

A Block: efforts to relocate to date

Previous attempts to resolve the issues of A Block have all been foiled by a lack of capital funding and it is not acceptable for the people of Medway and Swale (excluding Faversham) to be subjected to an inpatient environment that is so inequitable with that provided for residents of the rest of Kent. Those previous attempts were:-

1. Between 2004 and 2006, West Kent Health and Social Care NHS Trust invested £160k in a business case for the wholesale refurbishment and redesign of A Block. With initial estimated costs of £5.7m, the project was agreed by that Trust's Board and the Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority (SHA) in 2005.

When the Full Business Case was considered by the newly-formed KMPT Board in December 2006, estimated costs had risen to £7.1m and were expected to increase as more design work was needed. A comparative new-build solution was costed at £13m.

The Board asked its Major Projects Committee to address concerns about cost, affordability, model of care, and the source of capital. In the end, these concerns and the unavailability of strategic capital funding rendered the project unviable.

2. In 2008/09, KMPT tried again to develop a business case and looked at a range of options, including conversion of A Block, new-build elsewhere on the Medway Maritime Hospital site, use of existing KMPT facilities in Dartford and Maidstone and conversion of Southlands Hospital.

Again, the Trust was concerned at the potential capital cost and the unsuitability of facilities which had not been purpose built and designed. The Trust and PCT agreed a public consultation would be needed. Preparations began but the main feedback from the service users, carers and clinicians in Medway, Sittingbourne and Sheppey was that improvements were needed to community services. The PCT and KMPT decided to focus on making these improvements, rather than launching public consultation.

3. In May 2011, KMPT again revisited the draft business case, this time considering seven local Medway options with the PCT. Four of the buildings were not big enough and two were in unsuitable locations, with site constraints and neighbouring issues.

That left, once again, only A Block. The Trust spent £10k on a feasibility study for converting A Block into three fit-for-purpose wards. The cost was estimated at £7.2m and, again, the scale of capital investment was the major obstacle along with the constraints implicit in the layout of A Block in the lack of easy secure access to outdoor space.

4. In July 2011, following negotiations between the PCT, Medway NHS Foundation Trust, Medway Community Estates and KMPT, Medway Community Estates proposed two possible options on the Medway Maritime Hospital site. One of these, between the laundry and perimeter fence was discounted because of boundary and planning issues. The other, a part new-build/part extension next to the Post Graduate centre was considered in detail. A preliminary design was costed at around £6m.

This proposal was rejected due to the unavailability of capital and because the design was not suitable for acutely unwell mental health service users. There were also concerns about “landlocking” a mental health unit into such a small area in the heart of the general hospital, which is not particularly conducive to mental health recovery.