

Emsworth Victoria Cottage Hospital is preferred site for new GP surgery

The Victoria Cottage Hospital has been determined as the preferred site for a new home for Emsworth Surgery.

Doctors, the local NHS and key Emsworth area stakeholders have agreed that moving into a refurbished building on the disused hospital site in the town centre is the best current solution to meet GPs' needs.

GPs want to move into a new and bigger surgery to provide a sustainable service in the future and meet the health needs of an expanding local population, as their existing site is cramped and could not cope with an increase in medical services or an expanding patient population.

The original nine potential options for a new location were whittled down to three, following a period of public engagement with patients and residents in Emsworth and Westbourne, where the surgery has a small branch.

Refurbishing Emsworth Victoria Cottage Hospital (EVCH) is seen as having clear advantages for both GPs and the NHS.

These include having enough space for expansion, being within the financial budget available for capital spend as well as being the option most favoured by stakeholders and the local community.

There are still a number of risks that need to be managed and mitigated before the preferred option becomes a firm plan, amongst which are agreements over leasing arrangements with the current property owners as well as other financial and legal issues. These will be agreed in principle by the NHS South Eastern Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Group ahead of the formal business case submission to NHS England, who hold the capital funding.

Following feedback from the local community, the business case will include the option of keeping the Westbourne Branch Surgery open to enable the GP practice to keep its presence in north Emsworth and prepare for a new housing development at Southleigh.

Of the other 'short list' options, demolishing EVCH and building a new surgery on the site or moving to a new purpose-built building at Redlands Grange are not considered viable with the current time constraints and budget available.

A business case for the preferred option has to be submitted to NHS England by December 21 to meet the deadline to apply for the £4.4m funding currently allocated to the scheme under the national Estates and Technology Transformation Fund (ETTF). ETTF money cannot be spent on land purchase and usually only funds two-thirds of the total project costs.

Dr Abu Chinwala, a GP at Emsworth, said: "We want and need to work differently and the current building is holding us back from providing the best possible care we can for our patients. Population forecasts for new homes in the area will increase new registrations, which mean that we will need additional doctors and clinical staff and the space for them to work.

“Staying where we are is not, in our view, an option for the long term. But remaining in the town centre, on a site so close to where we are now, does offer advantages, including the timings of when ETTF funding can be spent. It is a workable solution for us.”

Sara Tiller, the CCG’s managing director, said: “A lot of people have put in a huge amount of effort to get us to this position, including the community, to whom we have listened as we promised we would - and the local politicians and key local stakeholders with whom we have worked very closely in recent weeks.

“No option is without risk, and a great deal of further discussions will need to continue between us, as a CCG, the GPs, NHS England, NHS Property Services as the site owner, and Havant Borough Council, to ensure that the risks and costs, both now and ongoing, are accurately reflected and understood by all parties. We are not there yet.”

The next steps are that a business case will be submitted to NHS England on December 21 to give NHS England enough time to review the papers before its ETTF Review Panel meets in February 2019. The outline business case will need to be agreed by the CCG in January, 2019, as any additional costs would need to be funded by the organisation.