

New Hospital Campaign

NHC

For *real* transformation in West Hertfordshire

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COUNCIL SCRUTINY OF HOSPITAL PLANS DUBBED A 'FARCE'

The New Hospital Campaign (NHC), which is fighting for a new A+E hospital on a clear, central site in west Hertfordshire, has branded a Hertfordshire County Council scrutiny meeting a "farce" and "grotesquely unbalanced".

The meeting, which was held to scrutinise the West Hertfordshire Hospital Trust's plans to renovate Watford General Hospital and make minor improvements at St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead hospitals, was called a 'topic group' of the County's health scrutiny committee. It was held on 8 February. The group supported the Trust's plans though one councillor disagreed.

The NHC had asked to make a presentation at the meeting but received no reply to their request. Altogether the Trust and other local health bodies were allowed to dominate the all-day proceedings with 15 minutes at the start allocated to 'public witnesses'.

This is despite the fact that an online survey run by the Trust last September showed that a large majority of the 3000 plus respondents disagreed with the plans, and that there have been two petitions on the parliamentary website, each recording more than 10,000 residents demanding a hospital on a new, accessible site.

A spokesperson for the Group called the meeting "a farce and grotesquely unbalanced", adding that it reached "truly bizarre conclusions, including that the Trust's plans did not amount to 'substantial development of service requiring formal consultation with the Committee', even though it involved the expenditure of hundreds of millions of pounds with implications over many decades to come".

Much of the discussion was based on gross misunderstandings. For example the group accepted the Trust's claim that their plans can be delivered by 2025 or 2026 even though a study commissioned by the

NHC had shown that it would take two to three years longer to achieve this and a hospital on a new site could be built much sooner. The report, by an independent construction consultant, was sent to the Chair of the Committee but was never mentioned.

The spokesperson added "It is clear that the health bodies and the county councillors have been working closely together and there are no proper checks and balances at local level".