

Monks Orchard Residents' Association

www.monks-orchard-web.org.uk

Croydon

(Non Party)

(Independent)

NEWSLETTER – SPECIAL EDITION

BETHLEM MEDIUM SECURE UNIT EXPANSION

As some of you may be aware, there is a planning application to build an 89 bed Medium Security Unit (MSU) on designated Metropolitan open land in The Royal Bethlem Hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham.

There are many different units within the Bethlem Hospital, including an Alcohol Unit, Behavioural Disorders Unit, Crisis Recovery Unit, Psychosis Unit and an Adolescent Unit, Mother & Baby Unit as well as others.

However, the Planning Application is for an extension to the Medium-Secure Denis Hill Unit. As the Bethlem official website states, this unit is for mentally disordered offenders and patients who are difficult to manage in general psychiatric settings, providing care and treatment in conditions of medium security.

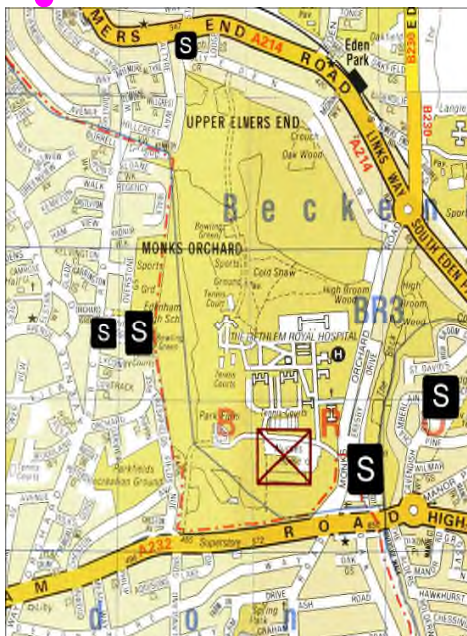
At present, the Denis Hill Unit is a 29-bed unit for people who need specialist care in a more secure environment than can be provided on general psychiatric wards. A planning application has been submitted to increase the number of beds in the unit from 29 to 89. The application involves the development of a new state-of-the-art building.

The proposal is to provide 60 new beds in a new building, which is in line with NHS strategy. In London they are 250-300 beds short of the MSU quota. There is a staffing ratio of 2 nurses to 1 patient..

In 1999 an application was made to build a 120 bed Medium secure unit at Cane Hill in Coulsdon. Over 7000 residents opposed the application based on fear of crime and building on the green belt. On one day 3000 people took to the streets in a protest march.

In 2000, Croydon Council refused permission For the Cane Hill site by 11 votes to 2. Reigate and Merstham Councils backed their constituents against similar units and overturned the applications on "Fear of Crime".

Now, residents who live local to the Bethlem Hospital are confronted with this new application. The new Unit will house sex offenders including paedophiles (**who will be allowed out of the grounds unescorted**), as well as rapists and murderers. Naturally, residents are concerned.



Map of Bethlem Royal Hospital:
The crossed box represents the proposed development, the other highlighted 'S' blocks clearly show schools in the immediate area.

WHY PROTEST?

Our prime concern regards security -

In a meeting on the 18th March at the Dennis Hill Unit, a member of staff discussed patients being allowed 'leave' from the unit. She told us that there are different levels of 'leave': being escorted in the grounds, and being escorted out locally. There are 100 leaves from the unit (of 29 beds) a week. With 60 more beds, there would be up to 300 leaves a week. In the last 3 years there have been 8 absconders (from the 29 bed unit). Based upon these previous figures there is likely to be **8 escapes per year if the planning**

application succeeds. Leave from the Unit is allowed very gradually based upon the assessment of the patients rehabilitation by a NHS Psychiatrists. Firstly accompanied leave is granted in the grounds, then into the immediate neighbourhood and then further field. Additionally, some patients will be allowed unescorted leave into the local community, and these patients include sex offenders (see below). **Patients are not “TAGGED” when on unescorted ‘leave’.**



There are currently 25 all male patients in the Dennis Hill Unit at present.

They are there because they :

1. Have serious mental illness and need treatment and appropriate care.
2. Have all been in trouble with the law, at the more serious end of crime.

6 have had no formal contact with the criminal justice system but they have committed offences elsewhere within the NHS, for instance assaulting staff.

At another meeting, on the 22nd March, there was further questioning about the new unit:

Q: Are there any (convicted/or not) Sex Offenders now in The Denis Hill unit (including Paedophiles, rapists)?

A: Yes, there are rapists and sex offenders, there has been paedophiles in the past and there will be paedophiles in the future.

Q: Will **all the above** be allowed out of the grounds **unescorted**, that includes the paedophiles?

A: Yes.

Q: Are they on the Sex offenders register?

A: Yes.

The same member of staff then confirmed that the patients also included murderers, and that there are **no armed guards** at the hospital, and **no security staff**, arguing that it is a hospital, not a prison. She also stated that the patients come from **Broadmoor** and **Rampton**. However, news reports state that Broadmoor, Rampton and Ashworth special hospitals may close in future (source: http://news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/newsid_68000/68469.stm).

Where will those maximum-security patients go? Will we see another development on the Bethlem site after those hospitals close down? Will we see additional planning applications for a Secure Unit at Bethlem once the precedent has been set if the current MSU planning application is approved? [A point to note: the original 29 Bed MSU Planning Application seems to have been approved without wide knowledge in the area].

