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Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Friday, 02 December 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to urge you to progress urgently with the funding required to upgrade Watford General Hospital and other neighbouring hospitals as part of the New Hospitals Programme. We also ask that you avoid any attempt to delay or deprioritise West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust's (WHTH) plans for hospital development.

As you may be aware WHTH is in significant need of funds to develop and improve Watford General Hospital, as well as hospitals in St Albans and Hemel Hempstead. Many ministers over the years have visited and met the team at WHTH and have communicated on numerous occasions with local MPs and council leaders. We agree with the local NHS Trust that this funding is needed and needed now.

Despite the hard work of the NHS trust locally, the physical infrastructure of these hospitals is posing an increasing risk to patients and the prospects of receiving good care. The pandemic highlighted the great resilience of the staff and management across the trust and the trust itself has worked hard to ensure patient care increasingly improves since its previous inadequate rating in 2017. But this will become more and more difficult to sustain if the quality of the physical estate continues to deteriorate.

The case for investment now is overwhelming and the progress achieved towards being ready to go, once funding is secured, places WHTH highly among the potential hospital building projects the government have repeatedly committed to build.

- A full independent feasibility study has been completed and concluded that the current plans for redeveloping the Watford Hospital site, alongside improvements at St Albans and Hemel are the best and fastest way to improve the physical estate and make them equipped for 21st Century medicine. The current proposal, as well as creating the physical infrastructure, places a great focus on sustainability and digital integration.
- In the case of Watford General Hospital, outline planning permission was granted in 2021 and the land required for the development is available thanks to the recent completion of an

award-winning new car park which is fully accessible, electric car compatible and ready to connect directly to the new hospital building once it is completed.

- The current plans are reflective of the NHS Long Term Plan which recommends a clear separation between urgent and emergency care and planned care. The plans are also designed in a way that will improve the way in which teams at the trust function – within planned care there will be a clear distinction between surgery and medicine which will improve patient outcomes in a way which is not possible given the current configuration of the hospitals.
- Furthermore, the Watford Hospital redevelopment is part of a major regeneration project within Watford – Watford Riverwell. This is providing new homes, landscaping and retail space as well as biodiversity improvements at the River Colne. The local council is also exploring ways to link the Watford Hospital development to the rest of the town through the disused Watford-Croxley line. The investment in the hospital will be a key part of levelling up the local area and boosting economic growth.

We have heard from others that the government is looking to phase its hospital building or otherwise deprioritise particular schemes. Our opinion, shared by West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, is that this scheme cannot be delayed, phased or deprioritised. As the current buildings deteriorate further, the costs of capital investment to maintain the status quo will increase, further burdening the Trust and taking money away from patient care.

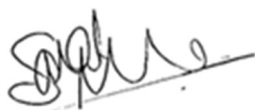
We hope that when you are ready to announce the future of the hospital building programme, the WHTH project will be at the top of the list and will be able to proceed at speed so that these exciting plans can be realised. We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Taylor, Elected Mayor of Watford

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