

Health care facilities could be sought from housing developers under new planning rules

Funding to help provide new health care facilities could be sought from housing developers under new planning rules.

The change could break the deadlock facing communities across Scotland where thousands of people have trouble seeing a GP or accessing primary health care.

While there's a national shortage of GPs, the main problem facing towns and villages in West Lothian is cramped and crumbling surgeries and health centres.

West Lothian Council's Economy, Community Empowerment and Wealth Building PDSP heard that planning officers are in early discussions with counterparts in NHS Lothian looking at ways to take new policies forward.

A council spokesman confirmed that the council has no powers to seek developer funding but could have under a new local development plan as part of the new national planning framework – known as NPF4.

The spokesman told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "As part of the preparation of the next Local Development Plan, the council is examining the potential for seeking contributions from developers towards healthcare

infrastructure, primarily primary care infrastructure.

“The council continues to work with NHS Lothian to demonstrate a robust evidence base to secure developer funding for primary care infrastructure investment. Currently there is no mechanism to allow the council to seek developer contributions for health services.”

Such contributions could come on top of the existing Section 75 contributions which pay for education facilities and roads infrastructure on the back of new housing development. A recent example is a £9m extension to West Calder High School which is being paid for by developer funding.

A report to the PDSP said: “National Planning Framework 4 (NPF 4), requires planning authorities to address the following matters relating to health: Tackling health inequalities, particularly in places which are experiencing the most disadvantage; Identify the health and social care services and infrastructure needed in the local authority area; and create healthier places.”

One councillor had already suggested seeking developer funding to solve the problem at East Calder, which has seen a 20 year campaign for an improved health care centre.

The problem there has been exacerbated in the village because of the huge Core Development Area housing site at Calderwood which will double the size of the village.

The building was built in the 1970s to support 5,000 patients. The current patient list is almost 15,000 and the forecast is that the numbers will grow by a further 5,000 by 2028.

At a recent meeting of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) which oversees primary and social care joint operations between NHS Lothian and West Lothian Council, cross party councillors and voting members backed a letter to the Scottish Government ministers calling for action.

East Calder Conservative Damina Doran-Timson added a suggestion that the IJB consult with West Lothian Council on whether Section 75 funding from developers could go towards improving health facilities in East Calder.

The IJB wrote to ministers protesting that spending on NHS capital projects have been stalled for at least two years. There are also problems with practices struggling with growing patient numbers in growth areas around Livingston, Bathgate, Armadale and Blackridge.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter