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News

DIT site 'close to ideal' for hospital

FRANK McDONALD

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A PROPOSAL to locate the national children's hospital on the extensive Grangegorman site in Dublin 7 is being backed by the city council's former chief planning officer, Pat McDonnell.

Yesterday An Bord Pleanála approved a planning scheme for the 73-acre site under which most of it would be developed as a new campus for Dublin Institute of Technology to replace its existing colleges in the inner city.

Mr McDonnell, who served as chief planning officer for the city until he took early retirement in 2004, said it was "not too late to halt the current proposals to create yet another extensive leafy suburban academic campus" on the Grangegorman lands.

Instead, "a high-density urban design approach would allow for all future room for expansion of the national children's hospital as well as a co-located maternity hospital and many other uses to regenerate this part of the city in a most useful and exciting way".

Mr McDonnell said the Grangegorman site is "minutes from the Mater hospital, Rotunda Hospital, Luas, Heuston Station, St James's Hospital, St Patrick's Hospital and the Navan Road/N3/M3, [which] leads directly on to the M50".

He said the distance across the UCD campus at Belfield "is equivalent to the enclosing distance of St James's Hospital and Grangegorman", while the Mater is much closer, fulfilling the "co-location" criterion in a campus arrangement.

Valerin O'Shea, who represented local residents objecting to the original plan to locate the children's hospital on the Mater site, said Grangegorman, which is in public ownership through the Health Service Executive, "ticks all the boxes" in terms of location.

Ms O'Shea has submitted the latest alternative option for the €600 million children's hospital project to the ministerial review group warning any move by DIT to vacate its existing colleges would cause "significant dereliction" in the inner city.

"Residents of the Grangegorman area who raised serious objections to the Grangegorman Planning Scheme for the relocation of DIT have indicated to me that they would very much prefer a hospital use on the site," she told The Irish Times.

In her submission to the review group, chaired by Dr Frank Dolphin, Ms O'Shea says Grangegorman "would easily accommodate" a paediatric hospital as well as a maternity hospital, associated research facilities and room for any expansion required in future.

Existing buildings on the site could also be used for other medical-related activity – daycare centres for occupational therapy, rehabilitation and physiotherapy, as well as centres for the Cystic Fibrosis Association, Alzheimer's support groups and others.

By contrast, she says, the space identified on the Mater site for the children's hospital and the maternity hospital intended to replace the Rotunda is about 2.04 hectares (less than five acres), which meant there would be "no possibility of expansion".

"It is blatantly obvious that the Mater is not a fit site for the development of the national paediatric hospital," Ms O'Shea says. "We have seen enough costly planning fiascos in this city – apart from the myriad empty office and apartment blocks of recent years."

She says the children's hospital in Melbourne is 1km away from the adult hospital and was stated by the 2006 McKinsey report to be "co-located" in a campus model. The Mater and Rotunda hospitals are "very much closer" to Grangegorman.

"It has been stated repeatedly that there is no ideal site for the children's hospital, and while the Grangegorman site may not be absolutely perfect, I fully concur with the former Dublin city planning officer that it is as close to ideal as we could hope to find.

"Of equal planning merit is the argument that DIT, rather than moving to Grangegorman, should remain at their existing sites throughout the city," Ms O'Shea says, adding that relocating them to a single site "would create significant dereliction" in the inner city.