

Welcome to our latest update on progress towards the replacement of Fort William's Belford Hospital.

This month has seen a highly significant milestone reached, with the appointment of Balfour Beatty plc as the Principal Supply Chain Partner (PSCP) for this complex project. Balfour Beatty will take on the role of managing contractor, leading the design and construction processes for the new hospital alongside architects Keppie Design, Inverness-based landscape architects Horner + MacLennan, and engineers Hulley & Kirkwood and Mott MacDonald.

Balfour Beatty have recently worked with NHS Highland in delivery of the new hospitals at Broadford and Aviemore, as well as the National Treatment Centre in Inverness, and their design team has extensive experience of delivering new-build health facilities across Scotland, including the East Lothian Community Hospital and the Balfour Hospital in Orkney.

Balfour Beatty emerged successful from a detailed selection process after four companies submitted bids.

The firm is one of six leading construction businesses appointed as PSCPs under the Framework Scotland 3 model, launched in 2021 by NHS Scotland's Health Facilities Scotland wing, which was set up to provide a simplified procurement process for the delivery of publicly-funded health projects across Scotland.

Companies on the framework compete for projects such as the new Belford Rural General Hospital in mini competitive tendering exercises.

The selection criteria for the new Belford PSCP was based 80% on quality and 20% on cost. We believe this emphasis will help ensure that in developing the Rural General Hospital, at the Blar Mhor site in Fort William, we will deliver the best building possible for people in Lochaber.

For the Belford project, we are now finalising the contract details with the company and working with them on the technical brief. The next stages will involve the development on the concept design for the new hospital and site, followed by the production of further detailed designs. We hope to be able to share the first images of the building later this year.

In addition to their role in the development of the new Belford, Balfour Beatty will also lead a major project to refurbish and reconfigure Caithness General Hospital, in Wick.

Balfour Beatty will be responsible for appointing a supply chain for both construction projects, which will offer good contract opportunities for local companies in a range of sectors and is expected to create more jobs in both areas, including training opportunities for our young people.

Every stage of the design and construction process will be managed under the NHS Scotland Assure process, which was established to improve the quality and management of healthcare construction and refurbishment projects across Scotland.

Another very important part of the new Belford project and the wider redesign of health and social care in the area is also due to take place this month.

The Cross Check Workshop will see more than a dozen senior staff who lead departments delivering the range of health services provided in the area present their visions for services to be delivered from the new hospital for review by their clinical colleagues. It marks the culmination of the series of Service Model Workshops that have helped shape our plans so far.

The outcome of the workshop will form the operational brief for the new hospital, as well as a template for developing services where possible between now and the new facility opening.

We are planning an event where members of the public and stakeholders can learn about the results, ask any questions they have and give their own views, which will be taken into account in the ongoing planning and design process, and will publicise a date for this shortly.

We will continue, through this column, to keep you updated on the progress of this project throughout the year. As ever, we also welcome any comments or suggestions you might have.