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NHS Highland Lochaber Times column

MAJOR MILESTONE REACHED FOR THE NEW LOCHABER HOSPITAL

As the Healthcare Planner for the Lochaber Redesign Service which includes the proposed new Belford Hospital at Blair Mhor, I am delighted to report that we reached a major milestone for the project this week.

Months of work, consultation, discussions and review finally came together with the culmination of what is referred to internally by the team as the 1-200 programme which showcases the proposed layout for the different departments of new Belford Hospital.

The concept designs were initially shared at our monthly Stakeholder Meeting held on 19th December which was attended by more than 40 people representing different community organisations.

Planning patient journeys and their overall experience on arrival at the new hospital is an extremely complex and important process involving many people both within the hospital and externally. I am grateful to everyone who has so far taken the time to respond to our surveys and share their experiences to enable this detailed planning to get to this stage. It is a major milestone in the design process. At the Stakeholder Meeting representatives of the design team including project architects, Keppie Design and Balfour Beatty, our principal supply chain partner for both the Lochaber and Caithness Redesign Projects, provided a presentation on the design objectives and the process so far.

First of all, the team had to consider the generic requirements of the proposed hospital building such as welcoming entrances, accessible receptions and clear passageways, as well as the formal and informal spaces required for training and the different working environments.

The design team then shared the thought process behind creating a new and exciting environment including the consideration of what functions are required of the different spaces, what the spaces should look and feel like, and how the spaces all have to work technically in order for people to feel comfortable both working there and attending as patients.

Once that work was completed, wider detailed research and planning was undertaken taking into account operational policies, site survey plans and, of course, cost plans. Only then could the team start to look at concept design sketches, based upon site analysis including considering how the location is affected by daylight and weather, and visualising how the site might look.

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Further design objectives were then created and more options, before detailed plans of each floor of the building were created, alongside the different department layouts and the interior design.

It's months of work, planning and revision and to see the plans start to visually come to light was greatly welcomed by everyone in the room.

The concept drawings showing the different draft layouts of each floor of the new hospital were shared with the audience who had the opportunity to ask questions and provide comments which were collated and reviewed by the design team.

Following the design team presentation, senior members of a variety of clinical teams representing community, emergency, theatre, renal, outpatient and intensive rehabilitation services provided an overview of the ongoing work on the redesign of services with their individual departments.

The Stakeholder event truly was a significant step forward for the project. The next stage of the process will be for the design team to submit an outline planning application to Highland Council early next year and, all going well, the land at Blair Mhor will be purchased.

Plans are also underway to host a public event in the early part of next year when the designs will be on display and the proposals for the new rural general hospital for Lochaber will start to feel more like reality.

Gordon Macleay

Healthcare Planner & Clinical Adviser