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## Belfast Telegraph

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# Campaigners call for new 'rural' status for SWAH as they launch road map for healthcare

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Liam Tunney

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A campaign group has called on the Department to categorise the SWAH in Enniskillen as a 'Rural Area Hospital' during its reconfiguration of the hospital network

A Co Fermanagh hospital should be re-categorised as a rural hospital and be provided with special measures to encourage staff to come and work in the area, local healthcare campaigners have said.

The suggestions are included in a comprehensive discussion paper produced by Save Our Acute Services (SOAS), which campaigns to retain acute services at the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) in Enniskillen.

Emergency general surgery at the site has been under temporary suspension since December 2022, while patient pathways put in place by the Western Trust and Department of Health (DoH) following the decision [are currently subject to an RQIA review](#).

SOAS launched its 19-page discussion paper during a public meeting at Fermanagh House in Enniskillen on Monday night.

Among its proposals is the suggestion that SWAH should be afforded status as a designated “Rural Area Hospital” under the Department’s reconfiguration plans.

Under DoH’s current proposals, SWAH will be designated as a “General Hospital”.

The group said the Co Fermanagh site would fit criteria used by NHS England to provide financial support to rural hospitals under a process known as the “unavoidable costs of remoteness”.

"It needs to be acknowledged that the exceptional geography that attaches to SWAH merits specific accommodation within the proposed Hospitals Network framework," said the document.

"This should include hospital categorisation, services to be provided and funding availability.

“The location of Altnagelvin on the northern periphery of the Trust means that it is unable to safely and efficiently deliver the required full range of services to the South West region.

"Consideration must be given to providing a range of essential secondary care services to SWAH that cannot be guaranteed with the definition of a General Hospital."

The discussion paper also said incentives should be introduced to entice surgical staff to SWAH, and suggests the hospital is well-placed to contribute to north-south healthcare links.

"A key consideration in the development of SWAH was the potential to treat patients from the central border area," said the document.

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"North-South presents a valuable opportunity which has the potential to both increase elective patient volume through SWAH while enabling appropriate access to emergency services in SWAH for adjacent border areas in the Republic of Ireland."



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The discussion paper will be submitted as part of the group's response to the consultation on the reconfiguration of the hospital network in NI.

A series of public events are being held during the consultation period, with one in-person event scheduled for each trust, with the Western Trust's event to take place in Omagh.

An online event will also take place on Tuesday, February 11.

The Department of Health said it welcomed all responses to its consultation on the hospital reconfiguration framework.

"This document — "Hospitals — Creating a Network for Better Outcomes" — sets out key principles to underpin service reorganisation, with each of our hospitals fitting into a network in which each plays a key part," said a spokesperson.

"For the whole HSC to work effectively we must build on the capacity and ability across all hospital sites to deliver.

"This means we need all hospital space, but that not everything can be done everywhere."