

36 Station Approach, Ruislip



1.0 Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of an application at 36 Station Approach, Ruislip which has an existing hydro pool in the rear garden built and used in accordance with planning permission 39731/APP/2021/4526. There is an existing condition attached to the consent which restricts the use of the approved hydro pool outbuilding to purposes incidental to the enjoyment of the main dwellinghouse. Initially it was thought a s73 amendment application would have been sufficient however the original description included "Applicant" therefore an amendment application to allow for external visitors to use the hydro pool would be a direct conflict with the original description. As there is caselaw which determines that a s73 cannot amend the description of development we seek full planning permission.

The outbuilding has been constructed and the hydro pool sits within it. The present application therefore does not principally concern the acceptability of new built form, but whether the use of an existing specialist facility can reasonably be extended beyond a purely domestic function so that it can provide hydrotherapy to a wider group of users in response to a clear and evidenced shortfall in local provision. That distinction is important, because the proposal makes productive use of an existing facility rather than introducing a new standalone institutional building into the area.

The supporting document explains that the proposed hydrotherapy use is driven by genuine local need and should not be equated with a standard leisure or swimming pool use. Hydrotherapy is described as a clinically recognised therapeutic intervention delivered in a purpose-built heated pool environment, commonly prescribed by physiotherapists, GPs, paediatric specialists and rehabilitation teams. It is fundamentally different from ordinary swimming in terms of water temperature, accessibility, hoisting, depth gradients and therapeutic supervision. The planning merits of the proposal must therefore be assessed through that lens.

In addition, the supporting documentation in regard of the Transport Assessment and Noise Impact Assessment explains that the limitations of the hydro pool in as far as it would permit only 1 person to use the facility at a time and reasonable restriction on the number of visits per day result in a proposal which would not result in significant impacts to neighbours or the highway network.

2.0 Policy Context

The application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the most relevant policy framework is as follows.

At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework supports the social objective of sustainable development, including the creation of healthy and inclusive communities and the provision of accessible services and community facilities. It

also seeks to promote healthy, safe and inclusive places and to plan positively for community needs.

At the strategic London-wide level, London Plan Policy S1 requires boroughs to ensure that the social infrastructure needs of London's diverse communities are met and that provision is informed by needs assessments and engagement with service providers and local communities. Policy S2 specifically supports health and social care facilities and requires boroughs to work with relevant partners to plan for and support the delivery of such facilities. Policy GG3 promotes healthy communities and seeks to ensure that development contributes to health and wellbeing.

At the local level, the most relevant policies in the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2 are Policy DMCI 2 (New Community Infrastructure), which supports the refurbishment and re-use of existing premises for community facilities and supports out-of-centre medical and health services in former residential premises where they do not cause unacceptable noise, traffic or other disturbance to residential areas; Policy DMHB 4 (Residential Amenity), which seeks to protect neighbouring living conditions; Policy DMHB 11 (Design of New Development), which requires development to be compatible with its context; and transport policies including DMT 2 and DMT 6, which deal with highway impacts and parking.

These policies are supportive in principle of health-related community infrastructure, including through the re-use of existing premises, provided residential amenity and transport impacts remain acceptable. That is the central policy question in this case.

3.0 Site and Planning Background

The site comprises an existing dwellinghouse in a suburban residential area of Ruislip. Within its curtilage is the hydropool outbuilding approved under ref. 39731/APP/2021/4526. The present proposal does not seek major physical enlargement or a fresh built form assessment; rather, it seeks to vary the operative restriction on the use of a structure that is already part of the lawful development of the site.

Condition 4 of the planning permission states:

The outbuilding hereby permitted shall be used only for purposes incidental to the residential use of the No.36 Station Approach and shall remain within the same planning unit. The outbuilding shall at no time be used for purposes such as a living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, study or as a separate unit of accommodation.

REASON

To avoid any future undesirable fragmentation of the curtilage or the creation of a separate residential use and in the interests of protecting the amenity of adjoining residential properties in accordance with Policy DMHB11 of the Hillingdon Local Plan - Part Two (2020).

