

MEDIA RELEASE 04/09/20

CAMPAIGNERS CAST DOUBT ON FUTURE HOSPITAL SITE STUDY

'Unrealistic' assessments of Watford General Hospital sites criticised

Campaigners for a new hospital have raised serious doubts about a review of possible sites for hospital redevelopment in West Herts. The review, called a Site Feasibility Study, has been commissioned by the West Herts Hospital Trust (WHHT) and is being used in the selection of a shortlist of sites for the project, due to be decided on 1 October.

The New Hospital Campaign (NHC) believe that the Study, led by RFLPS, a company wholly-owned by the Royal Free Hospital Trust in London, unfairly backs the views of WHHT, favouring sites at Watford General against alternatives on clear central sites. For example, the Study gives one site at Watford General Hospital (WGH) a high score, despite the fact that it has a large sewer running under it and suffers from possible 'hotspots of contamination'.

The NHC has carried out its own technical appraisal of the RFLPS Study and says that its conclusions about WGH options are

based on totally unfounded optimistic assumptions without adequate research ... it is obviously the intention for this [Study] to confirm the correctness of retaining the Watford site for emergency care and for excluding any alternative central clear site from the shortlist.

The Campaign's appraisal of the Study continues:

Adoption of either of the Watford-based options would come with a cost premium that would provide extremely poor value for money from the outset, sub-optimal facilities and serious risks of cost and time overruns with ongoing disruption to hospital healthcare services. The comparative costs for 'Greenfield' options, based upon the Trust's own estimates, are more than 30% lower than redevelopment or overbuilding and can provide much greater cost and time security.

The NHC says that the Study makes unrealistic assumptions about the time it would take to build a new hospital facility at Watford General, while claiming that it would take longer to plan and build a hospital on a central clear site. It says the assessments of the Watford

General options have been 'based upon a fast track high risk approach whereas the 'Greenfield' programmes have been arrived at through a much more conservative approach.' The Campaign's analysis notes that

RFLPS's Report contains many statements that the 'Greenfield' sites carry much greater risks and complexities than the WGH based options. It is clear that RFLPS have based this conclusion on advice provided by WHHT rather than any independent appraisal carried out by themselves.

One site on the fringes of WGH, known as the Watford Riverwell, is assessed in the Study, where it is said that there is 'anecdotal evidence [which] suggests that there may be hotspots of contamination to deal with. It is important to note that there is a large sewer which crosses the site.' Despite these serious drawbacks and the additional uncertainties posed by a sloping site and the likely presence nearby of a new primary school, the review gives the Riverwell 3 out of 4 for availability for completion in 2025, higher than any of the clear central sites reviewed in the Study, some of which have fewer obstacles to development.

The Campaign is also concerned that the Study does not provide the key information that RFLPS is wholly owned by the Royal Free Trust and shares some directors with the Trust. An investigation by NHC has shown that in its turn the Royal Free has developed many connections with WHHT, including an extensive clinical partnership, and is discussing a variety of shared services and joint initiatives, describing building stronger links with the Royal Free as a key strategic work programme.

Jean Ritchie of the New Hospital Campaign said today:

"Within the next month, decisions will be taken which will be vital to the future of our health service in West Herts. The sites shortlist for the redevelopment of hospital services needs to be fairly drawn up and based firmly on facts, not supposition.

"The assessments in the Site Study funded by the Trust favour sites at or around Watford General Hospital while making harsh assumptions about clear central sites. The Study relies far too much on anecdotal evidence. Neither is it comprehensive, because it only examines a limited range of central clear sites. Just as damagingly, its 'scoring' of the various sites is sometimes perverse."

Ms. Ritchie continued:

"When such important decisions are taken, the public need to be given all the information that is relevant. It is very relevant that the Study's main authors, RFLPS, are closely connected with the Royal Free, whose own partnership with West Herts appears to be burgeoning. Private consultancies were also involved in the Study but we make no comment on their contributions. It is clear that RFLPS takes prime responsibility for the Study's assessments.

"The West Herts Trust need to substantiate their claim that the RFLPS Study is independent. They must act now to set out the extent of the current partnership with the Royal Free and the aspirations for both Trusts for their future collaboration. Most importantly both Trusts

need to explain how RFLPS ensured that the judgements set out in the Study were arrived at independently by RFLPS staff. "

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Attached are: Technical Analysis of Site Study and A Question of Independence

The report of the study can be found at

https://www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk/newsandmedia/mediareleases/2020/august/sitefeasibilitystudy.asp#_ftn1