

# A new health hub for Thanet



## Thanet integrated health hub

### Purpose

This paper provides an update on the latest developments to establish an [integrated health hub](#) at the Carey Building, in Northwood Road, Broadstairs, Thanet.

This update follows a presentation to Kent Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee members in December 2024, which concluded the hub was a substantial variation to services. It details the decision on the change of use application presented to Thanet District Council Planning Committee on 15 January 2025 and an overview of the ongoing public and staff communication and engagement programme, which is helping to influence how the hub is developed for the residents of Thanet.

### Background

The project is being led by the East Kent Health and Care Partnership (EK HCP) and it is hoped the £10million hub will open in the summer of 2025, with services moving in gradually. Contractors have been appointed and have started work on the site.

Plans for the hub include:

- an NHS community diagnostic centre (CDC), to include an MRI in phase one, expanding to respiratory, cardiology and phlebotomy services in phase two
- a range of community NHS services, including community nursing, podiatry, cardiac and respiratory services
- relocation of St Peter's GP surgery to support growth in the patient list, of up to 7,000 people
- capacity to support development of a new model of care, including same day access to a GP when appropriate
- signposting and support to access health and care services provided by voluntary sector organisations, such as Age UK.

The plans are for 10 consultation or examination rooms, two counselling rooms, two treatment rooms, plus eight rooms for community services and six rooms for the community diagnostic centres on the ground floor as part of phase one. The second floor will be for administrative services. There will be additional clinical space on the first floor that is being explored for phase two.

### Change of use for Carey Building

The Carey Building was previously used by Canterbury Christ Church University. A [change of use application](#) from education to health was presented to Thanet District Council (TDC) Planning Committee on 15 January. Mitigation for changing the employment class of the

building is robust; the site has been vacant since 2018, marketing has proven that reuse of the building is unachievable and the hub would bring 129 FTE jobs.

TDC Planning Committee members agreed the proposed integrated health hub at the Carey Building was needed by Thanet residents. Members acknowledged the travel network and parking around the Carey Building is challenging and that a travel plan is required to mitigate Kent County Council Highways' objection due to transport, traffic and the number of parking spaces. TDC Planning Committee agreed to [defer and delegate for approval](#) on the condition that a signed legal agreement to secure transport plans and monitoring.

## Legal agreement and transport plan

Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT), as head tenant for the hub, is leading on the legal agreement and transport plans. It is working closely with Thanet District Council (TDC), the landlord and KCC to satisfy the planning permission conditions related to traffic management, car parking provisions and sustainable travel initiatives. The legal agreement is due to be completed by the end of March and will set out our commitments to comprehensive travel plan.

A transport planning consultant has been appointed to support the development of the plan. A transport sub-group meeting including TDC Planning, KCC Highways team, KCHFT and other East Kent Health and Care Partnership partners, has been working through a plan to mitigate concerns regarding the traffic around the Carey Building site and the number of hub parking spaces.

A first draft of the transport plan is due to be completed by the end of March 2025. It will promote sustainable transport options, such as public transport, cycling and walking. Electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure will support the transition to greener transport solutions. The next phase will be to develop a working group including representatives from the providers expected to occupy the building, voluntary community and social enterprise sector organisations and TDC councillors. TDC and KCC will monitor the travel plan for up to five years.

The public, patient and staff engagement programme, detailed below, is also helping to influence the transport plan.

## Engaging patients, public, local communities, staff and stakeholders

Phase one of a comprehensive communication and engagement programme is in progress to raise awareness of the plans and to make sure people's views help to shape the development of the hub.

This has included:

- Using the full range of existing communication and engagement mechanisms across the range of partners, such as KCHFT, EKHUFT and Kent and Medway ICB's patient, public, member and stakeholder **newsletters, alongside press releases and social media promotion** to publicise the project and how people can get involved.
- A dedicated **web portal for the project**, with supporting pages, has been developed at [www.kentcht.nhs.uk/thanethealthhub](http://www.kentcht.nhs.uk/thanethealthhub) with more than 500 views.
- The website is being regularly updated with **frequently asked questions**, which include details of opening times, number of parking spaces and how we will make the building fully accessible for people with disabilities.

- A printed **booklet** about the plan, available at key venues across Thanet including St Peter's surgery.
- We have published an **online survey** for people to give their views. More than **630 people have completed the survey**. We have also printed and distributed paper versions of the survey, including an Easyread version for people with learning disabilities or cognitive issues.



