

New Hospital Campaign

NHC

For *real* transformation in West Hertfordshire

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NEW HOSPITAL CAMPAIGNERS ATTACK RUSHED AND FLAWED DECISION

Patient safety concerns take second place to obsession with Watford Hospital

Hospital campaigners have criticised local health bodies who today decided to ignore the case for a new convenient central modern hospital to serve everyone in West Hertfordshire.

The New Hospital Campaign (NHC) described the decision to spend over half a billion pounds on refurbishment and new build at Vicarage Road Watford as rushed and based on flawed, shaky and often misleading evidence.

Flying in the face of expert analysis and their own massaged survey which revealed public and NHS staff disquiet about their plans, West Herts Hospital Trust (WHHT) and Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group (HVCCG) today produced a shortlist including SIX Watford options and none for anywhere else in West Herts.

Key to the decision was timing – the Government wants a new hospital in West Herts by 2025 or 2026. Meeting jointly, the two health bodies claimed on flimsy evidence that new central greenfield sites would take much longer to build on than new facilities at Watford.

Jean Richie of the NHC commented:

“There is no way a decision based on such misleading, doctored and inadequate information can go unchallenged. And it won’t.

‘From day one they knew what they wanted the outcome to be, and they have made sure, by manipulating the evidence and refusing to consider other information, that they achieved the result they wanted.

‘ Every bit of work they have done or have commissioned has been predicated on the eventual outcome being the current site for decades to come.

‘The role of the Trust has not been independent, which is a distortion of their position as custodians of hospital care for the whole of the population of West Herts.

'The meeting this morning was a stage managed production.'

A spokesperson continued:

'Members did not challenge officials on the key points. It was claimed for example that clear central sites should be rejected because it would take too long to build a new hospital on them. Yet a report led by West Herts' own partner Trust, the Royal Free, showed that a new greenfield hospital could be built just as quickly. All the timings were close to each other.

'More seriously, the Trust biased the collection of evidence by carefully selecting for assessment green field sites that had already been rejected years ago. This is contrary to good practice as laid down by the Treasury. The Campaign will continue to press for a fairer review of all possible sites.

'No-one in the meeting pointed out the manipulation of evidence - a serious dereliction of duty by a public body, considering the huge sums of public money involved and the need for fairness to all the people of West Herts'

The bodies' preferred 'Riverwell' option - with a new building squeezed on the notoriously steep slope of the Watford hospital car park, over a large sewer and with hotspots of contamination - would be built within a few metres of the often-open windows of the existing main clinical block. A senior nurse raised concerns in the meeting about patient safety in the light of this. But the papers prepared for the meeting ignored the risks to sick people caused by demolition, pile-driving and movement of construction vehicles, claiming that the Construction site 'would be isolated from the current hospital.' and 'Maintaining patient /visitor access will not impact on the programme'.

'The papers prepared for the meeting were in many ways inaccurate and misleading.' The spokesperson continued 'The officials do not seem to have looked at their own site map showing that the new building would be constructed within a few metres of patients. This is a disgrace, and explains why over 40 percent of staff who took part in the Trust's own flawed survey were fearful of disruption of services during construction at Watford.'

'More fundamentally, unfair comparison were made between the new site and Watford options. The result is that there will be no proper assessment of sites across the district.'

The campaign described the health bodies' obsession with building at Watford - right at the edge of West Herts - rather than nearer the main centres of population as 'a mystery'.

The spokesperson continued: 'We still cannot understand why the Trust and the CCG are so determined to manipulate the facts and fail to challenge inadequate and 'spun' evidence from officials - all in the interests of a hospital that is on a difficult and polluted site, hard to reach. One day, the answers to this mystery may emerge - and they will do no credit to the people who made these short-sighted decisions.'

See footnote below.

ⁱ From the Site Feasibility Study, August 2020, p3

Programmes Summary – substantially complete dates

Site	Optimistic	Pessimistic
<i>A (Kings Langley)</i>	<i>JUNE 2027</i>	<i>MAY 2029</i>
<i>B (East of Hemel)</i>	<i>MARCH 2027</i>	<i>MAY 2029</i>
<i>C (Chiswell Green)</i>	<i>MARCH 2027</i>	<i>APRIL 2029</i>
<i>D (Radlett Airfield)</i>	<i>MARCH 2027</i>	<i>MAY 2029</i>
<i>E (Watford Riverwell)</i>	<i>JUNE 2026</i>	<i>OCT 2027</i>
<i>F(Watford Owned)</i>	<i>JAN 2026</i>	<i>APRIL 2027</i>