

# Save Our Surgery (Sherston Tolsey)

Notes taken at the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 in Sherston Village Hall re Tolsey Surgery

Speakers:

Tanya Burgess - Chair of Sherston PC (absent due to illness)

Martin Fausing Smith - Wiltshire Councillor for Sherston

Simon Watkins - Senior GP, Tolsey Surgery

Gavin Grant - Wiltshire Councillor & Mayor of Malmesbury

James Grey - MP for North Wiltshire.

No representative of the Integrated Care Board attended the meeting, despite being requested.

Martin Fausing Smith explained that in 2019 Sherston agreed to a parish plan that agreed to 45 new houses being built on the proviso that the developers would build a new, fit for purpose, GP surgery. The planning has not yet been agreed and the NHS has not yet committed to new surgery. Tolsey was asked to submit updated business plan. A new NHS body called the Integrated Care Board (ICB), without consultation, recently announced a plan to merge Sherston surgery with Malmesbury Health Centre, ignoring proposal for new surgery building, fully funded by 3rd party developers (rumour has it that the ICB weren't even aware of this fact when drafting their proposals). The ICB have subsequently withdrawn their plans whilst they reconsider so the proposal is postponed until 16th November.

The outcome of a recent meeting between the ICB, Sherston PC and Tolsey GPs was that they'd not accounted for rural nature of patients in Sherston and the outlying Wiltshire and Gloucestershire villages who rely on the Tolsey. The the ongoing cost of lease for Sherston was raised as an issue but it also noted that Malmesbury Healthcare Centre would need to expand to take additional patients.

Dr Simon Watkins spoke on behalf of the surgery and stated that the current location of the Tolsey Surgery is not fit for purpose - no staff area, no privacy at reception area, access by stairs, no car parking, poor toilet facilities and would like more room.

Dr Petit owns the building. The lease was extended when she retired but on proviso that they move within that period as she would like the opportunity to sell the building as part of her own retirement plans. The lease currently expires in 4 years' time.

Dr Watkins stated that whilst he is committed to The Tolsey remaining in Sherston, residents should be aware that the practice had been struggling since COVID and part of the reason for that was because it relied on revenue for dispensing. Unfortunately, COVID saw dispensing patients being targeted by 3rd parties so dispensing has reduced. The Tolsey needs patients to return to dispensing as much as possible.

Dr Watkins came up with 3 actions that residents/patients can do to help: (1) Support Sherston PC with application for new development (2) use the dispensary (3) join Friends of Tolsey.

Dr Watkins stated that he doesn't want the GP practice to be moved away from the village and feels that we should be fighting to make the NHS support their claim of bringing local joined up health to communities.

Gavin Grant spoke and stated that North Wiltshire has growing aged population and new housing being erected in Malmesbury. GG feels plans to cram more people in Malmesbury Healthcare Centre is 'bonkers'. The combined distance between Sherston and the outlying villages and Malmesbury and poor bus links had not been considered; the poor car parking at Malmesbury had not been considered; nor had the lack of capacity at the Healthcare Centre.

Gavin pointed out that the ICB had admitted they made a mistake in communicating plans and, hence, withdrawing the proposal for the time being.

Gavin urged residents to write to James Grey and pointed out that 25% of elderly residents in Sherston don't drive. The ICB needs to be fought with 'People Power' and people must act sooner rather than later to support the SOS campaign.

Martin updated the meeting with planning application re the new development – the developers put in a plan 2 years ago but this was rejected. They amended their plans and have submitted a pre-ap which has now gone back to developers. Sherston needs this development to happen so there was a request for residents and councillors to support this planning application.

A representative of Luckington PC questioned why the surgery could not be re-located to the Tubb's factory but the meeting was informed that the NHS does not like to repurpose old buildings and there was no point in creating a surgery that the NHS was not going to commission.

It was agreed that all affected PCs should support Sherston PC in their fight to save the surgery and it was agreed that collective wording to be devised by Wiltshire Councillor for all surrounding PCs to use. Gloucestershire residents advised to write to Geoffrey Clifton Brown and turn up to his surgery. The petition started by Sherston PC needs to be signed by outlying villages. Letters of support of the surgery via the Practice Manager are also welcome. Finally it was suggested that concerned residents should write to the CEO of Integrated Care Board to express those concerns.

Helen Turner