



University Hospitals Dorset
NHS Foundation Trust

Poole Hospital
Longfleet Road
Poole
Dorset
BH15
2JB

Tel: 01202 665511
www.uhd.nhs.uk

15 March 2024

Cllr Vikki Slade,
Leader of the Council

Dear Cllr Slade,

Sale between public bodies re: Wessex Fields

I hope you and colleagues at BCP Council are well.

I am writing to request Cabinet and Council support for the recommendation to sell a portion of Wessex Fields to the NHS at market value in line with Treasury agreed process.

This decision would provide strong social value to our area, with benefits to local taxpayers, patients and NHS staff. It will be a positive and material step to address both the housing shortage and traffic congestion of the RBH site and unlocks a net-zero carbon development.

The joint vision for the site has been developed over many years. This demonstrates that the sale will generate economic benefit to the area, and prior to your meetings we will send you under separate cover a slide deck of our ambitions for the site. We aim to create much needed key worker housing to ensure an NHS workforce with capacity to serve our community; education and training facilities; further our goal of a Life Sciences Centre/Dorset Medical School, in addition to offering strong environmental benefits.

The transfer of land between public bodies for wider social gain is common and fits within the duties of public bodies to see the wider public benefit and avoid unnecessary procurement costs by a joint independent market valuation. I would add that this builds on previous joint work between BCP Council and the NHS that had already seen important benefits; for example, the new state of the art Pathology building, which undertakes cancer and other diagnostic tests for residents.

Chair: Rob Whiteman CBE

Chief Executive: Siobhan Harrington

The price of the land has been set by using the jointly commissioned, independent expert valuation, which ensures that the Council and the NHS are paying the correct value for the land. This is a highly transparent process in that it operates with the usual governance and decision-making frameworks of the consenting bodies. The valuation report makes clear that a private developer would most likely use the site for storage. This fits with the evidence to date in relation to privately owned land near the hospital, where a planning application for a large container storage has been approved. You will know that this provides only few low skilled jobs and misses the opportunity set out by the joint work over many years about how the site could boost the NHS and local economy.

In terms of resourcing, you will know that the position of centrally managed NHS capital within national, regional and local capping is very different to local government. If the transaction isn't completed now, it places considerable difficulty to assemble a new source of resources.

We are aware that an informal asset disposals group is advising the Cabinet to not adopt the Treasury compliant "Red Book" process of a mutually agreed transfer for market value in line with Council's strategy around adopting a "One Public Estate" approach. The alternative option is for the Council to sell the land through a public procurement process, most likely to private developers who would in effect "land bank" the asset. That would severely limit prospects for key worker housing and education facilities, meaning a poorer outcome for the public. Our fear is a private sale will lead to many more years of no action.

We would ask the informal asset disposals group to reconsider their recommendation which came out of the blue to us as a partner, with no opportunity to comment, after many years of joint development of our proposal. Either way, we request Cabinet and Council to transfer the site to UHD for market value. UHD Colleagues and I would of course be very happy to present to Overview & Scrutiny and any other meetings that assist to get the right outcome for our residents, patients, community and economy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Whiteman'.

Rob Whiteman CBE
Chair, University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust

cc: Graham Farrant, Chief
Executive BCP Council Group
Leaders