- An **in-person engagement event** on Saturday, 15 February at the Allen building, which is opposite the proposed new health hub building, in Broadstairs. We publicised the event on social media and via outlets such as Isle of Thanet News, changing the venue to increase capacity on demand and **more than 70 people attended**. The two-hour event, chaired by East Thanet MP Polly Billington, included [presentations from all the partners](#), followed by a table-top exercise where people could ask questions and check and challenge some of the ideas that had been presented. BSL interpreters were available at the session.
- We held two **online public engagement events**. One at 10am on Thursday, 20 February. There were 34 people registered for the event and 31 people attended, including colleagues from EKHUFT and KCHFT, plus members of the public and local stakeholders. The second at 6pm on Wednesday, 26 February, with 36 registered and 19 attending, including many community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Dedicated focus groups with key groups, including **Thanet Stroke Association** event and year 13 forums from **local schools**. We will be working with Healthwatch, Social Enterprise Kent and a range of voluntary sector organisations to further engage underserved communities and people with protected characteristics to make sure a range of voices help to develop the hub.
- Discussing and sharing the plans with **St Peter's Surgery patient participation group** at their local meetings, sharing booklets and the survey with its patients.
- We have engaged with staff, many of whom are also local residents, through an **initial joint-internal webinar across the partners** held on Thursday, 30 January 2025, attended by 79 people and facilitated by Julia Rogers, KCHFT Director of Communications and Engagement and KCHFT Chief Executive Mairead McCormick. There is a further webinar scheduled for 5 March. We also have a mechanism for staff to ask anonymous questions via menti.com. We have written and published a live and ongoing internal page on intranets dedicated to delivering transparent information and updates to colleagues about the hub.

## What people, public and staff have told us so far

We are still analysing the results of the first phase of the engagement and a full report will be published; however, some headline themes are included below.

### Headline survey results show:

So far, we've had more than 630 responses to our online survey of these 83.7 per cent were from a patient or a member of the public, 12 per cent were health or care colleagues.

- **95 per cent of people** said having same-day access appointments to **GP services** would be useful and 46 per cent said it would improve GP access, 38 per cent didn't know
- **83 per cent** said they agreed or strongly agreed the **clinical diagnostic hub would improve access to diagnostic services**
- **80 per cent agreed** that including **community services** from other locations would be useful
- **78 per cent agree or strongly agreed** that the centre would help to **improve partnership** working with community and voluntary sector organisations.
- **57 per cent said** they didn't see any problems or challenges with including these services.

### People were positive about:

- **Improved access to services:** Many respondents believe the new health hub will enhance access to diagnostic services like MRI and echocardiograms. The hub is expected to reduce waiting times for diagnostics and hospital appointments, easing pressure on existing hospitals.

*'To speed up the time waited for diagnostics and also saving having to go to Dover can only be a good thing.'*

- **Convenience and centralisation:** The centralisation of services in one hub is seen as beneficial, making it easier for patients to access multiple services in one location. People appreciate the idea of having a range of community services, such as podiatry, cardiac, and respiratory services, in one place.

*'Having everything we need in one place is great.'*

- **Reduction in travel time:** The hub will save patients from traveling to Dover hospitals for diagnostic services, which is particularly beneficial for those with mobility issues or without personal transport.

*"Be better you don't have to go far. Dover is too far away without a car park nearer to the building."*

- **Potential for additional services:** People have welcomed the potential for the hub to offer additional services. People have suggested a need for services such as x-rays and radiology, minor surgery, such as cataract surgery, expanded physiotherapy and occupational therapy, mental health services especially for young people, point of care testing and dental services, to further reduce the burden on existing facilities. Other suggestions include integrated health improvement service, such as those by One You and regular adult social care clinics and services to provide information, advice and

guidance. Cllr Paul Bartlett shared an example of a successful walk-in GP service for over 75s and suggested considering a similar model for the Thanet hub.

*'It would be good if the hub could have x-ray as well like Estuary View will take the pressure off QEQM.'*

- **Wide support for community and voluntary sector services:** People gave strong support for voluntary sector and ongoing community engagement to make this a hub that is fit for the future and meets the diverse needs of the population. There was support for the voluntary sector to help create a welcoming, community-focused environment was suggested.

*'Kent Coast Volunteering has a community transport and befriending services that help to tackle loneliness and isolation.'*

- **Support for meeting increasing demand on local healthcare:** The hub is seen as a much-needed addition to the local healthcare infrastructure, especially with the growing population in Thanet due to new housing developments.

