

Minister Stephenson Welcomes Non-Obstetric Ultrasound at Herts & Essex Hospital



Minister of Health and Secondary Care Andrew Stephenson and MP Julie Marson review new ultrasound and revamped X-ray services at the Herts and Essex Hospital

Residents of Bishop's Stortford are being told the addition of ultrasound services at the Herts and Essex Hospital means they have a new CDC (community diagnostic centre) despite the absence of CT and MRI scanning.

Minister of health and secondary care Andrew Stephenson visited the Haymeads Lane site to learn about new, non-obstetric (non-pregnancy) ultrasound services now provided by the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust.

The upgrade, which also includes modernised X-ray rooms, is part of PAHT's plans to support quicker and easier access to tests close to patients' homes as part of the Government's CDC programme.

As a result, the Herts and Essex Hospital will also offer extended hours for cardiology, ultrasound and X-ray.

Jim McLeish, director of quality improvement at PAHT, said: "It was fantastic to showcase the diagnostic services we provide to improve the experience for our patients, enabling our patients to be seen more quickly and closer to their homes.

"It was also an opportunity to discuss our next plans for modern, integrated, outstanding healthcare to support our community."



Herts and Essex Community Hospital

In December 2022, the Government announced the “West Essex CDC” was part of its plans for 19 new centres, adding to the 91 “one-stop shops” already “up and running” with the aim of opening 160 CDCs in all to perform an additional nine million additional tests a year.

Despite Hertford and Stortford MP Julie Marson’s claims that Bishop’s Stortford would have a “full and complete” CDC, the West Essex CDC was confirmed as a hub and spoke model - with supplementary testing at the spoke in Bishop’s Stortford supporting the main hub at St Margaret’s Hospital in Epping.

PAHT’s plans for Epping were subject to public consultation in January. They include two additional computerised tomography (CT) scanners; extended hours for X-rays; new ultrasound equipment; new cardiology equipment; new respiratory equipment; a relocated MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanner and the recruitment of more phlebotomists to ramp up the number of blood tests that can be carried out. It is hoped the new centre will open next summer.

However, by January this year, the Department for Health and Social Care was heralding services in Bishop’s Stortford and “West Essex” as two separate and open CDCs counting towards its 160 total.



Artist's impression of the new West Essex CDC at St Margaret's Hospital in Epping

Mr Stephenson, accompanied on his tour by Mrs Marson, nevertheless indicated that MRI and CT scanning were integral to a full CDC.

He said: "Community Diagnostic Centres are making it easier for patients to get the care they need as quickly as possible.

"We are taking the long-term decisions to make our healthcare system faster, simpler and fairer, and as part of that, we have already made £2.3 billion available over three years to transform diagnostic services – the largest investment in CT and MRI scanning in the history of the NHS. Our CDCs have, so far, delivered over six million potentially life-saving checks, tests and scans since July 2021."



Artist's impression of the south west corner of the new West Essex CDC at St Margaret's Hospital in Epping

He said: "We remain determined to improve access to care for all patients and the opening of this latest centre [Bishop's Stortford] keeps us on
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track to deliver our target of opening 160 CDCs across the country by March 2025.”

The *Indie* asked PAHT why the spoke of the West Essex CDC at the Herts and Essex was now being described as the "Bishop's Stortford CDC" when the only new diagnostic service was non-obstetric ultrasound and it did not offer the MRI and CT scanning capacity required in the Department for Health and Social Care's definition of a CDC.



Health Secretary Victoria Atkins and MP Julie Marson

The inquiry was referred to the Government, but no answer has been forthcoming. The health department has also failed to answer *Indie* queries about how it has apparently moved the goalposts to inflate the number of operational CDCs by presenting the limited extra testing available at the Herts and Essex spoke as a separate CDC.

The *Indie* has also repeatedly invited Mrs Marson and, latterly, Health Secretary Victoria Atkins to explain how the addition of non-obstetric ultrasound has transformed the Herts and Essex Hospital's existing services into a CDC.

PAHT provides 414 general and acute beds at the Princess Alexandra Hospital and a full range of general acute services, including a 24/7 emergency department, an intensive care unit, a maternity unit and a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

At the Herts and Essex and St Margaret's, it provides outpatient and diagnostic services.

The Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust runs the minor injuries unit at the Herts and Essex and its rehabilitation unit.

Source & Image Credit: [Bishop's Stortford](#)

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