

Dear Patient,

I am writing to outline our proposed plan to extend our clinical capacity and range of services at The Medical Centre, Driffield. To facilitate the increased clinical activity, we are seeking to increase our premises in Driffield, currently based at Cranwell Road. As a practice we would be very interested to hear your thoughts.

The Problem

As many of you may be aware our current building arrangements are being outgrown and are restricting our ability to maximise clinical output. The Medical Centre has 340sq/m of space and our administration building (just off Mill Street) has 144sq/m giving us a total of 484sq/m. The East Riding Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) - who are ultimately responsible for commissioning of primary and community services, including the funding our buildings - have advised us with our current practice size of 10,800 patients we should have a minimum of 833sq/m of space to efficiently deliver the current range of services. We also need to be mindful that the council estimates a population increase of approximately 7,000 in Driffield and the surrounding area over the next 20 years, so our lack of space is only likely to be exacerbated.

In addition to a lack of clinical space, car parking has historically been an issue for the practice. Currently we own 5 car parking spaces with an option for a further 10 should the proposed expansion scheme not proceed. This is clearly not enough for patients or staff (who will regularly attend home visits and travel to our branch surgery in Wetwang).

Proposed solutions

As you are probably aware Yorkcare (a local award winning care home operator) have purchased the land surrounding the practice and intend to build a 68 patient care home. As part of the development of the site they have offered us the building adjacent to The Medical Centre, as an option to convert the properties and significantly increase the clinical capacity of the Medical Centre. Yorkcare have proposed to undertake the development of the building on our behalf as part of the overall site development, with the building completely renovated, including a new roof and all new fixtures and fittings. This would increase The Medical Centre from 340sq/m to 1,200sq/m and would provide a total of 34 car parking spaces. Although an "old" building it would very much have the look and interior of a brand new medical centre.

Alongside the option to expand the practice into the adjacent properties, we are also exploring alternative solutions at other locations within the Driffield area. Through the development of a business case these options will formulate a long list of options and through an options workshop, we will narrow the options to a short list of overall preferred solutions.

Where we are in this process

At the time of writing outlined planning permission for the adjacent building to be converted into The Medical Centre has been obtained. We have received approval from the CCG that we need more space and have a professional team of estates experts writing an Outlined Business Case (OBC) for the proposed development, which we will present to the CCG. We are hopeful that this is approved by the end of 2020 which means building work could take place in early 2021.

Additional Uses of the building

As well as providing more clinical rooms, a much larger waiting room and lift access to all parts of the building will be provided; it will also create space for additional services. We work closely with other GP practices (Hornsea, Leven and Beeford, and Park) and this “grouping” of practices provides additional funding for services. As part of the government’s Five Year Forward View in the next few years as a group we have been promised over £1,000,000 per year to spend on additional services including clinical pharmacists, first contact physiotherapists, social prescribers and physician’s assistants. One of the main problems we face is not being able to hire any further personnel due to a lack of space. This means that Drifffield would be losing out on additional services (that it is entitled to) because of a lack of space.

We are also very keen to explore working closely with specialist frailty teams (providing comprehensive geriatric assessments to our older, more vulnerable patients) and the mental health teams.

As a young team of doctors (all 8 of us are between the ages of 29 and 39) we are very keen to develop as a training practice for both GP registrars and medical students. To do this our trainees would require clinical rooms in which to see patients which we do not currently have available. Further space would allow us to develop in these areas, not only potentially increasing standards of care but also allowing us to attract and retain high quality doctors for the future.

The CCG Responsibility

As the CCG will use public money to fund the additional space via rent reimbursement, it is important they look at all the options and what would provide the best value. As part of their process the CCG will be fully engaged on to review and assess all options, although the extension proposal is very good, it is important that we are able to demonstrate that the preferred option offers best value for money whilst achieving the overarching benefits of the scheme. At the time of writing the letter, the proposed alternative solutions include a brand new purpose built surgery or using the Alfred Bean hospital site.

A brand new purpose build surgery sounds great in principle but in practice it is very difficult to find suitable land, near the centre of Drifffield (for good transport links and close to local pharmacies) and is also very expensive for the CCG. There would be significantly more obstacles to overcome and would have a high chance of never really getting off the ground.

The Alfred Bean hospital has been discussed many times over the years as a potential site for both ourselves and Park surgery. They reason why neither surgery is currently housed there perhaps gives an indication of the multiple difficulties involved. In the past, securing a long term contract has proven to be very difficult and we certainly do not want to be in a position where we suddenly find ourselves with no premises! In addition recent exploration of this option has found that we would need to convert the old commercial kitchen into clinical space and have been warned the cost of this is likely to be significantly more than the cost of our proposed extension. Finally it is a long way from any of the chemists so this would make it very difficult for our less able bodied patients to collect their scripts.

In summary

We think that the proposed extension is by far the best option for the following reasons:

1. We continue to stay in the centre of Driffield
2. We will have 34 car parking spaces (so we can ensure adequate parking for all our patients)
3. It will initially provide us with more space than we need giving us plenty of options for adding additional services and space to accommodate further patients with the population growth.
4. It is very likely to actually get done- as a practice we are very keen, we have a developer who is also keen and highly motivated to finish on time and to a high standard as their building will be on the same site
5. We will remain close to chemists so collecting scripts is much easier for our patients.

We would love to hear your views and perspectives.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil Folwell

GP partner at The Medical Centre and Lead for the buildings