



Ian Sollom MP

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The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street,
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cc. Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning

5th February 2025

Shifting healthcare closer to community - Northstowe Town Hub

Dear Secretary of State,

Since the Government first announced its Plan for Change, we have heard repeated calls for drastic change to how primary healthcare is delivered across the country. Labour's election-winning manifesto promised a reform that would shift the NHS model away from late diagnosis and treatment, and towards a more community-centred, holistic approach to prediction and prevention. The Darzi Review highlighted that the failure to implement such ideas has been actively damaging the health of our nation for many years with the damning conclusion that "too many people end up in hospital because too little is spent in the community."

I welcome this push for reform, which will be hugely important for my constituency of St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire, where new primary healthcare facilities will be developed in the coming years to serve our growing population. However, there is an urgent need for clarity from your department on the principles of designing such facilities for the future – particularly in Northstowe, where design work is already underway.

As you may know, Northstowe is due to be the largest new town in the UK after Milton Keynes, and by 2040 will be home to 10,000 new houses and nearly 25,000 residents. Having participated in NHS England's 'Healthy New Town' (HNT) pilot scheme between 2016-2019, the relationship between community, health, and the consequent growth that your government is prioritising should be woven into every part of the town's design.

While the approach has seen success in many ways, the final principle that was devised from the HNT scheme, to 'create integrated health and wellbeing centres', remains unfulfilled. A combination of factors – primarily the Covid-19 pandemic – have meant that the HNT programme did not have the legacy that was originally intended; the new care model proposal that came from the project could not advance in the way that was envisioned; and the previously good working relationship with NHS England, one that was frequently utilised during the planning and execution of Northstowe's first two phases of development, has ceased to be.

Social Media

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The Town Hub is the building set to house Northstowe's primary care facilities. It is intended as a flexible and welcoming space that harnesses a 'cradle to grave' social prescribing approach, providing clinician advice and care directly alongside services that tackle wider determinants of health such as citizen's advice and education provision, and the potential for community diagnostics.

However, the timeframe to get the Hub delivered by 2028 is looking increasingly challenging when insight into what kind of services and facilities should be included under your vision for primary care remains opaque. At best, this lack of guidance could significantly delay delivery of what should be flagship new primary healthcare facilities in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. At worst, one of the Government's declared 'Healthy New Towns' will get healthcare facilities that are not fit for purpose or for the future, undermining your Government's plans for growth in both new and existing communities.

I put a written question to your department, (17650), asking whether they had plans to meet regularly with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board (ICB) and issue guidance to them on the construction of the Northstowe's healthcare facilities. Knowing that the Minister for Housing and Planning (copied into this letter) had already recognised the town as a flagship site for the Government's wider growth plan and had thus created a new taskforce for its development, it seemed an obvious choice for your department to follow suit and capitalise on the opportunity to build a real, on-the-ground manifestation of your 10-year plan for the NHS.

I was therefore disappointed to read, as well as to hear from the ICB and South Cambridgeshire District Council themselves, that your department is not currently providing any input into the planning and construction of Northstowe's healthcare facilities in any capacity.

The British people need to see that your intention to 'build an NHS fit for the future' is not simply a tagline. This is your chance to take this statement very literally: not just to fix the foundations, but to build them from the ground upwards. It is the responsibility of the Department for Health and Social Care to support the work of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB, as well as developers and local authorities, throughout the construction of Northstowe and its facilities, and I urge you to make sure this support is provided.

Furthermore, I invite you to visit the town and see for yourself the huge opportunity that successful delivery of the Northstowe Town Hub represents. Residents and developers would welcome the chance to discuss a shared vision for the UK's next truly healthy town.

I look forward to receiving your response and welcoming you to the community very soon.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Sollom MP

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