

Northern Health and Social Care Trust Board Meeting in Public - Cover Sheet

Subject:	Birch Hill Centre for Mental Health Capital Scheme	Date of Meeting: 28 August 2025		
Prepared By:	Simon Daly, Head of Capital Projects MH			
Approved By:	Alison Renfrew, Assistant Director of Capital Development			
Presented By:	Petra Corr, Director of MHLDCW			
Purpose				
To provide an update on progress with the Birch Hill Centre for Mental Health project, for noting.		Approval		
		Assurance		
		Update		
		Noting	✓	
Strategic Objectives				
Build Northern Partnerships and Integrate Care	Continue to improve Outcomes & Experience	Deliver value by optimising Resources	Nurture our People, Enable our Talent & Build Our Teams	Improve population Health & address health & social care inequalities
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Risk – please note if links to any principal, corporate or divisional risk				
Corporate Risks	A new build will reduce the ligature related issues and incidents of violence and aggression to a rating of 12 on the Trust Risk Register. Not compliant at present, high rating of 20. A new build may reduce the current inability to secure acute psychiatric beds to a rating of 12 on Trust Risk Register. Not compliant at present, high rating of 25.			
Committees/groups where this item has been presented before				
Executive Team				
Acronyms				
Mental Health, Learning Disability and Psychological Services (MHLDPS) Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT) Land and Property Services (LPS) Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads				
Executive Summary				
Commencement of RIBA Stage 4: RIBA Stage 4 Technical Design continues to be delayed due to the Trust awaiting the DoH Capital Plan following the ongoing 2026-2030 budget process across all Departments, the outcome of which will be known on the autumn of this year. A part of this the DoH had recently requested reprofiled costs for all of the Trust's priority schemes. Birch Hill remains the Trust's 1st priority with the project to upgrade the Electrical Infrastructure at Antrim Area Hospital second. The Trust's submission was made to the DoH on Friday 8 August 2025. The current accepted programme remains the one issued on 27th February 2025. Whilst it proposed an RIBA Stage 4 commencement date of 25 March 2025, and a completion date of December 2029 followed by a Trust clinical commissioning period, this is now out of date. As soon as the Mental Health Inpatient Addendum receives approval and funding secured, the ICT will be asked to prepare an updated programme from RIBA Stage 4 through to scheme completion.				

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Enabling Works: Approval has been granted for the alterations to the car park north of the Birch Hill site and the works to the spine road, however none of this can progress without Addendum approval and release of funding.

Work continues on the acquisition of a strip of land to support the widening of Steeple Road at the proposed new site entrance to Birch Hill in line with DfI Roads. Plans for the proposed works have been agreed with the land owner and the cost has been set by LPS at current market value for this type of land.

The Ecologist (part of the ICT) has issued an update to this original ecology survey following the suggestion by a neighbour that bluebells on the site were a protected species. He has confirmed they are not but rather a hybrid invasive species which can be removed. For noting the report also advised that protected primrose had been found and that they must be carefully managed. He has provided a methodology and mitigations to ensure the protection of the primrose during and after the works onsite. A licence will be sought to complete these works when the addendum is approved and funding to undertake the enabling works is released.

Mental Health Inpatient Addendum: The Trust has completed a draft Mental Health Inpatient Addendum in response to the last set of queries received on 8 May 2025. Support is being provided by the Health Estates Project Manager and Quantity Surveyor. It is proposed that the addendum will be completed by mid-September, subject to Trust approval and will be submitted to the DoH for their review.

Approval of the Addendum is urgently required to secure funding to commence RIBA Stage 4 and the completion of the Enabling Works for progression to tender in advance of the Full Business Case.

Schedule of Accommodation

Following lengthy discussions through a number of meetings with Health Estates the final Stage 3 SOA has been accepted as 18,335m². A draft paper has been prepared mapping the SOA from the approved OBC figure of 14,072m² to the RIBA Stage 3 figure of 18335m². HE has provided narrative to explain this shift. It includes the provision of additional clinical space, planning and engineering space to support the engineering strategy, roof voids and stair cores.

MLA Visits

Representatives from Sinn Fein visited Holywell Hospital on 8th July 2025. It was a positive visit and gave them the opportunity to see the existing accommodation along with the mock up bedrooms and the full proposals for Birch Hill. An article was published in the Antrim Guardian detailing the visit.

Finance: A number of Compensation Events still to be processed. The current spend for 2025/26 is £380,355, of which £171,772 is Project Management costs to end of July. Invoices totalling £208,583 have been received to date from Arcadis/IBI. Of these £80,129 relates to agreed Compensation events and £128,454 relates to Stage 3 ICT Fees. These costs have been offset against the 2024/25 accrual of £690k. In the absence of a CRL, the accrual continues to fund the project. The Trust and HE had collectively considered a number of potential cost saving / value engineering items which could deliver cost savings. This work is currently paused until the ICT are re-engaged at the start of RIBA Stage 4.

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Issues/Risks: Members of Core Group Governance met on 23rd and 24th June 2025 and undertook a detailed review of both the Risk Register and Issue Logs for Birch Hill. No new risks or issues were identified. This worthwhile exercise ensured that both were fully reviewed and carefully updated to ensure the project complies with all its Governance requirements.

Decision Log: No new decisions made.

While the project remains “paused” awaiting the DoH review of major capital projects regionally costs potentially continue to rise for a number of reasons e.g. materials increasing in price, rates of pay increasing and potential redesign being required as legislations changes. Notwithstanding this is the ongoing risk to the Trust having to provide 21st century care from a 20th century facility.