

## **Future of the Friarage: Briefing notes**

### **What's happening?**

A public engagement is underway with the people of Hambleton & Richmondshire into the future of the Friarage hospital Northallerton.

The expectation is that this is a precursor to a formal consultation which will lead to changes being made to the services offered from the Northallerton site.

This whole thing is being driven by the South Tees Hospital Trust (who run the hospital (as well as running James Cook in Middlesbrough and the Richmond Friary among others) and the Hambleton, Richmondshire & Whitby CCG (who are our local branch of the NHS charged with commissioning our healthcare services on behalf of the local population).

Between now and the end of 2017 they plan to gather opinion from the local population on what services we want to run from Northallerton Friarage Hospital in the future.

### **What's up for debate?**

Under the spotlight in this review are the A&E and the Acute Care services that run from the Friarage site.

The underlying issue is that there is a serious lack of junior doctors across the country. This is particularly severe in our area (which, when it comes to training is run by NHS Health Education North East, based out of Newcastle).

The shortfall in junior doctors is keenly felt at the Friarage where, unlike James Cook Hospital, has lost its status as a training hospital. This means 28-40yr old doctors who are the backbone of all hospitals are not area taking up posts in Northallerton. Without them, many services can no survive. (Ironically the training status been withdrawn from here and many other smaller hospitals around the country as the number of patients was considered to be too low, so it took too long for trainees to get the amount of experience required to develop at the required pace).

Most critically for the Friarage, is a lack of anaesthetists. If critical services such as A& E and acute care operation are to continue, the Friarage needs to recruit 6-7 'junior doctor level' anaesthetists asap.

If these posts are not filled then A&E and all operations which potentially require an overnight stay will be cut from the hospital. Instead it will revert to a day clinic with easy and profitable (knee and hip ops) plus 9-5pm treatments for cancer. We predict the wards will be repurposed for rehabilitation and end of life care. Basically, the Friarage ceases to be a functioning general hospital and turns in to a cross between a old style cottage hospital and a day clinic.

By the way, this pattern of A&E and Acute Care services being cut because of a lack of Junior Doctors is happening all around the country Especially at smaller, rural hospitals like ours. While Jeremy Hunt admitted (in the Guardian) the workplace panning in the NHS over the last few years has been 'woeful' he has yet to suggest an immediate solution,

### **Where are all the Junior Doctors/Anaesthetists?**

In short, they are in Canada or Australia. The combination of crap contracts, long hours, poor wages and the burden of student fees has driven many junior doctors to find work overseas.

Added to this, EU-born NHS workers no longer feel as welcome, face uncertain futures and are put off by the weakening exchange rates.

Visa restrictions mean it is increasingly hard to fill posts from beyond the EU. And again, salaries are often higher overseas than they are in the UK.

In short, we are training talent in the UK then they leave (to escape Jeremy Hunt, a life of stress and crap wages) and non-British trained doctors are no longer coming here in sufficient quantities to replace them.

Admittance rates are down and have been for several years, so this issue has been being for a while. As older doctors leave, not enough new ones come through and the crisis has now hit.

It's hitting our region first as bigger regions and cities shout louder than we do here in our area and in our rural hospital. So, we are among the first wave of hospitals hitting this issue (with many more following behind us).

### **What is really going on?**

While the lack of junior doctors is a big issue, is it really what's driving things? We are not sure. It seems hard to fathom that a lack of 6 junior doctors would be enough reason to cut acute care services for a population for 144'000 people.

Our hunch is that the South Tees Trust and/or CCG are driven by a need to save money. We know that while Jeremy Hunt is pretending to be investing more in the NHS, in fact he has demanded the trusts deliver a 2-3% cost saving each year between now and 2021.

We also know that our local CCG is about to announce an end of year loss of £8m for 2016/7. So they are cash strapped. Same goes for the South Tees Hospital Trust.