*'Thanet suffers from a shortage of GP services and our A&E is on its knees. Access to diagnostic tools so close to Thanet residents will be invaluable for prompt treatment.'*

### **People had questions, concerns or suggestions about ...**

**Transport and accessibility:** One concern is the location for patients travelling by bus, with one bus route serving the area. People suggested improving public transport by introducing additional frequent and reliable bus routes that stop directly at the hub. Implementing shuttle bus services from key locations, such as QEQM and Westwood Cross.

*'Work with Stagecoach to provide accessible public transport for staff without vehicles and patients to attend the hub.'*

*'Buses must stop outside, and be accessible from St Peters, Broadstairs, and Ramsgate, even a shuttle bus to QEQM.'*

*In response: We will be working with all partners to look at what is possible as part of the travel plan.*

**Traffic congestion:** Scheduling appointments to avoid peak traffic times, such as school arrival and leaving times, can also help mitigate congestion.

*"The appointment times could maybe be helped by avoiding peak traffic times, especially school arrival/leaving times."*

*In response: NHS providers are reviewing their appointment system so reduced appointments are offered at peak times such as school drop off and pick up times.*

**Parking:** There are concerns 59 parking spaces for both patients and staff is not adequate. Respondents suggested using nearby land for extra parking to help ease congestion on surrounding roads. People want appropriate allocation for disabled drivers and specific parking spaces for staff, considering they often carry heavy equipment.

*"The land in Millennium Way could be used for extra parking to ease congestion on Northwood Road and surrounding roads."*

*"Allocated car parking spaces for staff at the location. More buses to the location."*

**In response:** We are reviewing options for a staff offsite parking solution to ensure the 59 parking spaces available at the Carey site are prioritised for the public, including allocation appropriate for disabled drivers. As part of the design of the building there are plans to include a 'set down' area so transport vehicles or ambulances can use this to help with congestion in the car park. The team are also keen to engage with the local schools to discuss the parking in the local area.

**Additional or moving services:** People wanted to know if these were additional services or services simply centralising. The Community Diagnostic Hub will provide additional services and the hub will also allow St Peter's practice to expand its range of services.

People raised if there would be enough experts and consultants to properly interpret the results of the increased diagnostics and ensure patients received the necessary treatment they need.

**In response:** A key part of this programme is modelling the impact, with data and learning from the Dover Community Diagnostics Hub helping to adequately predict the level of need.

**Recruitment:** Across the engagement, people wanted assurance there would be the workforce to deliver the hub. People recognised that being near schools, the hub could serve as an educational environment to entice more young people into health and social care professions.

**In response:** St Peter's surgery is actively recruiting additional GP and a range of clinical staff in preparation, recognising the need to have a stable, consistent clinical team. The hub's modern facilities and new ways of working make an attractive option for healthcare professionals and offer the opportunity to embrace a wider range of health professionals beyond just GPs. A business case for The Community Diagnostic Centre supports a 'grow your own' internal staffing model from some services while supporting recruitment for others. All EKHUFT staff will rotate through all trust sites to support clinical skill sets and competencies.

### *Next steps*

East Kent Health and Care Partnership is deeply grateful to the local community, including individuals, local councillors and voluntary sector organisations, for their invaluable contributions and suggestions in developing the hub. For example, wheelchair users have offered essential input to ensure the highest standards of accessibility.

Local councillors have offered support in the development of the transport plan, including the opportunity to think about green transport options and the public health and prevention agenda and engaging local schools in reviewing their drop off and pick up points.

We are conducting a thorough analysis of all the comments received and continuing our engagement with seldom heard groups and people with protected characteristics. A full engagement report will be published, which, along with insights from a community citizens panel, will guide the second stage of the engagement and the project's design and development.

Contractors have started work on the building. While much of the space on the ground and second floors has been allocated, with services moving in gradually, we plan to expand the offer in subsequent phases based on population need, subject to available space and funding. The timeframe for completion of the initial construction work will be August 2025 with a phased move in of community services, St Peter's GP Surgery and the CDC programme during a 12-month period. Phase two planning will start for the first floor in the summer and is subject to successfully securing more capital funding.

**Overall, the engagement so far indicates strong support for the Thanet health hub. Many view it as a positive development that will enhance access to healthcare services and help us to tackle health inequalities. By working with patients, public, staff, stakeholders and our partners, we are confident we can mitigate concerns about transport, parking and traffic congestion to ensure the hub's success.**

### *Recommendation*

The East Kent Health and Care Partnership is happy to provide regular updates to the committee as the project progresses.

The committee is asked to consider the report.