

Present: Councillors;

Anne Fleming (Chair) David Thomas (Vice Chair), Peter Dutton, Rosemary Lewis, Sandra Leverett, David Wollweber.

In Attendance: Nick Rees (Clerk), Therese Coffey MP, Peter Aldous MP

Members of the Public: A register was kept on the door, manned by Mr M Fleming, 43 members of the public attended the meeting.

The Chair, Anne Fleming, welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that most of the meeting would be concentrating on the threatened closure of the Rayner Green Resource Centre and the Patrick Stead Hospital.

Dr Abbott revealed some further bad news, as well as closing inpatient beds at the Patrick Stead Hospital, they were also trying to close the whole building. The voluntary section had nowhere to go. The CCG was apparently unaware of this development. The whole hospital will be shut from the 1st October. The inpatient beds were for people who were too sick to stay at home but were inappropriate for a District and General hospital, these patients would have to be moved. The problem was that Beccles was temporarily closed, there were no beds in Lowestoft and only 6 beds at All Hallows, Ditchingham.

Secondly, Halesworth was supposed to have had 'Out of Hospital teams however, this would not be made available until the new care home facilities were operational, which was not until 2018. Since the consultation, GPs have not been allowed proper access to the PSH, most of the beds have been taken up by patients from Lowestoft and Beccles and GPs have been left with no alternative but to refer patients to the District and General hospitals. Security issues had been used as the reason for closing the whole of the PS hospital. Dr Abbott was very upset that there had been no notice or discussion. There would have been various options to move some departments such as phlebotomy if the GPs had been consulted.

Dr Abbott was hopeful that the various voluntary groups could be accommodated in some way but as the news had only just broken there had not been time to look at all the options.

Paddy Cox, President of the Dementia Carers Fund, read out extracts from his letter to Mr Andy Evans of the CCG. This letter highlighted that the RGRC was an irreplaceable asset to Halesworth and surrounding district in terms of its value to patients and equally, the relief it affords carers of people suffering from dementia and multiple sclerosis. If the Centre was closed the decision would be at odds with the aims of the 'patient care in the community' proposed in the CCG's consultation document released 15 months previously.

The Chair drew attention to the CCG's AGM which was planned for the 29th September at the Common Lane North office, Beccles and suggested residents may wish to attend and make their feelings known.

Dr Abbott confirmed that the staff had been told last Monday and that the GP's only knew last Tuesday. However, there always seemed to be a degree of secrecy when dealing with the ECCH.

Dr Kell considered that it was not important exactly when the news became common knowledge but it was important to try and find solutions. The CCG needed to be reminded that they were not meeting their commitments made last year. Dr Kell also noted that the NHS's 5 year plan stated that one of the priorities was about managing people closer to home and giving the community more voice. Apparently, there was also a legal requirement to consult the local community but it didn't appear that this was the case for Halesworth. Dr Kell mirrored what had been said earlier about the RGRC and how it was such an important asset not only to Halesworth but also to other market towns and surrounding villages in the area.

Therese Coffey MP, who had made a special effort to get to the meeting, advised that she had not had any further information in the last 48 hours after speaking to Jonathan Williams (Chief Executive for East Coast Community Healthcare) and so was not aware of the concerns regarding the Rayner Green Resource Centre. Apparently Mr Williams had advised that the Southwold model was working well. This was no consolation for Halesworth residents and Therese Coffey MP understood that people had been left down, pledges had been made and not carried through.

Peter Aldous MP, who had just arrived straight from another meeting, explained that Halesworth, the Patrick Stead Hospital and Rayner Green Resource Centre were all actually in Therese Coffey MP's constituency. However he held a clear interest as the PSH and RGSC served many residents in his own Waveney constituency. Mr Aldous's understanding was that the hospital would not close until the new facilities were up and running. It was therefore disappointing that this had happened and as Chairman of the Parliamentary Group, Care for Older People, he would be interested in hearing how the Castle Meadow scheme was progressing. It did appear that similar schemes, Kessingland for example, were taking a long time to get out of the ground. As for Rayner Green, Peter Aldous MP, said this was an example of charitable groups working hand in hand with the National Health Service and this approach should be encouraged nationally. Peter Aldous MP said he would be happy to work together with Therese Coffey MP to scrutinise any decision to close it.

Cllr Thomas reported that there were still some technical issues between the Halesworth Playing Fields Association and Campus Ltd but they had just had a very encouraging meeting earlier and he hoped that everything should now move forward once the Charities Commission gave their permission.

Therese Coffey MP reported that she had understood from the ECCH that they had experienced problem obtaining staff despite offering incentives, bonuses and guarantees. Therese Coffey MP said that she would welcome contact from staff at the Patrick Stead, which would be treated confidentially, to try and get another view point.

Several residents expressed disbelief that security issues, which would seem to be a simple problem to solve, was the reason given to close the hospital.

The Chair thanked both MPs for taking the time to come to the meeting, the remaining part would be an update on Council business.

The Chair reported that the Barrow Crossing had been given a reprieve but this was all very dependent on how the public used the crossing. If Network Rail saw further 'incidents', presumably irresponsible behaviour, crossing behind trains, cycling along the platform and cycling over the barrow crossing for example, this would give them the necessary excuse to close it permanently. The Chair would shortly be meeting a representative from Network Rail to discuss the Council distributing safety information and the definition of what may be regarded as an 'incident'.

The Chair congratulated Halesworth in Bloom for another Gold award in the small town category. This was now three in a row which was an amazing achievement.

The Chair reported that the Council was nearing completion of a business plan for acquiring the London Rd building. It was hoped that that an offer could be made to Waveney District Council but some indication of what figure would be acceptable to them was needed to complete the plan.

The Chair reported that this year the Council had entered the town for the Great British High Street awards. This was very much a last minute application and so there were not high hopes of success but it was useful exercise to get feedback for a more determined effort next year

There followed some debate over the free parking in the Thoroughfare car park. The Chair explained that the Council would, in cooperation with Halesworth businesses, local parish councils and our County Councillor, Tony Goldson, would hope to meet the cost of £17,000 to retain the free parking for April 2017 – March 2018. The Council had already met the costs for the rest of this year but it was concerning that the figures from WDC for each following year were substantially more each time. There would be point where the Council would need to consider putting some of the cost on to the Precept. This would mean that all Council Tax paying residents were contributing to the free parking. This was a decision that would need to be based on obtaining public consultation first. It seemed that most of those present at the meeting tonight would accept this cost (roughly a £1 per month based on £17,000) but the Chair was aware that other residents may have a different view.

A resident asked about two sites that looked like they were being developed, one in Fairfield Road and one in Old Station Rd. The Chair of the Planning Committee, Cllr Peter Dutton explained that the sites mentioned were in fact old applications and work was now just starting. Cllr Dutton explained that there were other sites earmarked in the town for 'possible' development but no applications for these areas had been submitted at this stage.

The Chair thanked everyone for coming. The date of the next Forum meeting had not been confirmed but it would be in January 2017. Some thought would be given to the best night to hold these meetings as there were other events taking place. Although this meeting had been advertised for about 6 months, there always seemed to be something else on at the same time.

The meeting was closed at 8.48pm