

News Release

7 September 2020

Disappointment as council planners recommend hospital multi-storey car park plan is refused

Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has voiced disappointment after learning that Dorset Council planners have recommended that permission is refused for the multi-storey car park which would unlock the development of clinical services on the Dorchester site.

Dorset County Hospital has been allocated £62.5million of Government funding to expand key clinical services on its Dorchester site as part of the national Health Infrastructure Plan and the project had been recognised as a priority.

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.

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 was submitted to Dorset Council in October 2019 and will be heard at a planning meeting on 15 September 2020 where council planners will recommend refusal. A paper to the Northern Area Planning Committee which gives the reasons for recommending refusal says that the appearance and conservation impact outweighs the public benefit.

Dorset County Hospital's Director of Strategy, Transformation and Partnerships Nick Johnson said: "We are of course extremely disappointed that our scheme has not been recommended for approval but we await the decision of the planning committee. We don't believe that the conservation concerns are as significant as stated in the council report and strongly feel that the wider public benefit outweighs this.

"Ultimately the planning permission decision is down to the planning committee so we are in the councillors' hands now.

"We have already been allocated £62.5million of Government funding for the development of essential clinical facilities and named as a national priority project which delivers the recommendations of Dorset's Clinical Services Review.

"Bournemouth and Poole Hospitals are now forging ahead with their site development plans in East Dorset after receiving planning permission last month for schemes which include a larger multi-storey car park on the Bournemouth site as well as new purpose-built clinical facilities.

“Before we can progress with expanding our clinical facilities for the west of the county we need to free up space on the hospital site by constructing a multi-storey car park to accommodate the lost spaces and improve parking for patients, visitors and staff.

“Anyone visiting our hospital knows that parking has been an issue for many years so we simply cannot build on our car parks without replacing the spaces. We’re committed to green travel but many people coming to our hospital need to travel by car – the public transport links from rural areas of Dorset are simply not adequate.

“The development of these clinical facilities is vital to make sure we are able to continue to meet the ever increasing demand on our services and secure the future of Dorset County Hospital in Dorchester for a generation to come.

“Our existing Emergency Department and ICU were not built to accommodate the volume of patients we are seeing now. Our clinical teams have responded magnificently to the additional challenges coronavirus has brought, but it is now more clear than ever that we must create additional space and facilities to ensure the safety of our patients.

“As well as improving healthcare services for our population we are also committed to our role in benefitting the local economy. We will work closely with our contractors to make sure local people are employed and local suppliers are used for our building programme. We are also planning to develop other land on our site for local key worker and affordable housing.

“Building the multi-storey is the first phase of this ambitious, once-in-a-lifetime development and the key to unlocking the expansion of clinical services.”

Clinicians at Dorset County Hospital have been asking local residents to register their support for the first phase of plans to expand key clinical facilities on the Dorchester site. An online register of support for the plans has already received 1,673 responses in support of the plans with many messages of support for building a multi-storey car park on the hospital site as soon as possible.

Clinicians 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.”

There is still time to show your backing for the hospital development plans by adding your name and postcode to the online register 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