

Hospital set to be one of capital's tallest buildings

Justine McCarthy

THE new €750m national children's hospital will be one of Dublin's tallest buildings if planners approve the design.

At 16 storeys, the facility, to be developed on the Mater hospital site, will rival the city's Liberty Hall building.

The plans for the 100,000 sqm hospital include grassed play areas on the roof, to be known as "healing gardens".

There will be no wards, just single-room accommodation. Each of the 380 to 395 bedrooms will have a shower, an additional pull-out bed, and three lavatories and basins for separate use by the sick child, the parent and the clinician.

There will be underground parking for more than 800 vehicles, and seven operating theatres, spread between the national hospital and an 10,000 sqm care centre at Tallaght hospital. A maternity hospital is also being built on the campus.

Eilis Hardiman, the chief executive of the National Paediatric hospital (NPH), said a final decision has to be made on height. "We'll be in a position by mid-April to say how high it will be. We're working in the range of 16 floors," she said.

A planning application to begin excavation work will be made in April. The hospital is on schedule to meet the revised 2014 deadline for receiving patients. Three hospitals — Our

Lady's in Crumlin, Temple Street, and Tallaght — will transfer to the new one, originally due to open by 2012.

So far, €17.5m has been spent on the pre-planning stage. This is three times more than in March 2009 when Mary Harney, the health minister, told the Dail the total was €5.3m.

The NPH's nine-member development board intends submitting a planning application to Dublin city council in May for the building. "I think the height is within the zoning for the region. It has to be right for its purpose," said Philip Lynch, the board's chairman.

"The children's hospital in Chicago is 40 storeys high and works well."

Comment:

There is no 40 storey children's hospital in Chicago. There will be a 23 storey one - the new Children's Memorial Hospital, one of several children's hospitals in Chicago. At 23 storeys, it will be the tallest children's hospital in the world.

It is scheduled to open mid 2012. It is obvious that an opinion on whether "it works well" must at least await its opening in two years time. Of serious concern is that the Chairman of the Board of such a hugely expensive (€750 million) project praises as a suitable model a hospital still under construction and in a city very different from Dublin. This misinformation must add to the persistent widespread public anxiety about the location of the NPH.