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Dear constituent

Thank you very much for taking the time to write to me about the Velindre Cancer Centre plans and the 'Save the Northern Meadows' campaign.

As the Member of the Senedd for Cardiff North I have given careful consideration to constituents' views on the planning application by Cardiff and Vale Health Board (20/00357/MJR) to build housing on the northern meadows in Whitchurch and I have come to the conclusion that I must oppose the extension of this planning permission.

I have never believed that there should be housing on this land. I opposed proposals to build housing on it in 1995, in 1997, 1998 and in 1999 I spoke out against building housing on the land at a public inquiry.

I have always supported the development of a new cancer hospital and that is still my priority, and I believe it is the priority for the vast majority of my constituents.

One in two of us will need treatment for cancer in our lifetimes. Anyone who has ever needed treatment at or visited Velindre knows that the hardworking staff and very ill patients desperately need a new building. I believe supporting it is the right thing to do.

Having now seen some of Velindre's vision for the site, I really believe it will be therapeutic for those patients who are desperately sick to be surrounded by nature in a building which incorporates as many natural elements as possible and blends into the landscape. The design ideas I've seen would mean a building akin to the light and calm of Maggie's (the cancer support centre) – it will be poles apart from the concrete high-rise blocks of UHW at the Heath.



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I am also reassured that the development team want to make sure the new hospital is part of the community. They want your ideas to inform the design and will be engaging with the community about how the meadows surrounding the hospital can continue to be used. They are even talking about possibly creating a small market garden, linking in with what the land was originally used for – it was part of the old hospital's farm which fed the patients and provided them with therapeutic activities. It would be great if people of Whitchurch had an opportunity to be able to grow vegetables there once more, in an echo of the past.

Below I have set out more detail on my views on the Velindre development.

2016 manifesto commitment to support a new Velindre Cancer Centre

In the run-up to the Assembly elections in 2016 it had become clear that Velindre Cancer Centre – which is now 60 years old and bursting at the seams – needed a new building and I committed myself to supporting this.

This was clearly stated in my manifesto and I was elected to represent Cardiff North again in 2016 as Assembly Member. Many thousands of people voted for me and I committed to supporting the development of a new first-class Velindre cancer centre so I owe it to them to continue to support this.

The new applications by Velindre University NHS Trust (2020)

Whatever happens planning permission for a Cancer Centre **has already been granted** by the Council's planning committee. It passed *unanimously* in December 2017.

So the Velindre University NHS Trust already has the legal right to build on the northern meadows.

The objections to building on the 'northern meadows' being raised now were also raised at the time of the Velindre University NHS Trust's planning application in 2017.

The planning committee scrutinised Velindre University NHS Trust's explanations for why it could not develop the old Whitchurch Hospital site or the existing Velindre site. It also scrutinised the other sites the Velindre team had looked into and found unsuitable.

Velindre's website has details of the sites considered:

www.transformingcancerservices.wales/your-questions.

Outline planning permission for a state-of-the-art Cancer Centre (formally granted in March 2018) has already had to comply with the obligations imposed by the Local Development Plan (which came into force on January 1st 2016), the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (which came into force on April 29th 2015), the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 (which



came into force on July 6th 2015) and, where relevant, the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (which came into force on May 21st 2016).

The issues are being debated again now, partly because Velindre University NHS Trust and Asda are putting in additional planning applications, and partly because the other *separate* planning permission for this land (Cardiff and Vale UHB's 2017 permission to build housing) is again up for renewal.

Velindre University NHS Trust's new applications seek an extension of time for the use of the temporary construction roads at the old Whitchurch Hospital site which they say will shorten construction time and save between £5m and £11m.

I intend to fully scrutinise these applications on behalf of constituents now that they have been submitted.

History of the Cardiff and Vale Health Board's planning permission for this site

As stated at the start of this letter, I will oppose the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board's application for another renewal of *its separate* planning permission for housing (20/00357/MJR) on the northern meadows. It is unreasonable for Cardiff & the Vale UHB to be making an application for a fourth renewal 20 years after planning consent was first given on appeal.

I first opposed this planning application in 1995. I argued then, as I do now, that there would be far less green space and far more impact on wildlife with housing. Housing brings with it owners' pets. Domestic pets are a danger to wildlife and there would be many more of these in the area if houses were to be built on the land.

In 1995 Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust (Cardiff and Vale University Health Board's predecessor) was under a statutory duty to dispose of the land at the best commercial price so it sought planning permission for a mixed use development including housing, retail, leisure and commercial development.

I strongly opposed this in 1995, in 1997 and 1998. The Local Planning Authority did not vote for it either, but the NHS Trust appealed and a Public Inquiry followed in 1999. I gave evidence and called for the northern meadows to be dedicated for public use and incorporated into the Forest Farm Country Park and Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve, so I was very disappointed with the outcome.

I vigorously opposed the application for an extension of time to this planning permission in 2005 (by the Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust) and in 2010 (by its successor, Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board).

Each time the Planning Committee granted the extension.

They did this again on September 8th 2017, following yet another application for renewal in 2016. This renewal had to take into account the new Local Development Plan which came into force on January 1st 2016 and of the legal obligations imposed on the Local



Planning Authority under the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and all relevant provisions of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The new cancer hospital will be able to treat more patients

One in two of us will need to be treated for cancer in our lifetimes so I welcome the fact that the new cancer hospital will be able to treat more in-patients every year as well as more outpatients.

By 2031, Velindre University NHS Trust will be able to treat more than 8,500 new patients a year, an increase of 2,000 on current numbers. In the same time period the number of patient appointments at the centre will increase by 20,000 to a total of 160,000 a year.

Let's not forget also that those seriously ill with cancer need to have their operations at the University Hospital of Wales so it is very important that Velindre maintains close links with the Heath Hospital and Cardiff University Medical School.

Common misconceptions

I believe there are some common misconceptions being shared about the new Velindre Cancer Centre and I would like to offer clarification on these.

1. The new centre will not take up all the land of the northern meadows – it is intended that 60 per cent will *not* be built on and the site will be open and green with footpaths and public access. It will not touch the nature reserve. I will hold the developers to this at every stage of the way.
2. The land is not 'common land'. It is owned by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. I know many new people have been using it during lockdown and many others since they were small children. They have benefitted from the fact that it has not recently been fenced off. I am glad that it hasn't been, but people may not realise that it is not common land and usage by local people has never given rise to potential 'town or village green status'.
3. People continue to mention the old Whitchurch Hospital as an alternative site. In its 2017 planning application Velindre University NHS Trust provided information explaining why the old Whitchurch Hospital buildings and grounds are not suitable for the new hospital development. The buildings and landscaped gardens are Grade II-listed and can neither be bulldozed nor significantly altered. A previous plan to adapt the old hospital for a modern mental health facility was rejected because it was felt that the existing buildings were wholly unsuitable and in



2016 mental health care was moved to Llandough. The buildings definitely would not be suitable for a state-of-the-art cancer hospital.

4. The existing Velindre site is too small for an expanded cancer centre and would not offer patients the green surroundings of the northern meadows site which will have such a beneficial effect on people's mental health and well-being. This is true for all of us, but even more so for people who are very sick or recovering from cancer treatment.
5. Lastly, there is the impression that this cancer hospital could be built elsewhere. I have held frequent meetings with the Velindre University NHS Trust's chief executive and project manager and they have assured me that there is no other site – including at the Heath hospital – owned by the NHS in Wales that the hospital could be built on. To purchase a new piece of land would cost millions more at a time when the NHS needs all the precious resources it can get to help treat the increasing number of patients with cancer.

In its 2017 application Velindre University NHS Trust provided explanations on why alternative sites were not suitable and the planning committee scrutinised these. The sites considered were at the Royal Gwent, the University Hospital of Wales and Llanfrechfa Grange near Newport. You can read more about this here:

<http://www.transformingcancerservices.wales/your-questions> .

I do recognise that many people feel very passionately about this land. It's a message I hear, and have echoed in the past, but as a politician there are hard choices to be made and the realities of the planning system to deal with so I continue to support the development of a world-class cancer centre to treat cancer patients in Cardiff and South Wales. I also believe that in the long term this cancer centre will truly become a community asset.

Best wishes

Julie

Julie Morgan, Member of the Senedd for Cardiff North



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