

Community Groups United: result!

The campaign of #Emsworth United to prevent the hurried sale of the hospital site by the NHS Property Company in July 2018 can be judged a major success for the whole community.

The open meeting last August, triggered by the 'For Sale' bill boards appearing at the Emsworth Hospital site, raised public awareness of the issue and brought together all local organisations. #Emsworth United included the residents' association, business association, community land trust, community association, churches, health action group and the Forum.

An enormous quantity of work followed that public meeting and a key group of representatives of the community, the NHS, the Surgery, the local council and others met as a committee chaired by the local MP to address the relocation of the local surgery what would happen to the hospital building. Two public consultations run by the NHS in November and December 2018 helped decision-makers focus on key messages from the community.

The announcement on December 19th of the NHS recommendation that the refurbished Cottage Hospital should be the main home of the Emsworth medical practice, with the Westbourne surgery remaining in existence, resulted in widespread local approval. That recommendation still has to be ratified in February, and the key decision should be finalised in March. How long any transformation of the old hospital into a modern surgery might take has not been announced.

Local Community Land Trust launched

The public meeting of #Emsworth United last August also helped launch the Emsworth Community Land Trust (ECLT). The Trust fully supported the use of the hospital for the surgery but if the Doctors had not been able to move to the Cottage Hospital the ECLT was poised to try and save the site for community use. Now the organisation will be looking at different sites and activities for its focus. A public meeting of ECLT will take place on Friday March 15 at the Emsworth Community Centre from 3.30 – 5.30 pm and 7.30 - 9.30 pm. All are welcome.

Chair of Emsworth Community Land Trust, Dwyn Stepien said: 'It was really heartening to see the Doctors, CCG, Havant Borough Council and local Emsworth and Westbourne organisations all working together to try and achieve the best outcome. For us it was not only about meeting current and future health needs, but also about keeping the surgery at the heart of the town. We now want to work with residents on community issues for the future, especially to support the north of the town centre. We shall have to wait until the end of February when the decision is ratified, but we wish the GPs, CCG and HBC all success as they work together to secure the capital funding and design the building to meet future needs. When the community come together as they did in #Emsworth United – decision makers listen and engage – and we get the best result!'

The ECLT plans a housing survey in order to identify more exactly what the needs are for affordable homes and community spaces in Emsworth. Similarly, the Trust will look into public transport provision to see if any gaps can be filled cost-effectively. Harry Thuillier, Treasurer of ECLT, commented: 'The provision of affordable homes is a huge challenge anywhere these days, but particularly in places like Emsworth where new houses may be built then invested in as second homes. This does not help the community to flourish and can mean the further reduction of shops and services in the town. We have a lot of carers working in homes for older people in Emsworth. I

doubt that many can afford to live locally. Issues like these must be tackled if the Emsworth we love is to survive. We at the ECLT will try our best to meet some of these challenges.'

This could be judged as a huge challenge but the group of local residents who lead the ECLT are encouraged by the fact that more than 350 people in Emsworth have expressed support for the aims of the group and become members/shareholders. More information on the Emsworth Community Land Trust is on the website www.emsworthclt.org.uk

Learning from the past....

Devotees of the EMS may remember the headline of November 2012: 'Surgery move hampered by NHS reorganisation'. At that time a plan to rebuild the cottage hospital site to create new surgery premises hit the buffers because the NHS was in upheaval. It was following this that the NHS property arm came into existence. The Emsworth Doctors have faced years and years of uncertainty while keeping their work running in very cramped premises. It is hoped that the process of relocation will run more smoothly this time. Local people appreciate the changes their surgery is having to face; not only the relocation but the focus on additional services that many surgeries are now expected to run. The Doctors can count on widespread support from their community to help them through any relocation period.

Ends...

Photo attached. Caption: Representatives of #Emsworth United gather to show support and approval for the first step in saving the Emsworth Cottage Hospital site.

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Have also sent a copy of front page of The EMS November 2012 to the editor of EMS