

49 Hallgate Lane
Pilsley
Chesterfield
Derbys
S45 8HN
22nd July 2019

Dear Ms Cater,

Proposed Closure of Pilsley Surgery

I am the Chairman of Pilsley Parish Council and having spoken to many residents over the past few weeks, I would like to register my strong objections to the proposed closure of Pilsley surgery.

I would be obliged if you could present my letter to your colleagues at Staffa Health and then forward it to NHS England and the Derby and Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

Before I proceed with my objections I would like to mention the following facts:

In June Staffa Health closed Pilsley surgery on Fridays giving residents no right of appeal. Residents were extremely concerned at this decision, given that the surgery's opening hours were already less than those of the other three surgeries.

Your letter notifying patients of the proposed permanent closure of the surgery contained only one questionnaire, whereas many households consist of several people of differing circumstances. The fact that you have not encouraged households to obtain further questionnaires has led residents to the conclusion that you are trying to minimise responses to your proposals.

We have learned that Dr Ruth Cooper sits on the Clinical Commissioning Group one of the bodies which will make the final decision on your proposals. This leads residents to take the view that their objections will not be fairly considered. They are also appalled that the papers that you have sent out to them make no reference to Dr Cooper's position.

At present you appear to have a system where appointments can be made on line. We have heard that Pilsley surgery has been removed from this system, again, leading residents to take the view that the consultation procedure is a farce and that closure is "a done deal".

Your "Frequently Asked Questions" paper contains misleading information on the distances to your surgeries.

You state that Pilsley has the fewest registered patients of the four surgeries, but you give no statistics. Has this been done on purpose?

Here are my objections to the closure proposals. You will note that in some of my comments I have used the headings referred to in your letter to patients and your “Frequently Asked Questions” paper.

Difficulty in Recruiting General Practitioners

Most people in Pilsley accept that you are having difficulty in recruiting General Practitioners but their reaction to this is why single out Pilsley for closure? To them a far simpler answer would be to reduce the opening hours of each of the four surgeries particularly as Tibshelf already opens for more than five days per week.

In addition, I understand that the Government has recently pledged to increase NHS funding by over £20 billion per annum. I assume that this will include additional funding for the training of General Practitioners which may result in the present shortfall being met in future years. If Pilsley surgery was to close down then any increase in General Practitioners would be too late for us.

Well-being of Patients

In your letter to patients you state that you are primarily concerned with their well-being. Your proposed closure proposals are completely at odds with this statement as closure will be most detrimental to the most unfortunate members of our community.

Why is the Change Being Proposed?

In this section of your letter to patients you state that

- you hope to continue to provide a quality service
- the reasons for the proposed closure are compelling
- reducing the number of surgeries will enable you to continue to retain the level of quality which patients have come to expect

These statements are totally vague and contain absolutely no substance and data to support them.

What This May Mean for Patients?

Your letter to patients indicates that in the event of the closure of Pilsley surgery, patients can be transferred to one of the other three sites. It does not, however, indicate how the surgeries would be able to accommodate the additional demand.

Transfer of Patients

Your letter states that if patients do not wish to transfer to one of your other sites, you will support and offer advice to them on how to register with another practice. I would point out that there is absolutely no guarantee that they will be accepted.

Fewer Sites

In the paper “Frequently Asked Questions” you state that you believe that by bringing services together on fewer sites will enable you to continue to deliver high quality care to your patients. Again this is a totally vague statement giving no detailed information to back it up together with the fact that your proposals are totally contrary to this concept.

Condition of Pilsley Surgery

You state that Pilsley surgery “requires an additional degree of repair and maintenance “but again you do not demonstrate how or why this is the case and once again no facts or figures are provided. Your claim that the access to the building is not easy for your disabled patients is not only incorrect but is totally rejected by everyone to whom I have spoken. It is most ironic that you appear to be championing disabled people when your proposed actions will, in fact, have a totally opposite effect on them.

Transport

According to official data 19% of households in Pilsley do not have a car. The closure proposals will therefore have a devastating effect on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community and if approved will have a most adverse effect on their quality of life. Surely Staffa Health should be focusing on helping such people rather than treating them in such a shabby way.

Queuing for a bus, particularly in adverse weather conditions, could badly affect the health of elderly, disabled, frail, ill people or pregnant women, ie those who may be most in need of a doctor. Rather than helping them as a doctor's surgery is supposed to do, it could well have the opposite effect. Is it fair to ask elderly, disabled, frail, ill people or pregnant women to have to wait at the roadside for buses which may or may not arrive on time?

Holmewood surgery will be completely inaccessible for these people as they would have to walk about one mile from the Williamthorpe roundabout to the surgery and back. They will therefore have only two surgery options.

After their appointments these people may well have to wait for up to one hour for their bus back to Pilsley. Again, this could have a serious effect on their health.

Can Staffa Health guarantee to offer appointment times which will coincide with the arrival of buses? This is most unlikely but even if they could there might still be a long wait for the patients' return journey.

