

HOPE: CAMPAIGNERS WELCOME MORE TIME ON SITE'S FUTURE

# Decision on hospital's future facing a delay

BY MIKE ROBERTS

**Campaigners bidding to buy Melton War Memorial Hospital hope they are in with a chance after a decision on the site's future was put back for at least a month.**

Health chiefs were expected to choose a preferred bidder for the 15-acre site on Thursday, but now say a decision is not expected until the end of June.

Campaigners aiming to buy back the site for the community say it will give them more time to lobby for support.

Melton, Rutland and Harborough Primary Care Trust (PCT) has revealed 13 site bidders have been whittled down to a five-strong shortlist.

Representatives from the five organisations and companies met health officials in March to present their cases.

All five were assessed by a trust evaluation panel and two have scored more highly than the others.

Officials will not divulge any more details because of commercial confidentiality.

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Melton First action group is bidding to transform the site into a £10 million regional arts centre and says it hopes the group is still in with a chance.

Campaigners say they do not want the site sold to a developer and turned into an exclusive luxury housing estate.

A new £9 million hospital is being built in Thorpe Road, which will replace services at the War Memorial, in Ankle Hill.

Louise Proctor, Trust director of primary care and community services, said: "I think we would all like to have completed the process, but it has to be done properly and given the amount of time that is needed, for it to be done well."

She said the trust needed to have more detailed discussions with at least one of the bidders.

All five bids will be presented to a board meeting on Thursday during a confidential session.

The board is expected to agree to further discussions, but no decision will be made until the time of the meeting.

Melton First chairman John Southerington, said the fight would continue.

He said: "We are naturally sad that we will not be finding out this week but it does give Melton First more time to present an improved case."

Melton First wants to transform the War Memorial into a regional arts centre with studios, workshops and conference facilities.