Dear Glen

Planning Appeal for Residential Development
Land at: Land off Wyngates, Blofield, NR13 4JG
Appeal Ref: APP/K2610/A/13/2198950

Blofield Surgery is a traditional General Medical Services (GMS) practice covering a large rural area of approximately 42 square miles and including 10 villages within a 5 mile radius of Blofield. It offers a comprehensive range of primary care services and the Practice is very highly valued by the local community and has consistently scored well in the annual patient survey.

Primary Care is the provision of a broad range of health care to the entire community. This includes managing acute and chronic disease as well as health prevention and surveillance.

The original premises were purpose built in 1992 and covered an area of 350 square metres. About 10 years ago the Practice premises reached capacity and the partners at Blofield Surgery recognised the need to expand them in response to the additional requirements of modern primary care and the anticipated population growth that was envisaged from the Little Plumstead housing development. To this end numerous business cases were submitted to Broadland PCT to carry-out a much needed extension and eventually after some 5 years the Practice was assisted in the purchase of a small area of farmland adjacent to the surgery to help facilitate a future development when funding allowed.

In 2009 Blofield Surgery was finally allocated a capital grant to extend and partly re-furbish the existing premises. It was anticipated that the 2 storey extension, the re-modelling of some of the ‘old’ building to provide new clinical consulting rooms and additional car parking would be sufficient to meet the anticipated increased demand from the proposed residential developments that were in the pipeline. At the time, the local planning officer indicated that beyond Little Plumstead, further significant housing development in our practice area was extremely unlikely.

The local population has been gently rising over the last 20 years and in 1992, when Blofield Surgery was built, the list size was 4300 but it has now steadily risen to almost 5900. In 2009 when the surgery extension was given the go ahead, it was calculated that the list size would grow to some 6200 once all the new houses at Little Plumstead were built. This projection was based on the information provided to us by Broadland District Council.
The Practice provides a full range of GMS services along with many Enhanced Services. This involves, amongst other things, continuous monitoring of a large number of chronic diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, ischaemic heart disease, chronic liver disease, mental health, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension and cancer. Additionally, we offer ante natal clinics, smoking cessation advice and weight management advice.

Integrated team working is a vital facet of modern practice and the facility to see clinicians not directly employed by the Practice on site enhances overall patient services and therefore whenever possible the practice ‘hosts’ other agencies/health workers such as Midwife, Mental Health link workers, MacMillan nurses, Social Services etc.

Whilst the current GP team has now risen to 5 doctors in number, this is only 3¼ WTE GPs. Based on the most up to date practice list size of 5860, this equates to a more realistic GP/patient ratio of 1563, which is about 41% higher than the figure reported by Wheatman Planning.

Within the existing practice area there are several residential homes, nursing/care homes and sheltered housing developments which account for some 2% of our practice population, which once again highlights a discrepancy in the figures already presented by Wheatman Planning.

In the last few months one of the established residential homes in Blofield has opened a new 28 bed dementia unit and a recent audit of the work carried out by clinicians in caring for these patients has revealed a workload equivalent to approximately 300 patients which in turn has placed a significant demand on current resources.

The working rota of all the Clinicians within the practice is carefully time-tabled to ensure efficient use of all the consulting/treatment rooms that are available. It is likely that the health care of the whole population would be compromised by our constraints of capacity if further additional housing developments are approved. For example access to GP appointments would be reduced as would the capacity to undertake chronic disease management clinics and enhanced services. In addition the Practice may have to ask the midwife to provide antenatal services from her base at Wroxham rather than have use of a room at Blofield Surgery.

The developers and their advocates may well suggest that Blofield Surgery needs to further expand its’ premises and complement of staff to meet the growing population demands. We do not believe that it is a realistic option as currently the priority for the Health Authority is to upgrade current surgery stock in line with CQC recommendations. Resources within the Public Sector including the Health Service are under enormous pressure. Blofield Surgery has been recently extended and refurbished and would be a very low priority for any further new investment.

The recently approved new housing developments at Manor Park, land south of Yarmouth Road and the Persimmon site just off the A47 will undoubtedly further accelerate our rising list size as Blofield Surgery is easily the nearest practice to these sites. It is likely that the influx of patients associated with these existing planned developments will bring patient numbers up to our planned capacity for the Blofield Surgery building.

We believe that if the local community were allowed to expand even further by granting approval to the proposed housing development at Wyngates, the future primary health care needs of the local community would be disadvantaged. The existing service would be stretched more thinly and the accessibility and quality of GP services available to patients across our practice area will inevitably be compromised.
Blofield and the surrounding villages are considered to be essentially semi-rural and we believe that the granting of permission to establish further housing developments in the small village of Blofield will be detrimental to our patients, the local community and the environment. We believe that the granting of planning permission at the Manor Park site will stretch and challenge the infrastructure of Blofield Surgery to its maximum limits. Furthermore, we think that the further proposed development will be a bridge too far and will compromise primary care services for our entire practice population. The further application/proposal is disproportionate to the size of the village and the facilities that are currently available. If due regard for the equilibrium of the village is disregarded, the village of Blofield will cease to exist and will become yet another suburb of Norwich.

We strongly support the original decision of Broadland District Council to refuse this new development and would urge the committee to refuse this appeal.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Drs Gaskin & Ledward
Blofield Surgery