

Belford Hospital Replacement

Louise Bussell, Nurse Director and Senior Responsible Officer for the project

We are very pleased to be reporting on the news that since the Scottish Budget announcement the planning work has recommenced for a new hospital at the safeguarded site on the Blàr Mòr as part of a redesign of NHS services in Lochaber.

As many of you will know, in January 2024 the Scottish Government issued an instruction to all NHS Boards that all capital projects not under construction were to be paused.

In NHS Highland this affected the Lochaber and Caithness redesigns, Cowal Community and the Raigmore Hospital maternity refurbishment. As a result the Belford Replacement project was taken to the end of Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 2 Concept Design, at which point the contract was paused and the delivery team reallocated to other projects.

Our staff and communities had invested a huge amount of time and effort into these projects and we know this news was difficult for the community and our colleagues to hear.

At the start of December, as part of the Scottish Government Budget, it was announced that funding has now been allocated to restart the Belford Replacement project and bring it to Full Business Case (RIBA Stage 5). The Budget remains in draft form and is expected to be approved in February 2025.

As the previous design team had been disbanded, we spoke to the contractors and a 12-week remobilisation period will be required to bring the delivery team back together. By March the delivery team will be moving apace on the Outline Business Case (RIBA Stage 3) through to Full Business Case (RIBA Stage 5). Dependent on further funding being allocated, we will then be able to continue to construction and commissioning.

During the 12-week remobilisation period from now until March, given we paused almost 12 months ago, we will review the Initial Agreement and Concept Designs, to confirm that the submitted Initial Agreement still supports our service redesign aims and supports a sustainable service delivery model. A remobilisation of NHS staff required to deliver the project will also take place during this period. The good news is that many of the people previously involved will be back working on the project which will mean they are ready to progress without delay. We are all looking forward to moving forward again.

The stakeholder group will continue to meet on a regular basis to support the reactivation of the new build project and ongoing development of community services. Plans for wider engagement will be developed early next year that will ensure people will be able to find out more and get involved.

We are delighted to get going again on this key capital project for the Board. Thank you to the stakeholder group members and wider community members for your hard work and commitment to date and in advance for your continued support as we progress.