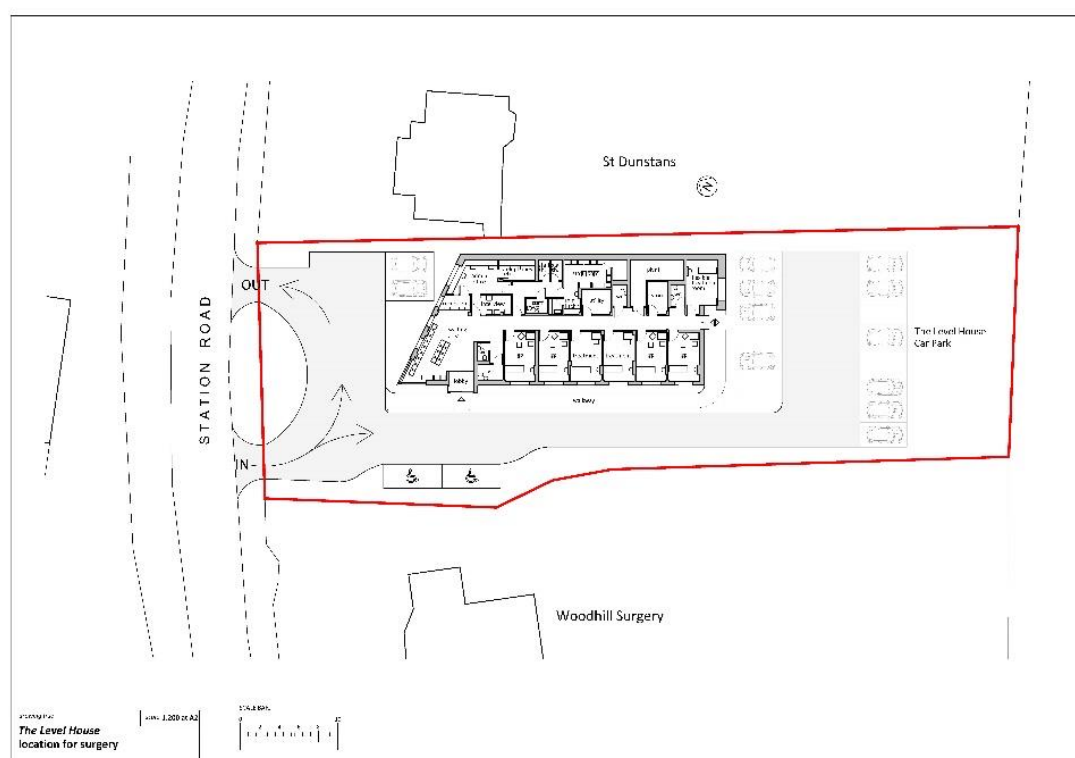


EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSAL TO BUILD THE HEALTH CENTRE AT THE LEVEL HOUSE SITE ON STATION ROAD

As the Council will be aware, I was approached earlier in the summer on behalf of the group of residents who have been advocating building a separate Health Centre on the site of the Level House in Station Road. Financing such a scheme would be very challenging. Additional money would be needed to buy the Level House site, whereas the Parish owns the freehold of the site at Court Meadow; and Wealden DC have made it clear that they would not be prepared to contribute to the cost of building a separate Health Centre, whereas they have committed significant funding to the integrated building planned on Court Meadow.

Whatever the financial challenges, this paper focuses on whether the Level House site is a viable option as a location for a Health Centre. The outline site plan below, which locates a Health Centre building on that site, was sent to me by email on 29 July 2024.



I have examined this in detail. In addition to the financing challenges, there are four main problems with the proposal.

