PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE THE CURRENT DOCTOR'S SURGERY
AT 270 WOODCHURCH ROAD PRENTON
WITH A PURPOSE BUILT NEW CENTRE LOCATED AT TOWNFIELD CLOSE NOCTORUM

COMMENTS FROM WIRRAL HEALTH FORUM (PPI) ON THE PROPOSALS

Preamble to Report:

In 2002 the Government enacted legislation, which brought into being 572 Public & Patient Involvement in Health (PPI) Forums throughout the country. In December 2003 the Birkenhead & Wallasey PPI Forum (B&W PPI) was established. Roles and powers of the forums include monitoring and reviewing the services provided by the PCT, obtaining the views of patients, users and carers about those services, and making reports and recommendations based on the views of patients and public. In establishing Forums it was the stated aim of the Government strategy was to help improve patients' experiences of health services.

Last year, when a number of PCT's were amalgamated, the structure of Forums was revised down to some 250 so that their areas of concern matched geographically with new PCT areas. At that time the joining together of the two previous local PPI Forums created the Wirral Health Forum (PPI).

Introduction:

Members of the PPI Forum were made aware early in 2006 that it was likely that proposals to replace the current Woodchuch Road Surgery would be initiated, and since that time the Forum kept in contact with the relevant PCT staff members.

It is correct to say that, on enquiring, the Forum were informed in mid-October that the proposals were '…in their infancy…'.

Unfortunately, events appear to have moved more quickly that the Forum realised because approximately four weeks later, on November 22nd members of the Forum were asked by Doctor Lee to comment on the wording of a draft brochure, and to reply within a deadline of a week.

Proposal Concept:

The current premises which are housed within a pair of adapted semi-detached houses are in urgent need of being replaced as they impair the standards of service the doctors would otherwise be able to offer patients. (They are particularly unsuited to the needs of disabled visitors and car-parking places are almost none existent).

Realising this some time ago, Doctor Lee and his colleagues have been searching for 6 years to locate available land as near as possible to the current site. Unfortunately, as there is little suitable available land in the Prenton area and the only possible site appears to be at Townfield Lane – which is regrettably some 1.4 miles distant from the current premises.

Brochure:

It appears that the Doctors themselves were mainly responsible for the content of the leaflet, having used a 'template' provided by PCT staff. The Forum suggested that the wording of these brochures should be adjusted so that the style of wording

was made slightly more informal, thereby making the brochure more 'reader friendly' to the average patient reader.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that all the alterations proposed were incorporated in the revised publication.

Unfortunately, whilst the Forum did respond as quickly as it was able, the consultation period had to be postponed by a week, and it did not start until December 11th 2006; also the 'open event' dates needed to be put back too.

This comparatively short length of time provided for the Forum to make a meaningful contribution to the writing of the brochure has regrettably led to more significant delays, as well as additional costs falling on the doctor's budgets, (for the reason that money had already been borrowed from a bank so the land could be purchased immediately); more is mentioned of this important point later in this report see 'Financial Arrangements' below.

Circulation of booklet:

The proposals brochure (about 4,000+ copies) was mailed out initially to each 'patient household'. Additionally, following a PPI Forum suggestion, a further 1,700+ leaflets were addressed to siblings aged over the age of 16 at their parents addresses. (Note: It is now understood by the Forum, from Doctor Mantgani, that this procedure will in future become standard practice with future PCT proposals).

These leaflets were available in the doctor's surgery on the first day of the consultation period, December 11th 2006. However, because they were only posted out to the patients' addresses on that same day they were not actually received until a few days after the start of the consultation period. Hopefully, this situation will not reoccur on a future occasion.

The brochure was not circulated to houses near to the new site (i.e. non-patient local residents), because the PCT staff felt that the people who live in the streets near to the new premises could express any views or objections adequately as part of the Council planning process, and for the reason that such a circulation could possibly be seen by some other practices as disguised 'advertising' seeking new patients; in our view should have been so distributed.

Open Day Events:

The two 'open days' were both well attended, probably because of more effective publicity and better signposting (something the Forum had requested previously). Significantly more people attended than have attended at other similar recent 'open day' events, relating to other 'new build' proposals. It is conceivable too that the increased attendance may also be partly because of individual's level of feelings about the additional distance (some 1.4 miles) between the current practice and the proposed new site, and possible related transport problems.

Consultation Responses:

A total of 6,244 proposals leaflets were distributed, mainly by mail to specific addresses. The Forum is satisfied beyond any reasonable doubt that the PCT have made all possible efforts to ensure that all relevant patients received details of the proposals, and have an adequate opportunity to make comments.

