

TRANSPORT LINKS TO THE NEW HOSPITAL IN PEMBURY PUBLIC MEETING ON WEDS 29 JULY 2009

Over 70 people attended the public meeting which Greg Clark MP called to discuss transport links to the new hospital in Pembury. These included representatives from:

- Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
- Kent County Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Arriva
- Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd
- Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Transition Town
- Pembury, Capel, Hawkhurst, Goudhurst and Paddock Wood Parish Councils
- Southborough Town Council
- The Access Group
- The Citizen's Advice Bureau
- LiNKS
- Tunbridge Wells Older Peoples' Forum

The aim of the meeting was to enable local residents to have the opportunity to input into the development of the new hospital's travel plan which is currently being developed.

The key issues that were discussed were:

BUSES

Background:

Arriva explained that they were aiming to increase the service to the new hospital but that it must be commercially viable. A submission has been submitted to the Department of Transport for funding to improve the No6 service between Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells hospitals, doubling the number of buses along that route.

KCC is investing in bus stop infrastructure in and around Tunbridge Wells, particularly on Route 6, and already provides socially necessary services calling at Pembury Hospital which represent a combined cost to the Authority of some £500,000. Any additional services being provided (with the exception of the enhancements to Route 6) will be funded by the NHS Trust through its Section 106 Agreement with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Nevertheless, KCC is working closely with the Trust to identify the most appropriate routes for investment and will ensure that these routes are fully promoted.

The new hospital has been designed so that bus passengers will be dropped off right outside entrance.

The planning application for the new hospital included a number of obligations to improve public transport links including:

- No 6 route
- Tunbridge Wells Town Centre - High Brooms - Longfield Road – Pembury Hospital – Pembury Road – town centre circular route (3 per hr)
- Pembury Hospital - Tonbridge Town Centre - Hadlow - West Malling - Borough Green (2 per hr)
- Pembury Hospital - Tunbridge Wells Town Centre - Crowborough (1 per hr)

Ideas/comments:

- Could No 7 bus be extended into a long circular route between Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Tonbridge to include Assura House which will be providing some health services in the future?
- Need detailed demographic studies to identify areas of need
- A 15 minute bus shuttle between Tunbridge Wells and the new hospital could reduce the need for car journeys
- Could have bus priority lane along Pembury Road?
- Outlying villages such as Hawkhurst only have one bus per week, could a shuttle service be considered? (Comment: Hawkhurst receives several daily bus services to Tunbridge Wells town centre. Passengers for Pembury Hospital have to change buses in Tunbridge Wells as it is not possible to provide direct services from the village).
- Bus routes need to operate into the evening to coincide with visiting hours (Comment: 100% single rooms will allow visiting hours to be more flexible and most outpatient appointments will be during the day)
- Could hospital consider introducing a Dial-A-Ride service? (Comment: The hospital is considering extending the voluntary car service which could link more inaccessible areas and pay nominal fee)
- Concessionary fares are not available until after 9am so could there be a specific ticket for people who need to attend the hospital?
- Need to ensure bus services link to train services

CYCLING

Background:

The hospital will encourage staff to cycle to work. The existing cycle lane along Pembury Road will be extended to the new hospital, and good facilities will be offered including showering/changing areas and lockable parking for bikes.

Comments/ideas:

- Some people prefer to use the road rather than the current cycle path along Pembury Road because of the surfacing and/or overhanging trees
- Any new cycle routes need to be separate from the road

WALKING

Comments/ideas:

- Need to have safe routes especially from Pembury village.

ROADS

Background:

The road infrastructure needs significant improvement. Work on dualling the A21 is due to start in 2012 and short-term measures to improve road safety along Colt's Hill are currently being planned. Greg Clark has asked the Transport Minister whether the two stretches of dualling along the A21 could be done at the same time but the Minister confirmed that to do so would delay the whole project which would be unacceptable. A longer-term project to by-pass Colt's Hill is desirable, but not likely to happen in the short-term.

Comments/ideas:

- Could replace traffic lights along Longfield Road with roundabouts?
- The A21 roadworks will cause severe disruption to hospital traffic especially along A26 through Southborough, is there anything that can be done to mitigate against this?
- The road linking Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells hospitals experiences severe delays through Wateringbury – is there anything that can be done about this?

PARKING

Background:

In the current plan there are 1200 car parking spaces allocated, with nominal allocations of 950 for staff and 250 for patients and visitors. The hospital explained that trying to negotiate for extra parking spaces at the planning permission stage would have threatened the whole scheme. Greg Clark's view is that the hospital needs to have the right number of car parking spaces when it opens and that the consensus of opinion suggests that current figures may be too cautious.

The hospital is reviewing and testing the figures, and if a need for more spaces is identified it will start negotiations with the authorities on how it can achieve this.

- Concerns expressed about knock-on effect on near-by residential areas if people are unable to park at the hospital or unwilling to pay the car-parking fees
- Will transport be provided for staff attending both Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells hospitals, for example training events?
- Adequacy of parking will depend on how many people use public transport
- Would the hospital consider staggered staff changeover times and admission times for patients to reduce demand on car-parking spaces?
- Has hospital taken increase in energy prices into account?
- Could taxi drivers with accessible cars be used?
- Could car-parking fees be used to incentivised staff eg those that car-share could be offered free car-parking

Greg Clark thanked everyone for attending and said that everyone must work together to ensure that when the new hospital opens, it will be easily accessible to everyone.