

***MEDIA RELEASE***

*For further information, contact Philip Aylett on 07984 181135 or email*

*philip.aylett@gmail.com*

***£39 MILLION HOSPITAL PARKING ‘SOLUTION’ WON’T WORK***

***Costly Watford General multi-storey will be too small***

A parking crisis is looming for West Hertfordshire hospitals. Demand for car spaces from new developments at Watford General and St Albans City Hospitals looks like exceeding planned supply, despite lavish spending. That could mean many patients, other visitors and staff being forced to park well away from the hospitals, increasing stress and inconvenience.

A local health group said today the impending car chaos demonstrated ‘poor planning and failure to understand the needs and interests of patients and families’ by the West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals Trust. The New Hospital Campaign (NHC) urged a ‘radical rethink’ - planning for an emergency care and specialist hospital on a clear new site. That would avoid the problems posed by the Watford General site and the new Riverwell housing estate - totalling up to 1500 flats and houses - which is springing up around it.

**Watford General - £39.3 m car park likely to be too small**

At Watford General, plans to build a 260-foot hospital on the current, steeply sloping surface visitors’ car park have been thrown into doubt. Those plans rely on contractors getting full access soon to that car park, with almost all visitor parking switching to the year-old, £39.3 million multi-storey car park (MSCP). The Trust claimed in 2021 that the MSCP would provide the ‘long-term solution’ to the parking shortage at Watford General.

Sadly, the Trust seem to have miscalculated. The evidence is that the MSCP - which cost nearly **£27,000 per car park space** – will simply not be big enough to accommodate all the cars that will need to park at the Hospital. **Both** the visitors’ surface car park **and** the MSCP have been nearly full at times in recent weeks. As the Trust closes the surface car park to start construction, where will staff and visitor cars go? Unless the Trust finds potentially-expensive extra spaces, many people will have to park in the town centre or elsewhere. The problem will worsen as the surrounding Riverwell housing estate is developed.

NHC Co-ordinator Philip Aylett said today:

*‘Access to hospitals is the Achilles heel of the West Herts Trust. Parking is a key weakness, with the Trust suffering a severe case of over-optimism. The MSCP is a good facility, but already it does not appear big enough on its own for Watford General.*

*‘The situation will only get worse, with big increases planned in Hospital bed numbers and staffing, and hundreds more people moving into the surrounding Riverwell housing estate. As so often during this redevelopment saga, the Trust’s poor planning and failure to understand the needs and interests of staff, patients and families have led them into trouble.*

*‘The Watford General site is simply unsuitable for the planned expansion. The case for redevelopment there relied on the claim that construction work would not interfere with the operation of the Hospital. This is patently untrue – disruption will be endemic at Watford General. The reality has not matched the vision. A radical rethink is needed, with active and urgent planning for an emergency care and specialist hospital on a clear site. That would be the feasible way forward, but the Trust won’t contemplate it.’*

**St Albans City Hospital – will surgery patients be forced to park a mile away?**

At St Albans City Hospital, plans for a new elective surgery hub to reduce backlogs, serving the whole of Hertfordshire and West Essex, are stumbling over lack of car park space.

Spaces for both visitors and staff are already in short supply at St Albans. With more patients arriving at the site from a wider area, the already-cramped parking facilities could be overwhelmed. So the Trust are desperately searching for spaces to meet the increased demand generated by the new hub. One possibility mentioned at a recent Board meeting was for 20-30 cars to park on the Batchwood estate - a mile away.

Philip Aylett said: ‘*It’s a very good idea to have an elective surgery hub in the area, but in bidding for the hub the Trust has overlooked severe practical difficulties with the St Albans site. It is absurd that some patients preparing for surgery could be expected to walk a mile, crossing a busy road and negotiating a steep hill to reach the Hospital.’*

Mr Aylett noted that the Trust are relying on green travel strategies to suppress the demand for car spaces and make their numbers add up.

*‘Greener travel based on better public transport, cycling and walking is vital. But local plans are vague and are still years from fruition.* *Bus services are being cut, not expanded. And many people visiting a hospital are unwell and/or have mobility problems and are unable to use public transport or walk any distance. The Trust should accept and respond to those fundamental facts before it is too late. A dose of realism is required.*

*‘It is disturbing that some of these problems have only come to light through the work of NHC members who sent in questions to a recent Board meeting. Trust Board members, especially the non-executives, need to be much sharper in scrutinising an organisation that continues to lag much of the rest of the Service in key areas such as A and E performance.’*

ENDS