

# Construction specialist Merit appointed to £66m pioneering pharma facility

A Cramlington construction pioneer has been appointed to a £66m project to create a facility driving forward next generation cancer treatments.

Offsite construction firm Merit, a former North East Company of the Year, has been appointed as the main contractor for the construction of the UK's first CAR-T cell manufacturing facility in Stevenage.

Autolus Therapeutics, a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company, will expand its current capabilities in the new 76,000sqft facility in the Hertfordshire town, where it will develop CAR T-cell therapies for cancer treatment.

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The therapies help to re-programme patients' immune systems so they can more easily recognise cancer cells. Once finished, the facility is expected to process 2,000 treatments a year.

Merit has been working with Autolus and the developer, Reef Group, to design the new facility for the last five months.

During the pre-construction phase, Merit developed the layout to maximize offsite manufacturing and to suit its unique building platform.

The design will utilise the Merit Flexi Pod and Pre-Assembled Modules (PAM) standard platform approach with 300 modules manufactured at Merit's 270,000sqft factory in Northumberland before being shipped to Stevenage to be installed by Merit's specialist teams.

Merit's offsite construction approach means three-quarters of the construction work takes place offsite in Northumberland, reducing carbon emissions as well as significantly speeding up the process by shortening the construction programme by two years, compared to traditional building methods.

The building itself will feature several carbon-reducing solutions, including heat source pumps and heat recovery systems.

Once built, the facility will become part of the cell and gene therapy cluster in Stevenage, which is the third largest in the world and is known as the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst.

The contract is the latest in a raft of recent appointments for Merit, which has been awarded a number of large-scale projects in the healthcare and life sciences sector, including the expansion of the rapid response facility in Darlington for CPI, as well as a lateral flow manufacturing site for Abingdon Health in York.

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