Buses to Stonebroom and Tibshelf are operated by Stagecoach which is renowned for reducing or closing those services which do not yield the required profit. There is no guarantee that the current (and infrequent) services will continue. There is also evidence of bus breakdowns on the Stonebroom and Tibshelf routes. Apparently Stagecoach use their oldest buses on these routes which contain very little space for wheelchairs thus creating the possibility of a wheelchair user being left behind.

Bus fares for people not in receipt of concessionary travel are high and an appointment at Stonebroom or Tibshelf could cost up to £9.

Taxi fares are even higher, around £10 each way. Is it fair to subject people who are in need of medical care, to these costs? In any case most taxi firms rely for their profits on undertaking school runs so they may not even be available on mornings and afternoons.

A number of people in Pilsley act as carers to elderly/disabled/frail people. If they have to take public transport to a medical appointment they could well be away for several hours, possibly leaving their dependants without care.

The difficulties in getting to appointments at Stonebroom or Tibshelf for people without their own transport might well have the effect of them deciding not to make an appointment even if they are in need of one. This might lead to their health deteriorating to such an extent that they have to call out a doctor. This would not be at all cost effective particularly if the closure proposals are, as many people believe, merely a cost cutting measure.

Children having to travel, with their parents, by public transport to medical appointments could well lose up to half a day's schooling.

Whilst those people who have their own transport would be less affected by the closure proposals than those who do not, a number of current drivers have expressed to me their fear that as they grow older they may be forced to give up driving and therefore have to rely on public transport to get to medical appointments. Some of those to whom I have spoken are genuinely worried about what the future may hold for them.

How would it Help Staffa Health by Closing the Pilsley Surgery?

This section is completely vague, gives no detailed information whatsoever and is totally lacking in substance and belief. The part about a more supportive, less stressful and less isolated environment improving recruitment and retention is quite simply rubbish and a great insult to the intelligence of Pilsley people.

Car Parking at the Other Surgeries

The statement that “we are hoping to build an extension at Tibshelf Surgery and we are working with the local authorities to expand the car park there” is once again completely vague and unsupported. It does not indicate whether land will be available for such purposes and if so, what the chances of obtaining it are.

The expansion plans if indeed, they are genuine and realistic, will obviously cost a great deal of expenditure which would be unnecessary if the Pilsley surgery was to be retained.

The plans make no reference to Stonebroom where car parking is extremely difficult at present whereas the Pilsley surgery, in addition to having a reasonable amount of parking space on site, also has a relatively large public car park very close by.

Proactive Things Which the Practice Has Done to Date to Address the Situation

The practical measures taken by Staffa Health are most welcome but when they have made such improvements why should they then close Pilsley surgery? How will the closure of Pilsley further improve the measures which have already been taken?

Proposed New Developments in Pilsley

In the past few years planning consent has been granted for more than 260 new dwellings in Pilsley. If Pilsley surgery was to close how would the occupants of these properties be provided with health care facilities?

General Comment

The explanations given by Staffa Health for its proposed action do not, in any way, demonstrate what the benefits will be, either to Staffa or to its patients. From this residents can only assume that Staffa's decision has been taken on financial grounds, ie that it is merely a cost cutting exercise.

Possible Closure of Pharmacy

Residents are extremely concerned about the effects which the closure of Pilsley surgery might have on the Well Pharmacy.

It is assumed that most patients obtaining prescriptions from the other surgeries will use the Pharmacies there rather than travelling back to Pilsley for this purpose. The Well Pharmacy is a commercial concern and it is considered that if business was to be reduced the owners would close it.

In the event of its closure the general goods and services which it provides to the Village will obviously be missed by residents but far more importantly the closure will result in residents having to collect their repeat prescriptions from other pharmacies and whilst it may not be too inconvenient for car owners, it will be potentially devastating, not to say expensive, for people having to take public transport.

Conclusion

National data indicates that Pilsley as a community suffers a significant degree of stress and deprivation.

The percentage of residents over 65 years of age and the percentage of pensioner households is higher than the England average and over one-third of the residents are ranked in the eighth decile (High Health Deprivation) on the Index of Deprivation Health Domain. In view of this the closure of Pilsley surgery would be a body blow to the Village and surely poses the question should frontline medical support and services be withdrawn from a community such as ours?

Pilsley hopes that NHS England and the Derby and Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group will accept that we are a community which very much needs and relies on a medical surgery and that after due consideration they will decide not to approve Staffa Health's proposals.

Should our pleas be not accepted we hope very much that before any closure might occur Staffa Health will do its utmost to pursue the possibility of another Practice taking over the running of Pilsley surgery.

It is understood that similar takeovers have occurred in neighbouring parishes and it is disappointing to note that this possibility has not been mentioned in the papers which Staffa Health have produced and sent to patients.

Should either NHS England or the Clinical Commissioning Group require any further information from me, I will be happy to provide it.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Stevenson
Chairman Pilsley Parish Council

Ms R. Cater
Practice Manager
Staffa Health
Tibshelf
Derbyshire DE55 5PS