

New Hospital Campaign

NHC

For *real* transformation in West Hertfordshire

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THE NHS LOSES OUT AS DEVELOPERS GRAB BEST LAND ON FUTURE WATFORD HOSPITAL SITE

High-rise hospital set to be joined by a dozen more tower blocks

The West Herts NHS Trust has been accused of letting private sector developers 'run rings round it' in negotiations over the future of Watford General Hospital. The Hospital is set to lose half the area it currently uses, as commercial interests take the best land on its current site.

The Trust have announced controversial plans to house the Hospital in three of Watford's tallest buildings – 18, 16 and 14 storeys high. Now planning documents have revealed that Watford's high-rise hospital is set to be closely hemmed in by even more multi-storey blocks, many built by developers.

The tallest of the three planned hospital towers will reach 80 metres – 12.5 metres higher than Grenfell Tower.

The New Hospital Campaign (NHC) today accused the Trust of an 'abject failure' in its negotiations, leaving the high-rise hospital to be built on its notoriously sloping car park and marooned in a sea of overdevelopment that will mean that the WGH site will contain buildings with more than 150 storeys between them – a 500 percent rise on the number of storeys on the site at present.

The Campaign will continue to press for the new hospital to be built instead on a clear central site easily accessible to all in West Hertfordshire. They point to the popular plans for a new lower-rise hospital on a clear site near Harlow to replace the present cramped urban Princess Alexandra Hospital as an example of what can be achieved by an NHS Trust with the right priorities.

Residents of West Hertfordshire have the chance to make their views known by 23 April in a virtual consultation which can be reached by clicking this link: <https://www.bdp.com/westhertshospitals>

Expert analysis points to the flaws

An analysis (attached) sent to the architects BDP and with contributions by building experts who are NHC members, points to major problems with the Trust's plans:

- The Trust has failed to negotiate effectively with commercial developers, so that the space available for the hospital buildings – its 'footprint' – is set to be cut by more than half, from 7.5 hectares to 3.58 hectares;
- With limited land available at Watford, the Trust will be forced to squeeze the hospital into three huge high-rise towers blocks – a costly, disruptive and time-consuming way to build;
- The land chosen for the new hospital building is especially hard and costly to build on – it's currently the notoriously sloping car park. Meanwhile, commercial developers will be able to work on flat land which is currently used by hospital buildings;
- Despite previous claims by the Trust, there will be little room for expansion of the Hospital to meet the needs of West Hertfordshire's growing population – less than two football pitches' worth;
- The plans make no mention of the mooted move of elements of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to Watford General. If that happens, 20,000 square metres of the scarce expansion space would be used up;
- There is not enough landscaping for such a huge scheme;
- The new hospital buildings will be surrounded on three sides by a forest of high-rises, almost all of them higher than any present WGH building. This will transform the area into a poor imitation of an inner city. This, they say, might be appropriate in a large city where space is at a premium – but it is totally inappropriate for a suburban setting in a Hertfordshire town;
- Transport planning has been almost non-existent. There are no plans for more public transport links and car parking will soon become inadequate. Thomas Sawyer Way, the key route into the Hospital for blue-light ambulances and other traffic, will become more and more congested as the developers' plans – for nearly 1000 residential units, a hotel, and retail – unfold. Construction vehicles will be thronging the area for the rest of the decade and residents including schoolchildren will be tangling with hospital traffic for ever.

A spokesperson for the NHC said:

"The West Herts Trust has allowed the private sector to run rings round it. Commercial interests have been able to cherry-pick the best parts of the existing Watford General Hospital site. Meanwhile, patients will have to

make do with a high-rise 'solution' for the new West Herts hospital which is going to prove more costly and difficult to build and operate than an equivalent lower-rise development on a clear and accessible site."

"There has rightly been a lot of criticism of the proposed high-rise hospital, which will see an 80 metre high monster accompanied by two other enormous blocks just 15.5 metres apart from each other. But there's more. The closer you look at the plans published recently for the Hospital, the worse they appear. Between the high-rise hospital and Vicarage Road there will be two other rows of high rises, ranging from 6 storeys to 10 storeys, closely-packed and with inadequate landscaping.

"The fact that the number of storeys on the WGH site will rise from 30 to over 150 speaks volumes about the distorted priorities of the Trust. They are guilty of an abject failure on many fronts. A new approach is badly needed – and there is a good example of good planning at Harlow, where the financial and operational advantages of a clear new site are properly appreciated."

