

260113 – Item 18 - HOSPITAL UPDATE

Meeting our MP

The Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride, MP has asked for a meeting with representatives from Moretonhampstead Parish Council and Moretonhampstead Health Centre on Thursday 15th January. It is proposed that Cllrs Fileman-Wright, Evans and Walden will attend the meeting on behalf of the parish council.

The Hospital Working Group will be meeting on Monday 12th January to prepare for the meeting. A draft briefing for the meeting has been prepared by the Hospital Working Group (annex 1) and is for approval by the Parish Council. It is proposed that the briefing should be published on the parish council's website.

Media

It is possible that our MP may contact the press on his visit. If so, the parish council may be asked for comments. It is proposed that Cllr Fileman-Wright and Cllr Walden would act as media spokespeople for the parish council if required, using the briefing as the basis for any comment to the media.

Hospital Petition

On 5 December 2025, Moretonhampstead Health Centre launched a petition to save the hospital. At time of writing this report, it had received 1,388 signatures. Councillors are asked to note the excellent response.

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-sale-of-moretonhampstead-hospital-return-it-to-the-people-of-moreton>

Designation of Moretonhampstead Hospital as a Conservation Area

Cllr Short has investigated whether the parish council should ask DNPA to carry out an appraisal of whether the hospital should be designated a conservation area (Annex 2). It is proposed that the parish council makes a request to DNPA for an extension to the conservation area.

The Reading University Hambleden Archive

Following a request from a resident, Cllr Evans and the Moretonhampstead History Society have made inquiries about the Hambleden Estate archive held at Reading University. It is not clear whether the papers include information about the early history of the hospital. The University confirmed that they have the archive, that it can be viewed in person in normal working hours and that there is a charge for copying material. They also said that they had received a number of other requests from the community to access the archive.

Given it would take considerable time and cost involved to access the archive in Reading, and that it is not clear how this helps make the case to keep the hospital open, the parish council is asked to decide whether we do anything further to research historic ownership at this time.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the parish council:

1. Agree that Cllrs Fileman-Wright, Evans and Walden will attend the meeting with the Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride MP for the parish council on 15th January.
2. Approves the draft briefing (Annex 1) for the meeting with our MP and delegates the approval of the final text to Cllrs Fileman-Wright, Evans, Walden and the clerk.
3. Approves the publication of the final version of the briefing (Annex 1) on the parish council's website.
4. If the parish council receives media enquiries in relation to the hospital, Cllrs Fileman-Wright and Walden will act as spokespeople, using the briefing (Annex 1) as background.
5. Approves the letter requesting that DNPA undertakes an appropriate appraisal to consider extending the Moretonhampstead Conservation Area to include Moretonhampstead Hospital and then consults on the conclusions (Annex 2).
6. Agrees whether any further action be taken at this time to investigate the Hambleden Archive at Reading University.

Annex 1

MORETONHAMPSTEAD HOSPITAL BRIEFING, JANUARY 2026

Briefing for the Right Hon Sir Mel Stride, MP

Key Facts

- Moretonhampstead Parish: 1,729 (2021)
- Ageing population, with over 30% of Moretonhampstead Parish residents aged 65 and over
- Number of patients registered at Moretonhampstead Health Centre: 3,500
- Moretonhampstead Health Centre serves Moretonhampstead and a wide rural area including Whiddon Down, Drewsteignton, Bridford, Widecombe-in-the-Moor, and areas towards Bovey Tracey and Princetown.
- Services provided by Moretonhampstead Health Centre: GP services; teaching places and specialist clinics
- Moretonhampstead Health Centre National Ranking (2025): 151 out of 6215 surgeries in England; 92% of patients describe their overall experience as good
- Principle hospitals: RD&E Exeter, Torbay Hospital
- Bus services: Moretonhampstead - Exeter; Moretonhampstead to Newton Abbot; trans-Moor link; limited services mean access to early morning; evening or weekend health appointments aren't possible.