A total number of 706 responses were received by the PCT; (note: this figure includes a small number of responses received directly by the PPI Forum Support Organisation). This is a response rate of over 11%.

As this was more than double the typical previous response rates with other projects, the efforts of those involved – in particular Doctor Andrew Lee, Doctor Abhi Mantgani, Ms Nina Birt and Ms Christine Campbell – should be acknowledged here,

as there appears to have been a genuine attempt by PCT staff to learn from the points the Forum have raised regarding previous proposals.

Respondents Comment and Concerns:

Anticipated Improvements:

- The planned new building is likely to benefit most patients as the purpose built premises will include a health clinic and other features including an on site pharmacy.
- The provision of 41-car parking places and bike storage areas will assist those using public transport or walking to the premises.

Potential Problems:

- It is quite possible that some patients will decide to transfer to another surgery, because of the prospect of having to undertake a longer travelling distance. Roughly 25% of those on the current patient lists will have further to travel, which could be a particular problem for those living to the west and south of Woodchurch Road/Singleton Avenue.
- Also, it is conceivable that the number of patients missing appointments (or being late) may increase, because of public transport delays on extended journeys.
- Access for vehicles onto the main road, particularly at school start/finish times, when numerous cars are parked in the vicinity, may cause potential traffic problems.
- Vandalism at the side of the new building (adjacent to the existing public footpath) is highly likely and every effort should be made by the architects to make the design as secure and as 'graffiti proof 'as is possible.

Alternative Practices:

- It should be noted that the Forum have received assurances that all 6 of the nearest alternative doctor's surgeries currently have 'open lists', so any individual wishing to transfer - for travelling or other reasons – should be able to register without experiencing problems.

Additional Comments:

- Currently there are two bus routes, which pass both the current and proposed site. If current services are not supplemented this could mean that patients would have to take two buses to get to the new facility (also those living to the north of the surgeries are particularly poorly served with public transport).
- Several patients have made comments that they are dissatisfied with the current appointments system – whilst the Forum realise that such appointment making facilities will be improved by the installation of more modern equipment, the Forum would ask that any patients arriving late (because of genuine public transport delays) is treated, at least when the building is first utilised, with some measure of understanding.
- Acknowledgement should be made of the architect's strenuous efforts to provide information requested by the Forum promptly.
- One Forum member (Mike Benson) has spent a considerable amount of time speaking with members of the architect's staff in an effort to ensure that the design of the new premises is as 'user friendly' as is

possible for disabled people. He is (and the Forum are too) willing to continue this involvement, in particular with relation to the 'fitting out' of the building if the PCT Board think that this would be helpful.

- The Forum is pleased to note that dedicated disabled toilets will be provided on both floor levels of the new building.
- We also note that the 'on site' pharmacy will be self-contained so that the opening hours need not necessarily be identical to the medical provision areas.
- That suggestions be made to the GP Doctors concerned that they attempt to involve all staff employed at the individual surgeries in the consultation process, if this has not already done.

Financial Arrangements:

- The Forum have been advised that the project will not cause the PCT any additional financial problems, as spending is covered by government grants.
- We also note too that the delays referred to above (paragraph 'Brochure' above) have caused the Doctors to incur significant additional costs, and would ask the PCT consider the possibility of offering them some financial reckon pence if at all possible.

Future Involvement:

- Nearer the completion date, it is essential that the PCT staff make strenuous efforts to improve the access by public transport, by having detailed discussions with the relevant providers.
- That copies of the 'proposal booklet' be provide to the PPI Forums in sufficient time for comments to be incorporated in the printed edition, and that PCT staff should accept a greater involvement with writing these (because of their on-going expertise) – and also that such leaflets are 'mail dropped' to the local residents in nearby residents houses.
- The Forum would request again that they are provided with more time for the consideration of the draft brochures in future.
- Brochures should always be ready in sufficient time for them to be posted out and received by patients prior to the first day of the consultation period.

Overall View: Conclusions:

The current view of the Wirral Health Forum was that the concept of the revised facilities was generally sound and that the majority of patients using the new centre would benefit. We are informed by the PCT that approximately 80% of the patients responding to the proposals brochure feedback, are in favour - therefore the PPI Forum intends to support the proposals.

Doctor Andrew Lee and his colleagues involved in preparing the proposals are to be congratulated on their initiatives in putting foreword the scheme to construct a new Health Centre, to replace their current facilities, which they have clearly out-grown. They appear to have spent a considerable amount of time, effort and a large amount of their own funds in preparing the specifications and in arranging for architect's plans to be drawn up.

Prepared on behalf of the Wirral Health Forum (PPI), to be ratified at the next PPI Forum Meeting.

Robin Eley Jones - Chairman