The Campaign points out that West Herts will be stuck with the hospital buildings until 2090 – they will have a 60-year life.

Calling for a fair and independent assessment of the pros and cons of a new acute hospital on a clear and convenient new site, Edie Glatter concluded:

"The Trust has demonstrated shocking short-termism in rejecting the obvious option of a new clear site, and insisting instead on promoting this crowded and chaotic mess. The effects of the catastrophic performance of the Trust will stay with the people of the area for generations. I hope many people concerned with the standard of healthcare in West Herts – and the quality of the environment in West Watford – will make their views known in the current virtual consultation."

PLEASE SEE THE PAGES BELOW FOR ILLUSTRATIONS COMPARING WEST HERTS'S PLANS WITH THOSE FOR HARLOW – HUMAN SCALE ON A CLEAR NEW SITE

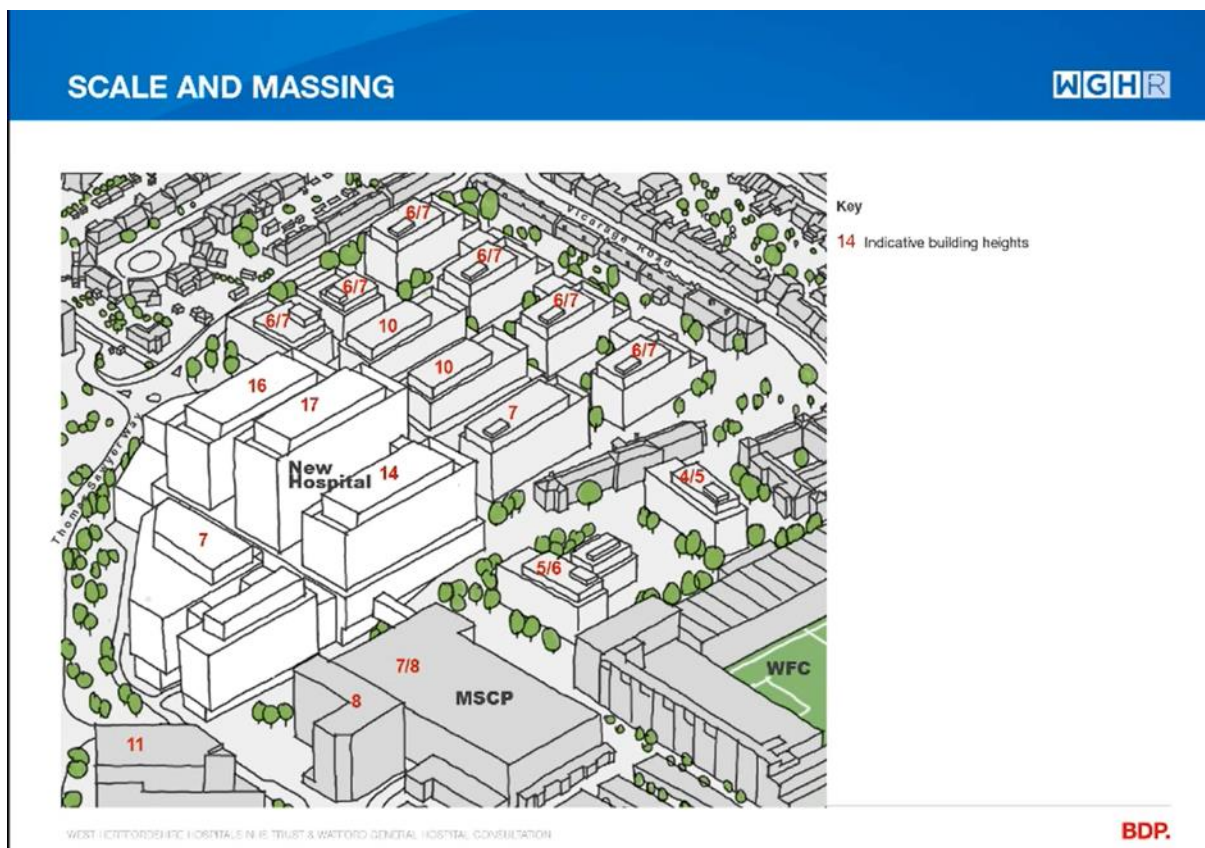
NOTES TO EDITORS – PLANS FOR WATFORD AND HARLOW HOSPITALS COMPARED

Watford Plans

This plan sets out what developers and the West Herts Trust want to do at Watford. The white triangle in the centre is set to be the space for the three high-rises of the new hospital. The 'future development areas' look set to house residential and commercial development.