Timeline

- Hospital was built: 1900-1901
- April 2013: in-patient beds closed
- February 2024: meeting hosted by Sir Mel Stride, MP to discuss NHS PS's plans to close the site. At this time the hospital hosted an Ulcer Clinic; office space for NHS District Nurses; and North East Dartmoor Care, the community-run charity that provides care to people in their homes. The reason given by NHS PS for the hospital closure was that it was unsafe due to water in the building from a leaking roof, which was uneconomic to repair.
- June 2025: District Nurses have vacated the hospital; ulcer clinic moved to an at-home service
- July 2025: NHS PS closed the hospital
- Late summer / autumn: NHS PS repaired the roof to prevent further leaks
- 23 July 2025: NHS Devon and NHS PS host a meeting in Moretonhampstead to explain next steps for hospital sale
- 5 November 2025: public meeting hosted by Moretonhampstead Parish Council and Moretonhampstead Health Centre attended by ~90 residents
- December 2025: petition sponsored by Moretonhampstead Health Centre gains more than 1,300 signatures.

Background

Moretonhampstead Community Hospital was built in 1900–1901 under the patronage of the Hambleden family for the people of Moretonhampstead and the surrounding area. Although the inpatient beds closed in April 2013, it remains an important community asset, well suited to hosting local healthcare, district nursing, a care agency, and wider community initiatives.

The government's 10-year plan for the NHS barely acknowledges rural general practice. The rural population of Moretonhampstead and the surrounding areas face significant health inequalities, which have been made worse by the gradual removal of services and now closure of the hospital. It is also a missed opportunity for the NHS working with local community partners to provide local value-for-money health and well-being services.

The population served by Moretonhampstead Health Centre is increasingly elderly with a higher prevalence of chronic complex, conditions that need regular monitoring and accessible community-based care, not distant acute services. Patients face real difficulties travelling to Exeter, Okehampton or Torquay for alternative services with travel long distances for any health care, which particularly affects farmers. Lack of public transport means reliance on private cars disadvantaging older, low-income households and disabled residents and carers. The NHS's digital-first approach disadvantages residents with poor broadband and mobile signal and those who lack digital skills. Rural isolation increases risk of depression, anxiety and loneliness. Loss of local facilities removes important social contact and early intervention.

NHS Property Services is now preparing to sell the building. This follows more than a decade of effort by the local GP practice, Wellmoor, and other groups to secure a future for the site. The Parish Council has also supported attempts to keep the building in public use. NHS Devon and NHS PS have shown no willingness to invest in the hospital. The last significant refurbishment in 1999 was paid for by the local GP and local fundraising.

Moretonhampstead Health Centre provides an excellent service to its patients and has the leadership and vision to develop and run a community-led local health hub. But it cannot afford to purchase the hospital and cannot relocate. It must remain at the existing health centre, which also requires investment for renovation and improvement. The practice already makes maximum use of the existing space it has and frequently has to turn providers away who would otherwise operate locally if adjacent space in the hospital building was available. The NHS has also confirmed it will not honour previous in-principle agreements for preserving some parking on the hospital site to enable expansion of the health centre.

This makes either retaining the whole hospital site within the NHS or transferring it into community ownership even more important - allowing the building to host local healthcare, district nursing, a care agency, and community wellbeing projects, while GP services remain based at the health centre.

However, the NHS PS has not allowed local organisations full access to undertake an independent survey. It has also been unwilling to give any guidance on the value of the building or its condition, preventing the community from developing an informed proposal for its re-use.

If NHS PS proceeds with the sale, 50% of the moneys received (after costs) should go back to NHS Devon to be reinvested in NHS PS-owned properties in Devon. NHS Devon has confirmed that Moretonhampstead Health Centre would not be eligible for any of this funding as it is not NHS PS-owned.

It still might be possible for the GP practice, and community groups to take responsibility for the hospital for a local health hub if given the necessary time, access, and support.

This would protect the building for NHS and community purposes and prevent its loss to private development.

Creating a local health hub would improve access and equity to health services for our rural population with earlier intervention and fewer missed appointments; reduce the barrier of poor transport links; reduce reliance on digital services than many patients cannot use; will support better prevention services (vaccination) and early intervention keeping patients out of A&E and accuse services; provision of services based on local needs. It would also provide value for money for the NHS with the potential to grow the patients treated locally from 3500 to up to 12,000 - 15,000.

We understand that the sale is now delayed pending agreement between on the outstanding service charges owed by NHS Devon to NHS PS.

