

Media release

A REAL CHANCE FOR A TRULY NEW HOSPITAL IN WEST HERTS

Why Watford General Won't Work

A health group is demanding an urgent, radical rethink of the current unrealistic plans for redeveloping Watford General Hospital. The Hertfordshire-based New Hospital Campaign (NHC) today called on the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust to ditch their 'obsession' with building at Watford, and grab a real opportunity to build a truly new emergency care hospital on a clear, accessible out-of-town site.

This case was put to the Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, on 7 February, when representatives from the NHC took part in a delegation led by Sir Mike Penning MP.

The outline business case for new hospital facilities for West Hertfordshire has to be completed by the autumn of this year. The NHC believe this gives the Trust the opportunity to get it right by turning away from Watford General as an emergency care site.

West Herts has been promised funding as one of the first wave of new hospitals in the Government's programme. But, say the NHC, the investment must be in the right place.

The Trust's original idea of a £900 million high-rise hospital for Watford General was firmly rejected by the Government nearly a year ago. But the Trust have still not got around to publishing any alternatives to their favoured 270-foot towering infirmary.

And the Trust's efforts to persuade the Treasury to provide the money for Watford General options appear to be floundering, with no news on what money will be available.

Philip Aylett, Co-ordinator of the New Hospital Campaign, said:

***“The Trust must call a halt to their current unrealistic and unaffordable plans before more money and time are wasted. The project is already a year behind schedule, and progress is stalled. The Trust are struggling to convince the Government that Watford General can be redeveloped in a way that is both good for patients and affordable. The Trust need to ditch their obsession with building at Watford, whatever the cost.*”**

“The truth is simple. As a site for a modern emergency care hospital - Watford General won’t work.”

Dr Aylett continued:

“It is baffling that West Herts Trust continue to insist that redevelopment must take place at and around the increasingly cramped current site of Watford General hospital. They constantly manipulate the facts and ignore reality to support this view. Most seriously the Trust failed to properly assess the significant risks of redeveloping at Watford General before rejecting all new site options in favour of Watford in October 2020.”

***“ Their focus needs to switch to considering a practical plan for a new hospital on a clear and accessible site that will benefit patient care for people across West Herts (including Watford) - and offer value for money. The Trust now has a window of opportunity to look at the many advantages of building on a clear site. It should move quickly to take advantage of that opportunity.*”**

“This case was put to the Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, on 7 February, when representatives from the NHC were included on a delegation led by Sir Mike Penning MP. We look forward to positive results from this meeting.”

The huge flaws in the Trust’s plans

Less and less space: the Trust are trying to fit a 1000-bed new hospital facility into a plot that is half the size of the current one. The reason for this seems to lie in the murky depths of the so-called Watford Health Campus - an agreement between developers and Watford Council for large amounts of residential and other development on and around the current hospital site.

As a result, the Trust have had to plan to build high. Its current proposals involve demolishing most of Watford General and building three tall towers - the biggest 270 feet high – making it the tallest NHS building outside central London. Furthermore, if the unthinkable were to happen, local fire services are not adequately equipped to deal with a fire in a building more than 150 feet high.

The Trust have known for nearly a year that these towers would break the budget – it would cost over £900m to build and equip them as designed but the money simply isn't there for this. So the Trust will have to curb their enthusiasm for their towering infirmary.

The reality of sticking with Watford General

Redeveloping Watford General in other ways would almost certainly mean retaining and refurbishing the existing buildings which are in a desperate state. And the site services infrastructure is at the end of its life.

- A poor environment – there will be serious overdevelopment of the cramped site around Watford General, with a total of 1500 flats and houses, a hotel, a school and industrial units either built or planned.
- The likely move of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to the Watford General site will add further congestion
- Construction noise, dust and pollution will disrupt the lives of patients and staff for many years
- The site is mostly steeply sloping, and there are pollution and flooding problems that have not been properly investigated. That makes development expensive and would deprive the Trust's other hospitals, at Hemel Hempstead and St Albans, of much-needed investment

- Existing poor access will get worse as car park places are cut and the overdevelopment increases traffic, which is already heavily congested - the hospital is right next to Watford Football Club. There's little prospect of real improvements to public transport for people in St Albans and Hemel Hempstead and other parts of West Herts.

Why a new site makes sense

A hospital on a new site convenient for all could provide:

- A good environment for care, with buildings on a human scale, decent landscaping and room to expand as our population grows
- Planned access by road and public transport across the area
- The chance to design buildings from scratch will help achieve net zero carbon and be well suited to new clinical technology
- Speed of construction as building can go on without interruption or disruption

Other trusts have chosen a different route

The West Herts Trust’s attitude is baffling: in nearby Harlow, the Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust, faced with the same choice of blundering on with redeveloping an existing, cramped town centre site or building anew on a clear ‘out-of-town’ site, have chosen the new site. The Harlow Trust have analysed the evidence for a hospital on a clear site, and have concluded it would be built much faster and give far better results for patients.

What are the alternatives for West Herts?

There are several possibilities for clear new sites in West Herts, easily accessible from everywhere in the area, but none have yet been properly assessed by the West Herts Hospitals Trust.

THE TRUST SHOULD URGENTLY RECONSIDER THEIR DECISION TO REJECT NEW SITE OPTIONS FOR AN EMERGENCY CARE HOSPITAL AND COMMISSION A PROPER INDEPENDENT STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE SITES

RELEASE ENDS

The New Hospital Campaign is a collaboration between Dacorum Health Action Group, Dacorum Patients Group, and campaigners from Berkhamsted and St. Albans to share ideas and strategies to fight specifically for a new A&E hospital for West Herts in a more central location.

To get in touch with us or find out more about the New Hospital Campaign, please right-click on the icons below:



