

Townlands Steering Group (TSG) Report for Bix & Assendon Parish Council Meeting of 2 July 2018

Background

For a number of years now I have been the Parish Council delegate on the TSG, a body set up by Henley Town Council as a local interest pressure group to promote the interests of residents in the catchment for Townlands Community Hospital. Over its time it has been a significant player in stopping earlier threats to close the hospital and latterly in getting it re-developed with a new facility.

Since the new hospital opened, TSG's role has changed to monitoring and promoting the development of the new hospital and continuing to protecting the interests of the residents within its catchment with regard to matters related to its site & services. As the NHS nationwide and in Oxfordshire in particular seeks to move care away from acute hospitals wherever possible and to integrate health provision more closely with social care to deliver better services overall to the patient, this is generating new health delivery models, and TSG also seeks to help monitor their successful delivery for our small area.

Current position

The TSG itself has not met for quite a while but it continues to be active via its small steering group (of which I am a member), and via its representation (Ian Reissmann, its Chair, myself, and ex officio the Mayor of Henley) on the Townlands Stakeholder Reference Group, an official stakeholder monitoring group set up by the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG), who are responsible for the delivery of NHS services within the County. Community representatives use this as a vehicle for pushing for regular information (both written/numerical report formats and attendance by key Health Care system representatives) to support our monitoring function, and in this we seem to be getting there, with reasonable co-operation from the various parts of the Health Care system involved. There are also other local representative e.g. from local Surgery Patient panels involved.

TSRG latest meeting was on 26th June.

The new Townlands facilities in general are working well.

The Minor Injuries unit continues to provide a welcome and similar service to that before but from better facilities and with high patient satisfaction ratings.

The NHS specialist clinics run under the auspices of the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) and via their Consultants for the various specialities have significantly extended the number of clinics as well the range of clinics provided by comparison with the old hospital, again from much improved facilities. Measured patient satisfaction rates for the clinics are high. RBH has also recently commenced a study to see how much more clinic and diagnostic activity they can devolve to units outside the main Royal Berks Hospital site and TSRG is pressing (to some degree on an open door) that Townlands may benefit from this in terms of more clinics, thus bringing more NHS services closer to the patient. Whether the currently empty top floor of the hospital can contribute to this expansion is also a topic we are raising, as well as the alternative (actually the original plan before they pulled out) of Sue Ryder moving their bedded Palliative Care unit in there.

The League of Friends of Townlands Community Hospital, a long standing local charity set up to support the Community Hospital with funds for equipment, support for patients and similar (which I have recently joined as a Trustee) has just agreed, in conjunction with Dr. Chan, Consultant Rheumatologist & Deputy Medical Director of RBH, to fund a new ultra-sonic scanner for the Townlands RBH Clinics. This will be a multi-disciplinary piece of equipment, to support scanning needs for the Townlands clinics of a number of different medical specialities.

The new Rapid Access Care unit which was set up in the new hospital appears to be building activity very successfully and is also delivering very high patient satisfaction ratings. It is a pioneering part of the new NHS strategy of trying to keep more patients out of acute hospitals, being treated nearer their homes, a policy which is believed to deliver much better patient care and outcomes, while relieving pressure on overcrowded acute hospital beds. Reference to this is principally via a GP, on a next (or occasionally same day) basis and it deals mainly with older patients with serious longer term or acute conditions, by delivering fast specialist treatment, with the support where needed of short stay bedded care in the small NHS run bedded unit within the new Chiltern Court Care Home on the site. This bedded unit also provides a small number of "step down" beds for patients medically capable of being discharged from acute hospitals but still needing a spell of bedded care which cannot be provided at that time in their home environment.

TSRG representatives have sought to be provided with regular reporting information on utilisation and demand for the NHS bedded unit in the Care home to ensure that the smaller number provided by comparison with the old Townlands is proving sufficient, and if not to push for appropriate action. So far information supplied seems to confirm this is satisfactory, but we still have a few queries outstanding to be sure.

The Care Quality Commissioners (official inspection organisation of Care Homes) produced a fairly negative report on the Chiltern Court Care Home last year and we have been endeavouring to see that the concerns are being/have been addressed. They have just published their latest report from a recent re-inspection and most of the concerns seem to have been addressed. We are pushing for the remaining ones to be dealt with fully.

While the Sue Ryder Palliative care facility at Nettlebed does not lie directly within the terms of reference of the TSRG, we are aware that local concerns as to the future of the bedded unit at Nettlebed following announcements by the charity are high. It has been agreed that Henley Town Council will endeavour to set up a public meeting with Sue Ryder and Oxfordshire clinical Commissioning group representation to endeavour to clarify intentions and alternatives for the public.

Finally, no-one who reads the local press can be unaware of the issue of apparently inappropriate parking penalty tickets being issued and pursued through all available means, to patients, carers, and other legitimate visitors to Townlands. TSRG is actively involved in pushing OCCG for a solution to this serious issue and we are currently endeavouring to set up an urgent meeting with NHS Property (who commission the current parking operators) to seek a resolution.

Robert Aitken
26 June 2018