If we are to have medium-secure patients, then surely they need a high level of security! As stated before, there have been **eight absconders already**, and with the increase in patients, there are likely to be many, many more. Just because 'only one' patient has re-offended after absconding, doesn't necessarily mean that others won't. And if the maximum-security hospitals close, and those patients are transferred to smaller units (like the Denis Hill Unit), then there is an even greater risk of **more dangerous patients absconding**.



Bethlem Administration Unit

There are many schools in the area surrounding Bethlem. In the immediate vicinity of the hospital, there is Edenham High and Eden Park, (who directly back on to the hospital grounds), Monks Orchard Primary, and Beckmead Schools. In the more local vicinity of Bethlem, there are Langley Park, Oak Lodge, Spring Park and Benson Schools. This means that there are approximately 1,600 children in the immediate area of Bethlem, and a further 4,301 (approx.) in the surrounding area.

As well as this, there are retirement homes in the surrounding area, and a significant population of the elderly live close by.

There have been cases in the past where mental patients have escaped from '**secure**' units and have been involved in violent crimes whilst escaped, and some who have attacked their care workers (source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/>

newsid_1461000/1461293.stm). If this has happened in other areas, who says it will not happen from Bethlem, in a residential area such as this?

There isn't any visible security around the grounds of the hospital, or the perimeters, and there are plenty of wooded areas for absconders to hide in. Some residents who back on to the hospital have even complained of finding escaped patients in their back gardens!

The courts have now ruled that crime and fear of crime are material planning considerations, and with the possibility of dangerous criminals absconding from Bethlem, we have a strong case to argue.

Secondly, there are environmental concerns -

Residents in Wickham Road will no longer look out on to an open field with an orchard. The orchard will be cut down and replaced by a 5.6 metre high security fence (this is taller than a double decker bus and will be clearly seen from Wickham Road). The new unit is planned to be on Metropolitan Open Land (MOL), which is the green fabric of London; once built upon, open space is lost forever.

Finally, there are traffic concerns -

With the added beds, there will be more nurses working at Bethlem—at a staffing ratio of 2:1, this means that at present, there are 29 patients with 59 staff. With the added beds, there will be 89 patients with 178 staff. And those are just the nurses, there may be more psychiatrists and care workers in addition. This would mean, in general, that there will be more staff members coming and going, and therefore more traffic flowing through Bethlem and the surrounding roads.

This special edition of the Monks Orchard Residents' Association Newsletter has not been intended to scaremonger, **only to make people aware of the facts.**

Many of the items in this newsletter can be found in the West Beckenham Residents' Association Website (www.wbecra.org), in the BBC website (www.bbc.co.uk) website, and on the official protest website (www.cabbe.org) **Campaign Against Bethlem Building Extension.**

WHAT ACTION CAN WE TAKE?

As stated on our website, An official campaign group has been set up by residents of West Wickham, Shirley, Spring Park, Monks Orchard and Eden Park. A website has been set-up specifically to address the concern of residents in the area:-

www.cabbe.org

(Campaign Against Bethlem Building Expansion).

On the back page of this newsletter, is a sample objection letter, which you can use as a basis for your own letter and send to the relevant people (see below). Ensure you write so it reaches the destination by **18th July at the latest. We urge you to write, as it is the most effective way of preventing an application from going ahead.** If you object to this planning application, we ask you to write to the following people:

Mr. Chris Evans,
Planning Department,
Bromley Council,
Stockwell Close,
Bromley,
BR1 3UH.
Please quote Bromley Planning
reference number:
02/00288/OUT

Mr. Ken Livingstone,
Mayor of London,
Romney House,
Marsham Street,
LONDON.
SW1P 3PY.

Mr. Geraint Davies, MP
MP for Croydon Central
Ruskin House,
23 Coombe Road,
Croydon,
CR0 1BD.

Mr. Robert Stevens,
Assistant Director,
Planning Control,
Croydon Council,
Park Lane,
Croydon,
CR9 1JT.
Please quote Croydon Planning
reference number:
02/00398/CC

Mr. Robert Putnam,
Head of Planning,
Govt. Office for London,
Riverwalk House,
157-161 Millbank,
SW1P 4RR.

Rt. Hon Eric Forth,
Member for Bromley &
Chiselhurst.
House of Commons,
LONDON.
SW1A 0AA.

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear Sir,

I wish to place on record my objection to the proposed construction of a Medium Secure Unit [MSU] in the grounds of Bethlem Hospital, Monks Orchard for the reasons given below :-

- 1 The building of this MSU will lead to a concentration of potentially dangerous patients in a primarily residential area. These patients would be allowed escorted and unescorted "leave" in the community based upon an assessment of the patient's rehabilitation progress. If this planning application were to succeed, the number of "leaves" per week could be up to 300 with a high potential of escapes, the threat or perceived threat to the local community is immense. There are many areas which potential escapees can hide and pose a significant threat to the local residents, children and the elderly, (the proposed development is very close to local schools and retirement homes). The fear of potentially dangerous patients absconding into the local residential community, with the potential of crime and crimes of violence against local residents, is a major reason for my opposition to this development.
- 2 The grounds of Bethlem are designated as Metropolitan Open Land and should not be subjected to piecemeal development, but protected as a resource for future generations.
- 3 The proposal to construct the MSU has led to fears among residents that the trust is preparing to have the grounds of Bethlem designated as a Major Developed Site.
- 4 The construction of a MSU will result in the loss of open space and wildlife habitat, the removal of mature trees, and the destruction of a walled garden.
- 5 I strongly object to the planning application on the basis that this locality is NOT appropriate for a MSU.

PLEASE VOTE AGAINST THIS PLANNING APPLICATION.