

Lenham Neighbourhood Plan and the Provision of Local Health Services

The main interface between residents of Lenham and “health” is via the local GP practice, Len Valley Practice (LVP), which operates from premises in Lenham and Harrietsham. Residents also interact through use of the pharmacies at both practices and also via the pharmacy in Lenham village, Saxon Warrior Pharmacy. A specific feature of Lenham’s geography is that because it is close to east Kent, residents also sometime “choose” to use services in Ashford or Canterbury rather than in Maidstone.

Services provided by LVP are organised through West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group (WKCCG). It is the WKCCG’s role to secure, through delegated responsibility from NHS England, the provision of primary medical services for patients. WKCCG is also responsible for strategic estate planning, working with existing practices or commissioning new capacity, to respond to growth. LVP has been aware of the proposed growth in the area and WKCCG has been updating and engaging them in discussions to understand the practice’s plans / ambitions so the CCG can plan accordingly.

A feasibility piece of work has been commissioned by WKCCG, using some S106 funding agreed with the council, to explore options for increasing premises to support future growth. That work is currently underway and WKCCG and LVP will be discussing the options and how the available S106 healthcare contributions, for use by the NHS, can be aligned to any emerging need.

It is clear that this is not a “Lenham” issue, nationally practices are under pressure, with workforce being a specific issue and there are plans in place, through the NHS Long Term Plan, that provide a focus and support to this. WKCCG is managing discussions with all practices regarding growth and priorities that do (or don’t) need to be set out to respond to this pressure on services. WKCCG is fully involved in Maidstone Borough Council’s local plan review and states it will assess the outcomes of that process and respond accordingly as the outcomes evolve. WKCCG is aware of the ambitions and potential requirements emerging from the development of the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan (LNP), which is one of the largest in the south of England.

However, wider changes to the local structures that deliver health, which now includes the provision of social care, may also impact on the service local residents receive during the time-frame of the LNP.

In September 2019 the eight clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in Kent and Medway all agreed they want to merge to form a single CCG. This is a first step towards Kent and Medway becoming an integrated care system (ICS), with health and care organisations working together much more closely than in the past. The intention is for Kent and Medway to become an ICS by April 2021 which will mean:

- GP practices working together in networks – called primary care networks
- four new ‘integrated care partnerships’ across Kent and Medway, drawing together all the NHS organisations in a given area and working more closely with health improvement services and social care
- a single commissioning organisation for Kent and Medway, led by local doctors, to take a bird’s eye view of health priorities for local people and look at where shared challenges, such as cancer and mental health, should be tackled together.

As with all change, and this is another significant shift in the way health services for local people will be delivered, it will take time to bed in and the outcomes of the transformation of services to become clearer. All of the changes to the wider NHS landscape are now underway and the most significant and wide-ranging shifts in service provision fall within the time frame of the LNP.

Once the LNP is “made” it will remain incumbent on those delivering the plan to ensure that the voices of local residents are reflected in the emerging changes to the local services people receive.

John Britt

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