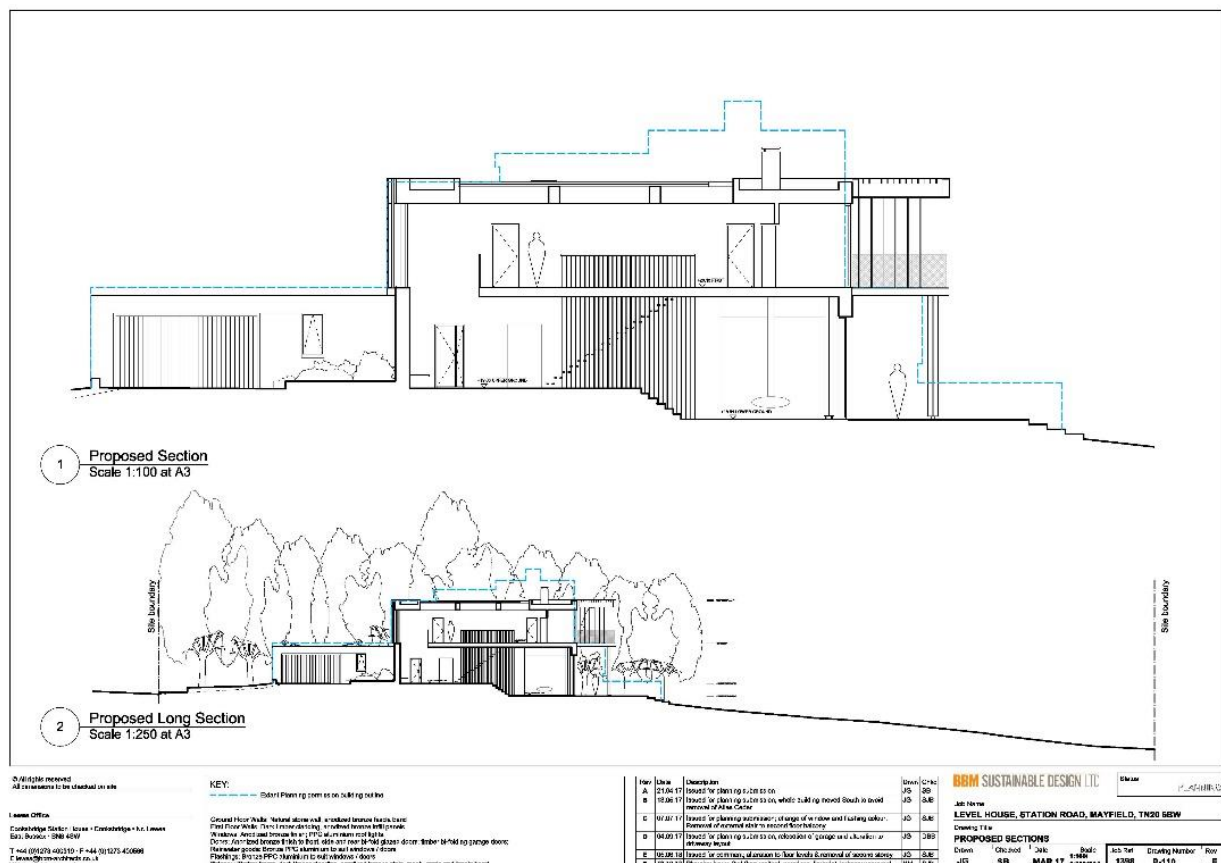
(1) The site is too small

The proposed plan above shows 18 car parking spaces. The NHS requires 20. The main car park is some distance from the front entrance which is not ideal for a Health Centre. There is no provision in the plan for ambulance parking, external bin and clinical waste store, covered cycle store, refuse vehicle or fire engine trackways. All these are required and they would be difficult to achieve without sacrificing parking

spaces, of which there are already too few. The access road to the side of the building appears to be 3.5 metres wide which would be inadequate. A minimum of 4.5 metres is required for two way car access or 5.5 metres for two ambulances.

