

News

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Blog: Seventy years on, transformation of the estate is key to the future of the NHS



By Peter Cox

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This year we celebrate 70 years of the NHS. As well as a moment to reflect on its huge achievements and the enduring appreciation it attracts internationally, it's also a time to consider how we should prepare for another 70 years of success.

Demand for healthcare services is increasing relentlessly while funding is squeezed. Expectations around the quality of healthcare received in the UK are also rising, yet not all patients receive the level of care the NHS is capable of delivering.

We need to see innovation and improvement, not only in clinical services, NHS management and public health, but in the NHS estate too. As demands increase, we should focus on how this integral component of the NHS can evolve to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population, seven decades since its inception.

This 70th anniversary year was also marked by the Government's response to the independent report NHS Property and Estates: Why the estate matters for patients from Sir Robert Naylor.

To a point, the report has acted as the catalyst for change, prompting the Government to commit to investing £3.5 billion of additional capital by 2022/23, including £2.6 billion to support Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) to deliver transformation schemes.

A long-term approach

The adoption of this recommendation from Naylor is without a doubt positive. Previously, we've seen many Trusts focus on the sale of their surplus estate in a reactive way, to raise funds to re-invest in improved healthcare facilities, or support their over spend.

However, it's essential to take a longer-term approach; rather than disposing of land when funding is required, it should be treated as an asset, and it's important to look at the best option to create value. How can we increase the value of a site before disposal? Can we create a long-term revenue stream rather than sell? What role can this asset play in meeting patients' and the communities needs in the long run?

As specialists in healthcare estates, at Morgan Sindall Investments (MSIL) we understand that the estate will never be the number one priority of a Trust Chief Executive. Nor should it be. But the estate can and should play a role in the successful operation of NHS Trusts, and partnering with the private sector can help provide the expertise, capability and focus to achieve that.

We're already working with Trusts to transform their land and property holdings to help ensure the continuing success of their operations. Our healthcare partnerships have developed and managed over £1 billion in assets through partnerships over the past decade.

Working with the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, we are part of STRIDE, a Strategic Estates Partnership. Through this joint venture structure, specialist teams from MSIL and Arcadis provide the Trust with access to strategic planning capabilities, private sector capital, and development and construction expertise.

A long-term approach to the Trust's estate is helping to deliver its overarching strategic objectives. We have just secured outline planning consent for a new healthcare village in Burton-on-Trent, which will provide a local GP practice, along with a range of residential accommodation, and supporting community services.

The mix of uses are geared towards local healthcare needs, incorporating a 60-bed step down facility, a 40-bed care home, an 80-bed extra care residency and accommodation for 100 doctors and nurses, as well as a community hub and 100-place children's nursery. By providing more suitable accommodation, these facilities will help to reduce the need for residents to return to hospital. Our overall aspiration through the healthcare village is to improve the integration of local health and social care.

Our partnership with Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (TOPP) has seen us progress similar work to transform a number of their surplus sites, taking a long-term approach to the both capital and revenue generation. This will include some new clinical buildings such as a new Primary Care Centre in London but the emphasis with this partnership will be to deliver solutions for their surplus estate.

We have recently announced that we are preferred bidder for the Strategic Estates Partnership with Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust. This Integrated Care Organisation, which provides both health and social care, already has well developed Clinical and Estates strategies. Our ability to deliver against these by providing both clinical and non-clinical spaces and places, meeting their new models of care as well as benefiting the wider community fits directly into our own MSIL strategic drive to make a difference to the communities we serve.

By partnering with the right organisation, NHS Trusts can ensure that their land and property becomes an asset, not a liability or missed opportunity. If we're going to ensure that the NHS is fit for another 70 years, it's time to think longer-term about its estate.

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