

Dear Peter,

Pre-Application Consultation: Development of New Mental Health Unit at Glan Clwyd Hospital

I would like to thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the revised proposals for the £84.5m development of a new Adult and Older Persons Mental Health Unit and multi-storey car park on the Glan Clwyd Hospital site in Bodelwyddan. It was a pleasure to attend the drop in session last month and to discuss the proposals in more depth with project leads.

I was very pleased to see that the proposed development has been relocated away from residential properties, as requested during the initial consultation. I believe the new proposed siting will reassure the residents concerned that their views have been considered and listened to.

I welcome any opportunity to improve facilities at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. The proposed modern, welcoming and bespoke building will provide the opportunity to improve patient experience and outcomes and also the potential to boost staff morale, recruitment and retention. Those relying on mental health services in North Wales should be cared for in a safe and homely environment. I feel the proposed development would be able to offer this. I would however be grateful if you could respond with a list of existing facilities in the current Ablett Unit for comparison.

I recently met a neighbouring business owner who raised concerns over the security of the current unit and a desire to ensure that security is a key priority when considering the new facility. I hope that it will be possible to address his comments.

You will be more than aware that current and past criticisms of local mental health care provision have not simply related to bricks and mortar but also to systems and quality of care. It is imperative that any development is accompanied by a step change in the prioritisation of mental health services and a radical change of culture within the Health Board.

This is, I believe, also a valuable opportunity to consider the potential for a standalone North Wales mental health trust which can dedicate its efforts to a much-needed attempt to bring local services at least up to the standard of those elsewhere in the UK. I have previously also suggested it may be beneficial to ensure that, among the senior leadership roles at the Health Board, are individuals with a detailed knowledge of, and interest in, mental health.

Focussing on the proposed new building, I note that the second floor consists predominantly of open plan offices for administrative staff. Similarly, it is suggested that the existing Ablett Ward will be repurposed to include administrative and medical record spaces. I am aware that the current plans for the redeveloped Royal Alexandra Hospital site also consist of a number of offices and space for medical record storage. Whilst I understand the need for on-site offices, I would ask whether office space throughout the central region of the Health

Board could be mapped out, as the current plans alone seem to contradict the suggestion that “greater use of agile and home working is being explored” across the NHS estate. They also appear to disregard the ongoing digitisation of medical health records. I wonder whether there may be potential to reduce the cost of either the Royal Alex or Mental Health Unit developments by rationalising the office space provision.

With regards to the multi-storey car park, I strongly welcome the general concept but believe it is woefully insufficient. Parking is a concern raised regularly by all those who use the hospital site. As I am sure you are aware, the current provision is wholly inadequate and often results in people parking dangerously. It can take a considerable length of time to find a parking space, and this can result in much stress, many missed appointments and reduced time for visitors to spend with loved ones. I understand that the Design and Access Statement indicates that the construction of the new mental health unit and proposed new multi-storey car park will involve the net loss of a dozen or so spaces. That contradicts suggestions elsewhere that there would be a net gain of 16 spaces. Either scenario would be unacceptable.

Whilst I understand that there is an ambition to reduce reliance on cars, and encourage cycling, I think that this is extremely unlikely given the out-of-town location of the hospital and the rurality of much of the region. A desire to see more people using public transport is not often possible when dealing with the constraints of the bus timetables and the nature of hospital appointments and waiting times. Likewise, a staff car-pool scheme is unlikely to receive significant enrolment when staff may be required to work differing shifts and sometimes later than their planned finish time. Fundamentally, cars are decarbonising in any case and it is progress with technology that will achieve our net zero aims, not a suppression of the quality of life and convenience that the car brings.

I welcome your consideration to reintroduce the Park and Ride scheme. However, I would question whether the ongoing cost implication of such a scheme is preferable to creating additional on-site parking.

I would strongly encourage you to consider including a wider footprint and an extra floor (or more) to the proposed multistorey car park. Whilst the Design and Access Statement suggests “the additional car parking deck would be constructed in a way that would allow for further expansion in the future if required”, I feel that the additional requirement has been abundantly clear for many years. It would be more cost effective to include additional provision during the initial construction phase than to cause further upheaval in the future.

With regard to restrictive Welsh Government policy on general car use and parking at hospitals, I would encourage the Health Board to make firm representations contrary to this policy, or else to explore novel solutions – perhaps prioritising greener vehicles for any new provision and generating a business case based on charging for the new surplus spaces only, to avoid capital funding constraints.

I am pleased that it is planned for the car parking deck to be completed before building work starts on the new hospital unit. I believe this is extremely important to minimise negative impact on patients, staff and visitors.

I look forward to seeing the proposals progress, with hope that the development can be a catalyst for a new way of thinking about mental health across North Wales.

Yours sincerely,

Dr James Davies MP

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