

News Release

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Trust resubmits plans for Christchurch Hospital

The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (RBCH) has resubmitted its plans for the development of Christchurch Hospital in a final bid to secure NHS services on the site.

Earlier this month Christchurch Borough Council's Planning Committee turned down the development scheme despite the plans being recommended for approval.

The hospital Trust has now made a number of positive changes in response to the council's decision and resubmitted its application. It is also calling on all its members and the public to get behind the plans so they are approved at the planning meeting on 14 March – otherwise essential funding for the GP practice, which forms an integral part of the plans, will be lost.

Richard Renaut, the Trust's Director of Service Development, said: "It's a straight choice between keeping services or having empty buildings."

Funding for the proposed GP practice had been approved by Dorset Primary Care Trust (PCT), subject to planning consent. However at the end of March, the PCT will be abolished as part of national health reforms. It is not known what process the successor body - the National Commissioning Board - will use to make investment decisions, but the whole process will have to start again.

The viability of the whole scheme also relies on the demolition of H block, a disused building which a number of Christchurch councillors expressed they wanted to keep.

Mr Renaut said that while the Trust does want to capture the history of the site and will do so through a permanent display feature, H block would cost millions to be made safe and even then would be unusable for NHS services.

He added: "H block is an unlisted building that has been empty for several years, as it is unfit for healthcare use. An independent expert report has concluded it would cost an extra £5m to keep and convert the building, above and beyond the current investment on the site.

“This is money that isn’t available and can’t be justified, especially because the facilities at the end would be far less usable and far more costly to run.”

Changes to the planning application include the number of proposed key worker homes, which have been reduced by three, creating more space around neighbouring properties and giving some homes 74ft gardens. The design and features of the buildings at the front of the site, which would replace H block, have also been altered.

Mr Renault said: “We firmly believe that securing services for future generations, making best use of public funds and ensuring care is delivered in appropriate surroundings, all outweigh the concerns over keeping empty, poor quality buildings.”

Many residents have already contacted the Trust to express their support for the plans and it is hoped they will also express this to their local councillor. More than 600 people wrote to the council to support the original application.

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