Hence our hunch that the future imagined for the Friarage is as a cash cow for the Trusts, churning out lucrative, fast turnaround knee and hip ops and as a parking lot for dying and recovering patients who no longer justify being under the wing of senior consultants.

## **Why we think this is dangerous**

- Any changes made will be hard to reverse as we'll lose both staff and hospital status.
- Travel times for the local population would be massively increased, putting patients at risk in an emergency and inconveniencing both patients and their families.
- James Cook Hospital is already running over capacity – both in terms of waiting time times at A&E, for an inpatient bed and in operating theatres.
- Our population is set to grow. Demand from both the growth of Catterick Garrison and the wider population is on the up. We need more capacity in our region for the future, not less.
- % of positive outcomes for patients at the Friarage is allegedly higher than that of James Cook.
- Waiting times and time spent in hospital is lower in the Friarage than at James Cook.
- We are told (by two senior consultants) that because of these factors, the cost per head to treat patients at the Friarage is cheaper that it is at James Cook.
- No consideration has been given to what this means for our Ambulance Service. Longer distances and longer drop off times at A&E times mean longer waits for patients.

## **PS. Relevant history**

It's worth noting that maternity services and paediatrics have already been removed from the Friarage (despite public protests). The two mental health wards are also under review (we've campaigned hard against this and we find out at the end of October what the decision will be, but we are not hopeful).

As a result, staff morale is low. As is public trust. There is also concern that junior doctors may be nervous about and advised against committing their future to a hospital with an uncertain future.

Staff at James Cook also seem reluctant to work in Northallerton but The Friarage staff are often expected to cover at James Cook.

The Trust makes much of that they have invested £40M in The Friarage in the last 15 years. The reality is over half of this investment is actually from donations for things like the MRI Scanner. We would like to know how much has been invested in James Cook over the same period.

## **What can you do to help?**

Campaign with us. Two immediate things that would be hugely useful:

1. Do you know anyone with an interesting perspective on this who we should talk to? Maybe someone in the medical profession, someone involved with the Friarage, a junior doctor or a recent patient. Please let us know as we really want to get inside perspective on what's going on.
2. Attend one of the engagement sessions and let us know what you see and hear. They are happening across the region over the next couple of months and are drop ins (so even if you can only pop in for 40mins then that's ok). Key things we'd love to know:
  - a) What's the public mood and what's driving it (and soundbites to share that sums that up?)
  - b) What are the narratives that the Trust/CCG are suing and how are they being received?
  - c) How to they stand up to questions – what do they find awkward to answer, what are they confident around?
  - d) Any new info in terms of the mind-set of the Trust/CCG that you can garner (again, soundbites are useful)?

## **Remaining scheduled engagement meetings:**

Monday 16 October	Fountain Hotel, Hawes	6pm – 8pm	Market Place, Hawes, DL8 3RD
Saturday 21 October	Richmond Town Hall	1.30pm – 3.30pm	41 Market Place, Richmond,  DL10 4QL
Monday 6 November	Catterick Leisure Centre	6pm – 8pm	Gough Rd, Catterick Garrison, DL9 3EL
Wednesday 8 November	Stokesley Town Hall	4pm – 6pm	Market Place, Stokesley,  TS9 5DG
Thursday 9 November	Northallerton Town Hall	6pm – 8pm	High Street, Northallerton, DL7 8QR
Monday 13 November	Old Leyburn School, Arts and Community Centre	6pm – 8pm	Richmond Road, Leyburn, DL8 5DL
Wednesday 15 November	Golden Fleece Hotel, Thirsk	4pm – 6pm	Market Place, Thirsk YO7 1LL
Tuesday 21 November	Bedale Hall, Bedale	6pm – 8pm	North End Bedale DL8 1AA
Saturday 2 December	Town Hall, Masham	Noon – 2pm	Market Place, Masham, HG4 4DY
Thursday 14 December	Northallerton Town Hall	4pm – 6pm	High Street, Northallerton, DL7 8QR

Find out more: <https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/friarage/>