

News Release

14 August 2020

Public urged to show their support for hospital development plans

Clinicians at Dorset County Hospital are asking local residents to register their support for the first phase of plans to expand key clinical facilities on the Dorchester site.

The plans include the expansion of the Emergency Department (ED) and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) as well as the establishment of an Integrated Care Hub as part of a long-term project to deliver the recommendations of Dorset's Clinical Services Review.

Dorset County Hospital has been allocated £62.5million of Government funding for the expansion plans as part of the national Health Infrastructure Plan and the project has been recognised as a priority.

The first phase of the development is freeing up land on the hospital site by building a multi-storey car park.

The planning application for the multi-storey car park, submitted in October 2019, was due to be heard by the Northern Area Planning Committee on 18 August 2020 but has since been delayed as the committee is no longer being held. The earliest the application can now be heard is 15 September 2020 at the next scheduled committee meeting.

In the meantime, the hospital is keen to demonstrate public support for the plans to strengthen the planning application.

Clinicians at the hospital say the plans are crucial to providing safe and high quality services into the future as, despite the best efforts of their teams, they are struggling to accommodate the rising number of patients they are treating – with the coronavirus outbreak making it clearer than ever that more space is needed.

Emergency Department Clinical Lead Dr Steve Meek said: “The Emergency Department was built for seeing 20,000 people a year and we saw 50,000 last year, so it was dated and cramped for space even before COVID-19.

“In particular, our paediatric facilities, resuscitation area and mental health room are no longer adequate. A visiting NHS dignitary told me last year that she was 'impressed how the skilled and dedicated ED team worked around these issues to deliver great care, without complaint'.

“The pandemic has added a new layer of problems, with social distancing in waiting rooms, and a permanent need to design facilities in ways which better protect the vulnerable and prevent infection.

“Our long awaited chance to build a new modern Emergency Department, to meet the needs and expectations of West Dorset residents, must not be thrown away.”

Consultant in Anaesthetics and Critical Care Medicine Dr Ian Mew added: “It is essential that we are able to expand our clinical footprint to deliver the critical care and emergency care that our population require.

“With the increasing housing development in the west of Dorset, the movement of patients towards Dorchester as a result of the Clinical Services Review and the surges from tourism, we need to keep up with demand without compromising care.

“COVID-19 has had a massive impact on our ability to deliver ‘normal’ hospital services and this is largely due to having to take over other areas of the hospital to provide intensive care to our population when they need it the most.

“This is a very serious matter – it really is a life or death situation. The Government recognise this which is why we have been allocated the money to redevelop. I am confident that the healthcare of our population will be held in very high regard by the planning authority when it comes to enabling Dorset County Hospital to expand our clinical facilities – which depends on successful planning approval for the multi-storey car park.”

Clinicians at Dorset County Hospital are urging local people to back the development plans by adding their names and postcodes to an online show of support:

Follow <https://dchft.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/dch-support> or go to the home page of the hospital’s website www.dchft.nhs.uk

You can find more details about Dorset County Hospital’s site development plans at: <https://www.dchft.nhs.uk/about/site-development/Pages/default.aspx>

The planning application for the multi-storey can be viewed on Dorset Council's online planning portal: https://planning.dorset.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=DCAPR_139869&activeTab=summary

ENDS

PHOTOS: Dr Steve Meek, left, and Dr Ian Mew outside Dorset County Hospital’s current Emergency Department.

For more information please contact the Dorset County Hospital communications team on 01305 253394 or 254683, or email communications@dchft.nhs.uk