(2) Extensive groundworks would be required

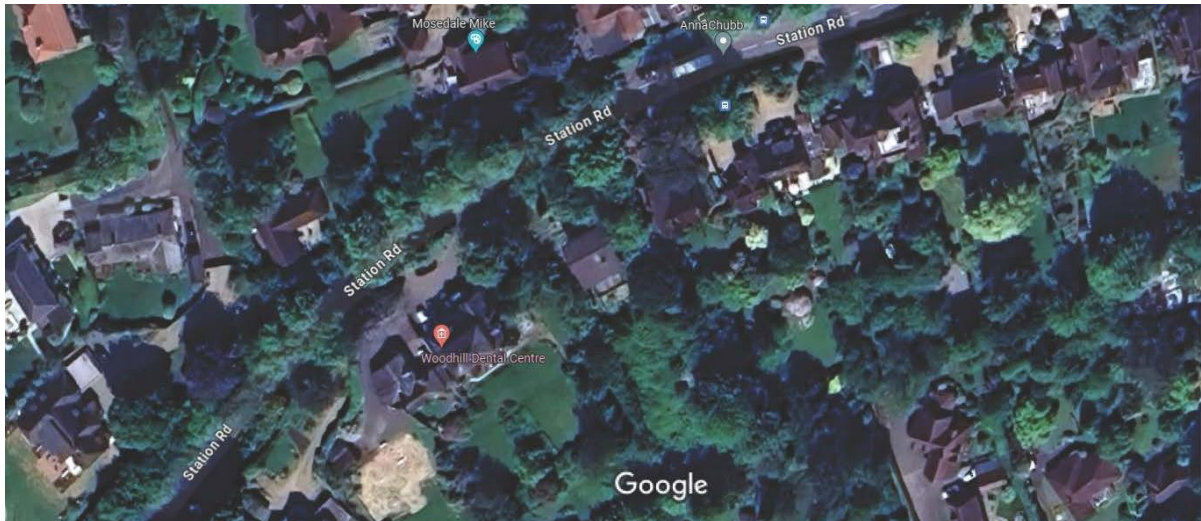
Despite its name, the Level House site is not level. It occupies the crown of the ridge between Station Road and West Street, rising at the front and falling away to the rear. A longitudinal section of the site is included in one of the historical planning applications in relation to the site (reference: WD/2017/0943-F) and it is shown below.



This section indicates that the midpoint of the site is just under one metre higher than Station Road and nearly six metres higher than its rear boundary. Access requirements for a Health Centre require a flat site. Extensive cutting and filling would be needed. The cost of this would be significant and the available site area would be constrained across its width by the necessary piling at the edges.

(3) Many trees and other vegetation would need to be removed

Current satellite imagery of the site from Google is shown below. The Level House site is to the right of the red marker which is the location of the Woodhill Dental Surgery. This shows that the site has many trees and thick vegetation.



The trees and other vegetation that were there in 2017 are shown on the plan below which was included in the same planning application as referenced above. Note this appears feint on screen but is clearer when printed.



Consistent with the satellite imagery, this plan shows that there are many trees at the front of the site and these can be seen from Station Road. There are lines of trees along most of the boundaries of the site and there are two large hedgerows in the site. Since 2017 these will have matured further and the site will have effectively rewilded. To construct the Health Centre on the Level House site in accordance with the plan above would require felling most, if not all, of these trees and removal of the vegetation. The roots of trees in adjoining properties, which are shown in the satellite imagery, would

also be affected. No trees are planned to be felled to build the Health Centre on the Court Meadow site.

(4) Other potential planning difficulties

Obtaining planning permission for the Health Centre on the Level House site would be difficult. Services would need to be upgraded as it would be a much larger building than the single residential dwelling. There would be heritage issues as a large modern Health Centre would be out of keeping with the adjoining Victorian and Edwardian properties. It is likely that there would be objections on environmental issues for the reasons mentioned above. Consent from East Sussex Highways would also be problematic, not least because it is not obvious that the necessary visibility splays are available from the site's location on the inside of a bend in a 30mph zone.

In summary, regardless of the financing, the Level House site is not a viable option: it is too small, extensive groundworks would be required, there would be wholesale destruction of trees and other habitat and there would be problems in obtaining planning permission.

Andrew Ratcliffe

31 August 2024