This is important in the context of Policy DMHB 11, because the visual and physical effects of the outbuilding have already been accepted through the earlier permission. The planning assessment is therefore focused on land use consequences, namely whether the proposed hydrotherapy use is of a nature and intensity compatible with the residential setting, and whether the public benefits are sufficient to justify varying the condition.

4.0 Nature of the Proposed Use

The proposal is for the extended use of the existing hydropool as a small-scale hydrotherapy facility. It is not a proposal for a general commercial leisure use, unrestricted public access, or a high-turnover operation. The supporting material makes clear that hydrotherapy is a specialist therapeutic service for people with medical, neurological, mobility-related or developmental needs, rather than a conventional recreational activity.

That distinction is highly relevant to Policy DMCI 2. The policy is supportive of health and community infrastructure and specifically contemplates medical and health services operating from adapted or re-used premises where impacts can be properly managed. The proposal falls squarely within that policy objective because it would utilise an existing specialist facility to meet a health-related need in the local community. It also aligns with London Plan Policies S1 and S2, both of which support the delivery of social and health infrastructure in response to identified need.

5.0 Need for Hydrotherapy Provision

Hydrotherapy is described as providing substantial evidence-based benefits across multiple population groups. For people with musculoskeletal conditions, hydrotherapy can reduce joint pain and stiffness, support rehabilitation after hip and knee replacements, improve muscle strength and mobility, and enable safe movement following injury.

For those with neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, stroke recovery, Parkinson's disease and acquired brain injuries, hydrotherapy can improve balance, coordination and muscle control and can reduce spasticity through immersion in warm water.

For children with SEN and physical disabilities, hydrotherapy provides a safe, calming sensory environment, supports therapy through play-based intervention, and helps build confidence and independence. For the elderly population, it offers safe low-impact exercise, reduces falls risk by improving strength and balance, supports recovery after fractures or surgery, and combats social isolation through structured sessions. There are clear mental health and wellbeing benefits, noting that warm water immersion can reduce anxiety, encourage social engagement and help build confidence in those living with long-term conditions

These detailed therapeutic benefits matter in planning terms because they show that the proposal is not merely convenient or desirable: it serves a recognised health function. That gives the proposal direct support under London Plan Policy S2, which is concerned with ensuring health and social care infrastructure is planned for and delivered, and under Policy GG3, which promotes development that improves health and wellbeing. It also reinforces the proposal's alignment with the NPPF's support for healthy, inclusive communities.

6.0 Shortage of Existing Provision

There is a wider national decline in hydrotherapy facilities due to funding constraints, ageing infrastructure and redevelopment of hospital sites. At the local level, it states that access to hospital-based hydrotherapy pools is limited and usually prioritised for acute cases, community access is extremely restricted, waiting times are long, and many residents must travel outside the borough to receive treatment. It notes that this shortage disproportionately affects people with mobility challenges, who are least able to undertake long and difficult journeys.

The Applicant's son has experienced first-hand the benefits of hydrotherapy however there has been a significant decline in facilities open to the public hence the reason the facility was constructed in the first instance. In compiling this document, the Applicant explained that hydrotherapy has been required over a period of three years as part of managing multiple sclerosis, yet the absence of local provision has meant travelling to Kingston Rehabilitation Centre and a clinic in Bow, London. Journeys are approximately 90 minutes each way and cost around £120 per session. It further states that three hospital hydrotherapy pools serving the wider local area have closed: Northwick Park, Ealing and Hammersmith.

This is powerful evidence. It demonstrates not simply a theoretical unmet need, but an actual and ongoing deficiency in local health infrastructure. In policy terms, that deficiency is directly relevant to London Plan Policy S1, which requires social infrastructure planning to be informed by evidence of need, and to Policy DMCI 2, which supports the re-use of premises for community and health purposes where justified.

7.0 Key Beneficiary Groups

The submitted evidence also explains why the need is particularly acute for specific sections of the community. It identifies three key groups.

First, disabled residents. Hillingdon has a significant number of residents living with physical disabilities and long-term conditions and that hydrotherapy is often one of the few genuinely accessible forms of exercise available to wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility.

Second, children with special educational needs and paediatric users. The number of children with EHCPs has risen significantly in recent years and that many of those children would benefit from regular hydrotherapy to support physical development

and sensory regulation. It notes that families often face long travel times, high private costs, or simply an inability to access suitable facilities.

