

Welcome to our fourth update on progress towards the replacement for Belford Hospital.

In July, we were able to confirm that our Initial Agreement document had finally been approved by the Scottish Government. The full document is now available on our website. While this is very positive news and a key milestone, we're aware that the timescales involved have made this a bitter-sweet announcement for some.

The approval letter set out that the replacement of Belford Hospital is not allowed for in the current financial planning cycle which will run to April 2026, and therefore funding for construction cannot be confirmed as being available before this point.

While we may respect the honest approach, the message is of course disappointing to those who have waited so long to see the Belford replaced. Having said this, there are chinks of hope that circumstances could change:

The approval letter recognises that the Belford is one of the oldest hospitals in Scotland, remaining largely unchanged since it's construction and now functionally unsuitable. Despite our project not being allowed for in the current financial cycle, the Capital Investment Group is *'keen for this project to proceed to the next phase of the business case process'* and we are therefore invited to prepare and submit an Outline Business Case.

The Health Infrastructure and Investment portfolio covers all of Scotland, so the availability of funding could change if other projects are delayed. Additional funding may become also available either during the annual budget review or if other departments are unable to spend their allocation as planned. While funding for the hospital construction is unconfirmed, the Scottish Government have nevertheless committed millions of pounds to support the project development and design work which is a positive indication of their commitment.

It's important still to bear in mind that we can't plan for a construction start date before April 2026, however NHS Highland will proceed with the outline business case work as if funding is going to be available when needed: we've built up a level of momentum and positive involvement that nobody wants to lose at this point, and so if funding does become available earlier than expected we'll be ready to use it.

The next steps are to develop the service model from a high level principle to the detail of the number and types of rooms, beds and staff we'll need: this will form the 'operational' side of the project brief and will be developed between now and the end of 2022. In tandem, we are working on a 'technical' brief which sets out the relevant standards for the building design, such as cabling standards or acoustic requirements, and on the appointment process for the main building contractor, known as the Principle Supply Chain Partner and usually abbreviated to PSCP (for obvious reasons!). The PSCP will employ the design team and their appointment in early 2023 will allow us to start work on designing what will be a state of the art, carbon neutral, rural general hospital for the people of Lochaber, even if it's a couple of years later than we'd hoped.

If you'd like to get in touch with questions or comments, you can contact us via the NHS Highland Feedback team [Nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot](mailto:Nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot) or 01463 705997, or via our project email address on [nhsh.nhshighlandstatesprojects@nhs.scot](mailto:nhsh.nhshighlandstatesprojects@nhs.scot).

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