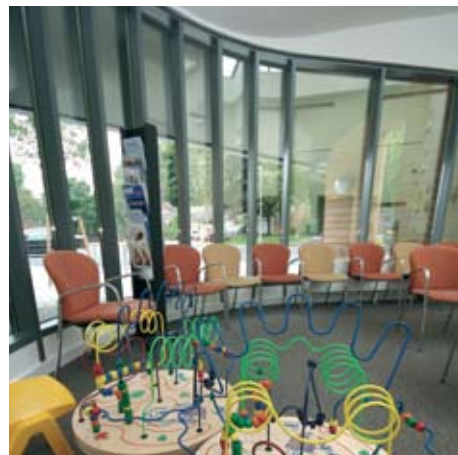
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Prime Comment

Inside knowledge from the Prime Team

“Being a member of the LIFT team in North Staffordshire has allowed us to build strong, long-term working relationships - not only with our immediate PCT partners but with a wide range of other local public sector organisations such as the borough and county councils. This is extremely useful in, for example, finding swift solutions to planning or highways issues which often arise during the development process.”

Richard Cutler, Development Director
Prime (UK) Developments Ltd



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