

# ... a tissue of lies and deception

[John Lister](#), adapted from [The Lowdown](#)

Leaders of [two professional bodies](#) seeking to uphold standards in public relations have criticised the convoluted “Playbook” from comms chiefs in the DHSC’s New Hospital Programme, which insists new wings and refurbishments of existing buildings had to be [described as “new hospitals”](#).

**I**n deed the [Playbook](#) completely rewrites the history of the commitment to “48 new hospitals” and constructs a tissue of lies and deception: why the desperation?

The answer lies in the crisis of the prioritised six, and more recently eight “pathfinder schemes,” (Whipps Cross, Epsom & St Helier, West Herts, Princess Alexandra, Leicester, Leeds, and later Hillingdon and North Manchester) which are at a standstill or going backwards, with costs soaring and plans having to be revised.

Boris Johnson made building 40 new hospitals a prominent [election pledge](#). The list was only [inflated to 40](#) by lumping in two PFI-funded hospitals in Liverpool and Birmingham (still unfinished after the [collapse of Carillion](#)) along with other projects that were already “in build,” like the Carlisle cancer centre, plus a dozen tiny community hospitals in Dorset – and relabelling new units as ‘hospitals’.

Only [six of the promised ‘40](#) new hospitals by 2030’ were allocated immediate funding. The rest got only token “[seed funding](#)” to work up projects that could not go ahead until at least 2025.

The increase from 40 to 48 projects [came last October](#) with the announcement of a [vague ‘competition’](#) for “8 further hospitals including new Mental Health Hospitals,” with results [next spring](#).

The six pathfinders were promised [a share of £2.8bn](#). The most advanced, [Epsom](#) and [Leicester](#), pressed ahead with consultations and “Decision Making Business Cases”.

*But the pool of cash was not increased when the two additional pathfinders were added – and all the plans have had to be revised in the light of Covid and new policy guidance.*

In early July the leader of the New Hospital Programme, Natalie Forrest, admitted to a conference that the ‘[brakes had come on](#)’ for some of the pathfinder projects, most notably Princess Alexandra, and that several were unlikely to start before 2023-24. The concerns were said to focus on the capacity of the construction industry – but the unwillingness of the Treasury to finance the schemes is the key factor.

Three weeks later the New Hospital Programme team wrote to all eight “pathfinder” trusts calling for them to [draw up cheaper plans](#), and submit three sets of plans for evaluation – an option costing no more than £400m; their preferred scheme, and options to build the project in phases.

Phasing the building programmes, as happened in the 1970s, would threaten years of disruption and run the risk of the full scheme not being completed at all.

All of the five schemes that have published estimated costs are over £400m. Indeed [Epsom & St Helier](#) and [University Hospitals Leicester](#) had already admitted that their allocated funding would not be sufficient to complete the plans on which they consulted the public – and hoped more funding would avoid cutting back their schemes.

So behind the Playbook spin **NO new hospitals are yet being built**, and plans are being hacked back – while older hospitals not prioritised for funding, like [QEH Kings Lynn](#), [James Paget](#) and Hinchingbrooke are actually falling down.