



The practice:
The Village Dental Practice
 14 High Street
 Benson
 Oxfordshire
 OX10 6RP

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photography: Lloyd Goodall

TIMELINE:

Property purchase date: **Early 2009**
 Plans drawn up: **Summer 2008**
 Building work began: **October 2009**
 Grand opening: **March 2010**

How I did it

Dr Neel Tank looks back on opening his third dental practice, The Village Dental Practice in Oxfordshire

Having qualified from Bristol University in 1998 and completing my vocational training and one-year associateship at a practice in Reading, I took over ownership as a partnership of a practice at Didcot in 2000.

In 2005, after leaving my first partnership-owned dental practice, my wife Laura and I discovered a practice in Benson, Oxfordshire, that was about to close, and made the decision to take it over from the retiring dentist.

Despite having only 200 patients left at the practice, I was determined that the experience I had gained from modernising my previous surgery would enable me to rebuild and set my newly acquired practice up on a positive trajectory going forward. Fast forward a few years, and the practice was once again back on track business-wise. It was at this point that I realised it was time to expand the range of services available to patients to encompass treatments that covered all aspects of dentistry, as well as provide these in a modern and friendly environment.



The reception and waiting area at The Village Dental Practice

THE TEAM:

- **Dr Neel Tank**
Practice owner – dentist
- **Dr Lianne Steadman**
Dentist
- **Dr Kashif Hafeez**
Dentist
- **Dr Kiran Rai**
Dentist
- **Lesley Sparrow**
Hygienist
- **Jane Smale**
Hygienist
- **Laura Tank**
Senior manager
- **Norma Watson**
Practice manager in Benson and Kingsclere
- **Jane Gardner**
Receptionist and administrator
- **Rebecca DeMichelis**
Senior nurse
- **Adele Marietti**
Nurse



The practice had begun to outgrow its existing premises, and I felt it was the right time to relocate to a more prominent position on the high street, which had been a long-term goal of mine from the start.

Perfect premises

As soon as I saw the new site, I knew immediately that it was in the perfect location; situated on the main high street with a large shop frontage meant that it would be extremely prominent, which in turn would create an increase in public awareness of the practice. The building itself was spread over two floors, making it very easy to separate the space into different working zones. The downstairs area lent itself very well to becoming the main clinical site, while upstairs was perfect for housing office, staff and administrative activities.

Having fully refurbished my other practice in Kingsclere the previous year, I was fortunate that I had already had some experience in this area. This helped me enormously in terms of my confidence, and gave me the experience I needed to approach this

new challenge in an optimistic but realistic way. I also had close emotional support from Laura and my family, which helped in dealing with the many obstacles that I knew would lie ahead.

Facing the fear

Having created a picture in my mind of what I wanted to achieve, as well as acquiring the ideal site on which to realise this, one of my biggest fears was that I would be unable to find a company capable of turning my vision into a reality.

However, this was not the only hurdle that I had to overcome. There was also the not-so-small matter of obtaining planning permission to make the necessary alterations, as well as get consent for the building's change of use – all of which meant that I had a lot to juggle.

Another concern was the question of whether residents living near to the new premises might raise objections to my plans, and how I would manage these if they arose. To say that there is a lot to consider when relocating is an understatement!



The practice's branding is consistent

Money talks

Besides the emotional considerations, which have to be taken seriously, there are also the financial implications, which, if overlooked, can significantly hinder (and, in some cases, destroy) the completion of an otherwise good project.

In terms of finance, I was helped with a business loan from my bank, which enabled me to purchase the freehold property and cover the costs of construction work.

The surgeries at The Village Dental Practice

The costs of the equipment were covered by a contract with Tim Gammon at Lease UK, enabling me to lease what I needed.

The practice had grown enough to take on the expansion and a bigger NHS contract was available from the local primary care trust to help finance the project. The new NHS contract allowed the rapid expansion of the practice in its new location and the introduction of two more associate dentists. These patients enjoy the benefit of the new practice and the vast array of private treatments that are also available to them.

Outside help

Several companies assisted me in this project. Aspects building contractors, who dealt with the building works, electrics, plumbing, and air conditioning/heating systems, recommended Clark Dental, who provided the planning and design of the surgeries and central sterilisation room, along with all of the new equipment.

By using Clark Dental's CAD (computer aided design) I was able to



see my vision in its completed state. Being able to visualise the rooms from every possible aspect was incredibly helpful and certainly added to my peace of mind.

My architect, Chris Bateman of Bateman Harris, who helped us to achieve the change of use and planning permission required as well as providing the initial drawings for the new practice layout, highly recommended working with Matt from Clark Dental, commenting that the company was extremely helpful, friendly and quickly available for the initial onsite meeting.

As mentioned previously, finding a company that I could trust with my vision was incredibly important to me, but I really felt that my new practice was in safe hands with the companies who helped me achieve my dream dental practice.

The obstacles

Of course, it wasn't all plain sailing – we encountered several issues throughout the course of the project. The premises purchased was actually two buildings – commercial property at the front end, and residential at the rear and upstairs. We required legal permission, as well as planning permission and change of use, to be able to merge the two property deeds



The associate dentists and hygienists use the second surgery, which houses the air tube system

together. This involved submissions to both the south Oxfordshire district council and the local parish council. Due to worries from neighbours regarding the increase in noise (especially due to the fact that the air conditioning condensers could generate noise pollution), an acoustic engineer was instructed to carry out noise level tests. The noise from all aspects of the new practice was found and concluded to be within acceptable limits.

The council also advised us, because the building was grade II listed, that



Ceiling-mounted TV screens are used for patient education programmes as well as showing patients digital radiographs and intra-oral photos



The air tube system transports dirty instruments from the surgery to the decontamination room and clean instruments back to the surgery



State-of-the-art equipment can be found in all the surgeries at The Village Dental Practice; the X-ray units are activated wirelessly with bluetooth handheld controllers

some features should be preserved. This posed problems in the reception area layout because an original brick wall had to be kept, which reduced the space required for the reception area and walk through to the rear surgery. If I could do just one thing differently, it would be the removal of this listed brick wall!

Since opening, I have also learnt the

importance of having a good cleaner who can maintain the standard of cleanliness of the practice and also team members who will do the same during the day time, thus keeping the practice looking fantastic.

Personal achievements

From research, and spontaneous

inspiration from myself and my wife, we were able to choose the décor and furnishings, as well as the colour scheme for the practice, which I am extremely proud about.

I have developed a very modern practice that I am very proud of. I am especially proud of the feature wall and lighting in the waiting room, the appearance of the surgeries, the



The bathroom is one of Dr Tank's favourite features



The waiting room with feature wall and hidden air con unit



ceiling-mounted TV screens, the toilet design and appearance, and the air tube system that takes all the dental instruments from the front surgery to the central decontamination room, and returns the clean instruments.

For me, one of my own personal achievements was being able to project manage while still practising dentistry full-time at the original site at Benson and at my Kingsclere practice; it gave me a real sense of personal pride. On top of this, I was also incredibly pleased to have stuck to the budget that was initially agreed and finished on time!

Laura, with her 13 years in the profession as a dental nurse and practice manager, liaised with many of the companies involved, gave valued

input to the project from her experience and supported me with all the decisions that were made.

Growing all the time

The relocation of the practice to larger premises has allowed the continued expansion and introduction of more dentists and hygienists, a new full-time senior nurse and an administrator.

My practice manager from the Kingsclere practice also visits on a regular basis to oversee the day-to-day running of the practice and maintain the systems, policies and protocols. A team of dentists have been introduced that have individual special interests in oral surgery, endodontics and periodontal dentistry.

Regarding marketing, we promote the practice through the local village monthly magazine, called the *Benson Bulletin* and a more widely distributed magazine called *Jump Ahead*, which covers many local towns.

Our website is currently being reconstructed and will soon be relaunched, and we have just ventured into the social networking world of Facebook and Twitter (follow us @tvdp1).

The view from the rear surgery of the reception area

Looking back

Now that the project is complete, I am very proud to own such a modern practice that receives compliments on a daily basis. New patients are always enquiring about the practice from recommendation as we have an excellent reputation.

We were recently shortlisted in the categories of Best Dental Practice and UK Outstanding Achievement at the 2011 Dentistry Awards. This has made all the team members very proud and given them the encouragement to achieve new heights.

The workload has increased, seeing more patients and more administration, however because of the team expansion, it is easier than ever to delegate the work. Regular practice meetings maintain the communication between team members and allow us to discuss future plans to improve care and services for patients.

On a personal note, I am proud of achieving the goal I set out with in 2005 when I took over the practice in

Benson, owning two great practices, a great team and an overall great reputation.

If I were to offer any advice to other dental professionals considering a similar project it would be make sure you are financially stable. I would also advise hiring a great architect and a surgery design and equipment company that you can trust implicitly and who will help with the planning and successful outcome of the project. It is imperative that you have excellent rapport with companies that can help to achieve you goal.

I am delighted to say that thanks to my focus, determination and unwavering vision, along with the invaluable assistance from several companies, everything that I planned has been successfully developed and achieved.

It is also very important that you have a proactive dental team who can contribute to the practice's success, and, on a more personal note, a family that provides encouragement and support. [PD](#)



The signage for The Village Dental Practice is clear and consistent with the branding

COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

Aspects Dental Construction
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Chris Bateman from Bateman Harris
(architects)
T: 01491 412161

Clark Dental
(equipment suppliers)
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Tim Gammon from Lease UK
(finance)
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