

## **Moretonhampstead Hospital – Meeting with Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride MP**

**15 January 2026**

### **Present**

- Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride MP
- Mike Knuckey, Parliamentary Assistant
- Cllr Catherine Fileman-Wright, Cllr Janette Evans, Cllr Chris Walden, Moretonhampstead Parish Council
- Alex Austin, Practice Manager, Moretonhampstead Health Centre
- Richard Foxwell, MDT Wellmoor

Cllr Catherine Fileman-Wright welcomed the MP for Central Devon, Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride MP, and his Parliamentary Assistant. She reminded everyone of the last meeting held two years ago, in February, at the hospital. At that meeting, Sir Mel had kindly offered help if things were not progressing as planned. She briefly summarised what had happened in the two years since.

She then explained how efficient the Moretonhampstead Health Centre is, and how vital it is to the health of the rural communities it serves, together with Wellmoor.

Catherine explained that the independent structural survey to assess the condition and value of the building had been halted halfway through by NHS Property Services (NHS PS). This has made it extremely difficult for the community to assess and quantify the costs, work, and funding needed for any possible community projects to go forward.

She explained that Moretonhampstead has a highly respected and valued Health Centre, with the visionary leadership needed to develop a health and wellbeing hub based in the hospital to meet rural health needs. The hub was originally proposed by NHS Devon when beds were closed in 2013. Despite the concerted efforts of the Health Centre and Wellmoor, no progress has been made by NHS Devon on developing the health hub.

She explained that there was confusion over the process for advertising the building and the time limit that interested community parties would have to prepare a bid. At a public meeting in July, NHS Devon and NHS PS stated the community would have 60 days; however, recent correspondence from the NHS states 40 days. This is insufficient time to prepare a bid, given that there is no completed survey and NHS PS has been unwilling to provide any information about the likely purchase price. Catherine asked whether Sir Mel could halt the sale process.

Catherine stressed the importance of Moretonhampstead Health Centre to the town and surrounding rural areas. Alex Austin explained the particular problems their

patients face in accessing health services based outside the area due to rural inequalities, including transport, IT access, and the nature of rural employment.

Alex explained that the sale of the hospital would be irreversible and that any funds would be lost to the community if they were used elsewhere. NHS Devon has confirmed that none of the proceeds would directly benefit the community. Although 50% of the sale proceeds could be returned to Devon, none would be spent in this community as there would be no remaining NHS-owned properties on which to reinvest the funds.

Sir Mel asked whether there had been any further contact from the NHS since the public meeting in November. It was confirmed that there had been a meeting with NHS Devon to update them on the sentiment expressed at the meeting, followed by further correspondence.

Following the community public meeting, the Health Centre set up a petition. At the time of this meeting, it had received nearly 1,600 signatures. Alex noted that once a petition reaches 1,000 signatures, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is obliged to include the issue as an agenda item for discussion.

Richard Foxwell noted that a previous structural survey carried out by NHS PS had been lost, and confirmed that if access to the building were granted, the independent structural survey could be completed very quickly. He also noted a willingness to share the survey publicly, to allay any NHS PS concerns about preferential treatment of one potential bidder.

Alex Austin listed 16 NHS services that have been lost from the hospital since 2013 (excluding bed closures). The loss of these services has created many difficulties for the community. She gave the example of increased infection risks arising from ulcer treatment and catheter changes being carried out at home in non-sterile environments rather than at the hospital.

Sir Mel asked whether it was feasible for the community to make a bid. It was explained that this was very difficult due to the lack of reliable financial information. Alex explained that the Health Centre could make use of approximately 50% of the space. There are potential benefactors and the possibility of community crowdfunding once costs and funding requirements are clarified.

Richard explained that if sufficient funding were raised through crowdfunding, it would be possible to employ a project manager to investigate further options or a potential community takeover.

The meeting discussed the challenges of public transport and how it is increasingly difficult, or virtually impossible, for many residents served by the Health Centre to access NHS services that are now being delivered further afield in Devon.

The meeting considered timing, costs, and possible ways forward. Sir Mel agreed to assist with the following actions:

1. To request that NHS PS pauses the sale to allow the independent structural survey to be completed and a community bid to be developed.
2. To ask NHS PS to consider a sale of the hospital to the community for a nominal sum.
3. To set up and chair a meeting with senior NHS Devon and NHS PS officers to discuss the proposed health and wellbeing hub.
4. If the community is unable to acquire the hospital, to investigate whether some of the proceeds from the sale could be reinvested in the community.

Sir Mel asked about the general situation in Moretonhampstead. The group highlighted the town's strong community spirit, the activities of local community groups and volunteers, the carnival centenary, food festival, and recent substantial investment by local businesses. Catherine also mentioned concerns about public services under threat, including the hospital, Teignbridge District Council's proposal to off-load responsibility for public toilets to the Parish Council, and the South Western Ambulance Service Trust's proposals (now no longer progressing) to remove the Fire Service first responder role in favour of volunteers.

Sir Mel agreed that the meeting could be reported to the community via social media and other usual communications channels. It was agreed that a draft would be shared with him prior to publication.

Catherine thanked Sir Mel, on behalf of the group, for coming to Moretonhampstead and for a productive meeting.

**ENDS**