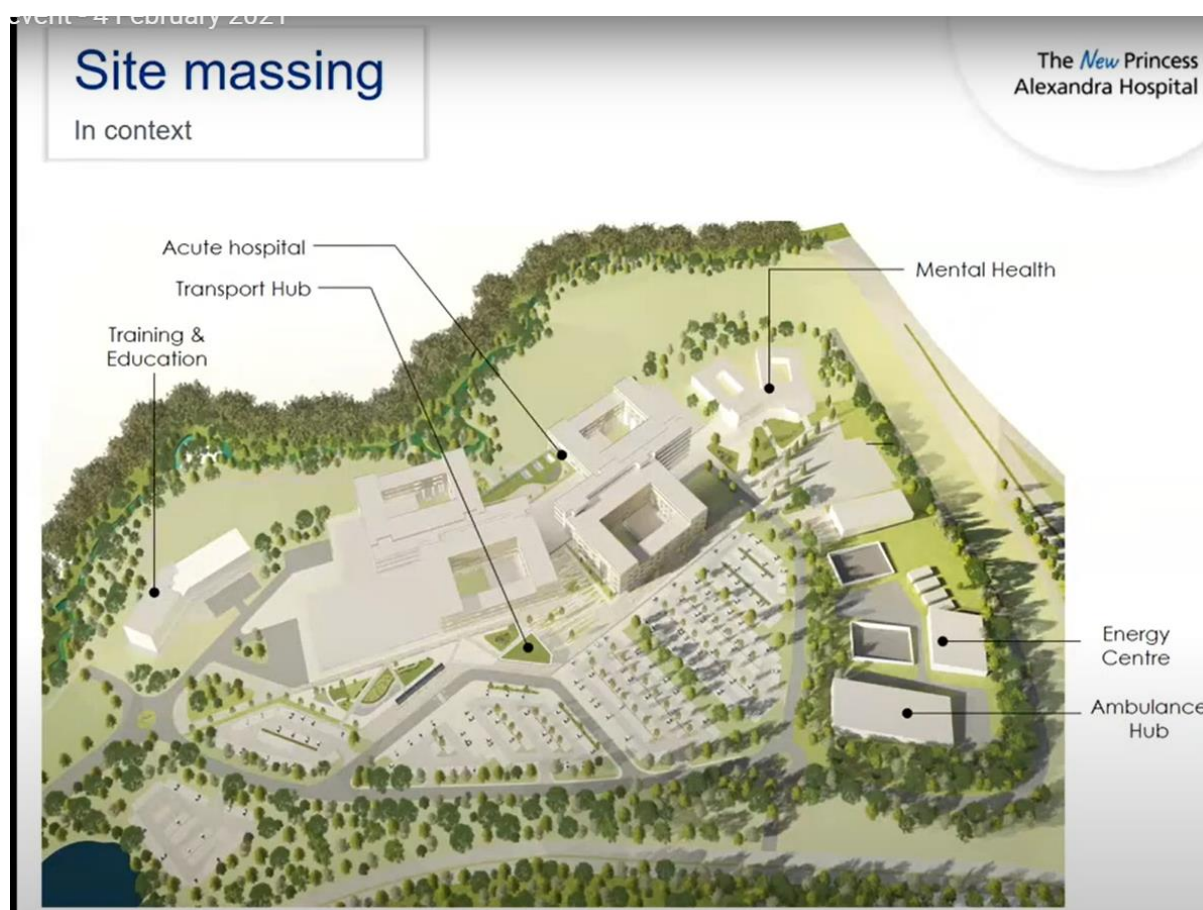


This is the 'massing' diagram of what is planned for the site of Watford General – a potential total of 150+ storeys. The 'storey count' for the current hospital is about 30.



Harlow's New Hospital – human scale on a clear new site

The NHC say that there is a better alternative than the West Herts plans – and it is just 35 miles away. The Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust at Harlow, like Watford building one of the six 'new hospital' schemes announced in September 2019, has decided that it would be quicker and cheaper to build a new hospital on a clear and accessible site just outside the town, than to try to build on their own cramped town-centre site. Plans – below - are well advanced for a hospital with only medium-rise buildings set in plenty of space.



Site massing

Artistic impression of the proposed site layout

The *New* Princess
Alexandra Hospital

