EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust Calls Out Delays to New Hospital Programme

21 January 2025



The long-awaited specialist emergency care hospital for southwest London and Surrey has faced yet another setback following the Government's announcement about delays to the national New Hospital Programme. Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust has voiced strong concerns over the consequences of these delays, which they warn could have dire implications for patient care and infrastructure safety.

Health Secretary **Wes Streeting** outlined the revised timeline, stating that the New Hospital Programme, initially set for completion by 2030, will now proceed in four phases. Notably, nine schemes under the programme will not commence construction until between 2035 and 2039. Streeting emphasized the need for a "firm footing with sustainable funding" to ensure all projects are delivered.

A Legacy of Promises and Delays

The proposed hospital in Sutton, intended to centralize critical emergency services for Epsom, St Helier, and the surrounding areas, was approved in 2020 as part of the Government's pledge to deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030. Initially, the Sutton facility was set to open by 2025. However, delays have since pushed this date to 2027 "at the earliest," with recent announcements suggesting construction may not begin until much later in the decade.

This latest postponement has sparked frustration within the Trust. **Dr James Marsh**, Group Deputy Chief Executive of the St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, did not hold back in his criticism:

> *"After decades of false promises, the people of southwest London and Surrey have been let down once again. Every year we delay adds up to £150m to the cost of a new hospital and keeping the current buildings safe to provide care."*

Critical State of Current Facilities

The Trust has long highlighted the challenges posed by the aging infrastructure at Epsom and St Helier hospitals. Dr Marsh provided a stark assessment of the situation:

> *"We have already had to condemn and demolish one of our wards. It's only a matter of time before other parts of our hospital become unsafe for treating patients. We now need to plan and prepare for the catastrophic failure of our buildings, which could mean moving patient care into temporary buildings."*

Dr Marsh extended an invitation to Health Secretary Wes Streeting to visit the hospitals and witness the deteriorating state of the facilities firsthand:

> *"If the health secretary thinks we can continue to care for patients for 10 years in this building, we invite Wes Streeting to come and see the state of the estate himself."*

Financial Burden of Delays

The financial impact of the delays has been severe. According to the Trust, inflation and the cost of maintaining outdated buildings have driven up expenses by £150 million annually. These costs are expected to rise further as the timeline for the new hospital stretches into the 2030s.

The Trust's frustration echoes broader concerns from healthcare leaders across the country. NHS Providers interim Chief Executive Saffron Cordery described the delays as "a bitter pill to swallow," while Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, warned that prolonged delays would result in higher costs and increased pressure on services.

The Plan for the New Hospital

Despite these setbacks, the Trust remains committed to its "Building Your Future Hospitals" programme. The plan aims to consolidate six major acute services—including A&E, maternity, and paediatrics—into the new Sutton facility, while

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ISSN 2753-2771

upgrading Epsom and St Helier hospitals to provide enhanced outpatient, diagnostic, and rehabilitation services. Both existing hospitals will retain 24/7 urgent treatment centres to support local needs.

Call for Action

The delays to the New Hospital Programme have fuelled local frustration, with many questioning the Government's commitment to fulfilling its promises. As Dr Marsh emphasized, the cost of inaction is not just financial but could also jeopardize the safety and quality of care for thousands of patients.

For further details on the Trust's plans and timelines, visit Building Your Future Hospitals. Images of the facilities, illustrating their current state, are available alongside video footage upon request.

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