Third, the elderly population. Ageing population increases and demand for low-impact rehabilitation services and that hydrotherapy can reduce hospital admissions, shorten rehabilitation periods and support independent living.

These groups are central to the planning balance because they underline the equality, accessibility and health dimensions of the proposal. The wider therapeutic use of the hydropool would not just create another service; it would help address barriers experienced by some of the most vulnerable sections of the community. That strongly supports the proposal under London Plan Policies S1, S2 and GG3, and under the NPPF's objective of creating inclusive and healthy communities.

8.0 Community, Social and Economic Benefits

The proposal goes beyond clinical benefits as there are broader community values. The local hydrotherapy centre would help reduce health inequalities, provide inclusive community infrastructure, support integrated working between the NHS, schools and community groups, provide structured sessions for SEN schools and care providers, and reduce social isolation among vulnerable users. It also explains that the facility could operate through a mixed model involving NHS referrals, school partnerships, community sessions and specialist therapeutic sessions.

Of course, the proposal would also present a local investment in preventative health infrastructure can reduce long-term costs to NHS rehabilitation services, social care budgets and residential care placements. Hydrotherapy can facilitate earlier discharge from hospital and reduce dependence on higher-cost interventions. The proposal aligns with Council objectives relating to health and wellbeing, inclusion and accessibility, support for vulnerable residents and community resilience.

Those points are highly material to planning. They mean the benefits of the proposal are not private or narrow; they extend into public health, social care efficiency and social inclusion. This gives the proposal strong support under Policy DMCI 2 and London Plan Policy GG3, and it adds substantial weight to the planning balance.

9.0 Highways and Accessibility

Transport impacts must also be considered, having regard to DMT 2 and DMT 6. Here again, the specialist nature of the use is important. The proposed hydrotherapy use is not one that would attract unrestricted footfall or intensive customer turnover. Attendance is likely to be pre-arranged and staggered, and the number of users at any one time is expected to be modest. That means traffic generation and parking demand would be materially less than many other commercial or community uses.

There is also a wider accessibility point. The current lack of local hydrotherapy provision means vulnerable users are often forced into long-distance travel,

sometimes across London, simply to access treatment. The proposal would bring that service closer to home for local residents and in doing so would reduce travel burdens for users who may already have mobility or health constraints. That is an important public benefit in itself and is consistent with the broader health and accessibility aims of the NPPF and the London Plan.

10.0 Impact to Neighbours

A Noise Impact Assessment has been compiled and is submitted alongside this planning application. It identifies the existing background noise levels to be high due to Station Road being a busy road, the commercial uses to the north and the presence of South Ruislip station and railway line which is less than 100 m from the site. The proposal is to widen the existing use to external parties allowing for 2-3 appointments to take place and use of the facility between the hours of 9-5 when naturally most residents would not be at home. The Applicant owns both neighbouring properties as well. There is an existing external access to the rear of the outbuilding accessed via the Alley off of Northolt Avenue. This reduces the impact to neighbouring properties.

The Local Planning Authority have the ability to impose conditions to restrict the number of visits per day and the time in which these can take place.

11.0 Conclusion

The proposal seeks planning permission to widen the use of the existing hydro pool restricted by both the description of development and a condition attached to planning permission 39731/APP/2021/4526 so that the existing hydro pool at 36 Station Approach, Ruislip can be used for hydrotherapy purposes beyond a purely incidental domestic function. The submitted evidence demonstrates that hydrotherapy delivers major benefits for musculoskeletal, neurological, paediatric, SEN, elderly and mental wellbeing needs; that there is a serious and worsening shortage of local provision; that vulnerable users are currently facing journeys of around 90 minutes each way and treatment costs of around £120 per session; and that the proposal would reduce health inequalities and provide meaningful local health infrastructure.

Taken together with the policy support in the Hillingdon Local Plan Part 2, the London Plan and the NPPF, and bearing in mind that the hydro pool building already exists and that amenity impacts can be appropriately managed, the proposal represents a sustainable and socially beneficial form of development for which planning permission should be granted.