



WORRIES: BUILDING VIEWED IN BID TO BANISH CRITICISM

Hospital's future unveiled to MPs

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The future of Leicester General Hospital was unveiled to MPs yesterday in a bid to banish criticism of a "Portakabin health service".

Since the Government ordered £200 million worth of cuts to the city's £800 million hospitals' development plans, the General will no longer be completely rebuilt.

Instead, there will be a mixture of refurbishments and new, more short-term units known as modular buildings.

Following concerns about the spending cut, Health Secretary and Leicester West MP Patricia Hewitt, Leicester East MP Keith Vaz and Leicester South MP Sir Peter Soulsby met to view one of the modular buildings which has already been constructed on the site.

The orthopaedic operating theatre cost £1 million and was constructed in 16 weeks.

'AMAZING'

It was brought on to the General site in sections and put together there, where it will have a life-span of around 25 years.

Staff showed the MPs around the old operating theatres, which date back as far as the 1940s, so they could compare them to the new buildings.

Deputy sister Heather Morris, who works in the modular building, told them: "Everybody loves working down here – the space is just amazing."

Mr Vaz, who was critical of the cuts when they were announced and coined the phrase "Portakabin health service" said the viewing had not changed his mind.

He said: "We were promised a completely new hospital at the Leicester General and the health authority has failed to deliver this."

However, Ms Hewitt said: "I think it's terrific. To have a modern facility like this which



PICTURE: CHRIS GORDON / 170797-7

TOUR: Sir Peter Soulsby, Patricia Hewitt and Keith Vaz get a tour of the prefab theatre unit at Leicester General Hospital with, from left, Michael Nattrass, general manager for orthopaedics at Leicester General Hospital, Heather Morris, deputy sister, and Gabrielle Rhys, theatre sister



'IT'S TERRIFIC': The new prefab at Leicester General Hospital

we can build so fast and take down if you wanted is a very important part of the hospitals of the future.

"I think buildings like this ought to be part of all new hospitals.

"Having seen the difficulties a few hospitals are having in paying for large and expensive new buildings, the more I think we

need to build in this flexible way."

Sir Peter said: "What we will see is a dramatic transformation of all of the three hospitals and I think that's something we should be very pleased about."

The Department of Health announced a review of all major Private Finance Initiative schemes in January this year

following concerns the schemes, which involve consortiums borrowing to pay for improvements on behalf of hospital trusts, were too big a risk.

Hospital bosses have now been told they have about £600 million to spend on improvements to the General, Leicester Royal Infirmary and Glenfield Hospital.

Hospitals' trust chief executive Peter Reading said: "We would have preferred to have carried on with our original plans that had been developed carefully over five years and were considered affordable.

"However, times move on rapidly in healthcare and the Government quite rightly is concerned that we're not committed to anything that might not be affordable in the long-term.

"We'll be spending less but giving the same – or almost the same – patient benefits, and it gives us greater flexibility for the future."