What we are calling for:

- An immediate pause on any sale or disposal process by NHS Property Services.
- Immediate access to the hospital to enable the Hospital Working Group to complete the independent survey of the building.
- An agreement in principle that, should disposal proceed, the site be transferred at a nominal sale value to the people of Moretonhampstead as a health hub, with the purpose of improving access, health outcomes and NHS sustainability for this isolated rural population. 120 years, this building still has credible health services to provide.
- Sustained support from the Integrated Care Board (ICB), our MP, and NHS property services (NHSPS) to develop a health and community hub on the site which would include; district nurses, a care agency, GP overflow and local well-being services.

What we are asking you to do:

- To ask NHS PS for the immediate pause on the sale of the hospital and to re-think its approach to the sale of Moretonhampstead Hospital.
- To host a meeting between senior representatives of NHS Devon, Moretonhampstead Health Centre, Moretonhampstead Parish Council and MDT Wellmoor to develop proposals, for a community health hub partnership based in the hospital to meet long term health needs of NE Dartmoor's residents.

Briefing prepared by:

Moretonhampstead Parish Council and Moretonhampstead Health Centre.

January 2025

Annex 2

REQUEST TO DNPA TO UNDERTAKE AN APPRAISAL OF THE CASE TO EXTEND MORETONHAMPSTEAD CONSERVATION AREA TO INCLUDE MORETONHAMPSTEAD HOSPITAL

The purpose of this report is to enable the Parish Council to consider whether to request that Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) extends the Moretonhampstead Conservation Area.

Members will recall that at the last meeting there was an update on the Hospital (item 15) referring to a public meeting where the possibility of extending the Conservation Area was raised. The report mentioned that Moretonhampstead History Society (MHS) may be able to help on the historical background and that it would be appropriate to brief two property owners who may be affected. It was resolved to delegate to Cllr Short to investigate further (Minute 206/2025).

The Chairman of MHS has informally confirmed that members of the Society may be able to help if requested by DNPA. The two property owners have been briefed, and it has been suggested that they comment on any forthcoming appraisal.

Cllr Richard Short

Recommendation

That the Clerk requests DNPA undertakes an appropriate appraisal to consider extending the Moretonhampstead Conservation Area to include Moretonhampstead Hospital and then consults on the conclusions. A draft proposed letter is below.

Dear Mr Kinsella

You will recall that you attended a public meeting on 5 November regarding the future of Moretonhampstead Hospital when the possibility of an extension to the Moretonhampstead Conservation Area was raised. The Parish Council now formally requests that DNPA carries out an appropriate appraisal of the case for an extension of the Conservation Area and then undertakes public consultation prior to any designation. The Council considers that the area may have sufficient special architectural or historic interest that it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The site lies only about 40 metres from the existing Moretonhampstead Conservation Area at 50 Ford Street (Forder House).

The Moretonhampstead Conservation Area was designated in 1973 and extended in 1976, other conservation areas on Dartmoor such as Chagford and South Brent have also been subsequently extended after designation.

The community would like to see a continuation of health related or other community use. While there is a Local Plan policy that seeks to protect community facilities it may be ineffective in preventing other forms of use or development. NHS Property Services is likely to place the site on the open market early next year after it has been advertised on 'Insite'. Proposals for demolition and redevelopment of the site are likely to come forward.

Moretonhampstead Hospital was built and endowed by Lord Hambleton in about 1900. It is not a statutorily listed building but does feature in the National Register of the Historic Environment / the Devon and Dartmoor Historic Environment Register (entry MDV42275).

It is one of a number of Lord Hambleton's works in the area such as Jubilee Cottages, Mardon House and Bovey Castle.

The hospital building is aesthetically pleasing being of traditional granite construction with high quality stonework, has historic significance as a remnant of the Hambleton Estate, is an early example of a cottage hospital and is of communal cultural significance to the town and adjoining parishes from its past use.

The Hospital is separated from the existing Conservation Area by the garden of Forder House, Forder Cottage (which is unlisted but appears to have been stables on the 1841 Tithe Map), Southmead (an attractive 1970s detached house) and the entrance to the allotments that may be considered an important open area to the setting of the existing Conservation Area.

Members of Moretonhampstead Historical Society would be prepared to offer DNPA any assistance that it requires in researching the history of the area to be considered for appraisal. The two property owners who may be affected have been briefed on this request.

Please acknowledge this message and let me know as soon as possible whether you will be undertaking an appraisal and your likely programme.

Yours sincerely