

Caerphilly and District Miners Hospital Survey Local Focus - January 2009

Local Focus is a monthly magazine, circulated to around 10,000 homes in the Caerphilly Basin. The January issue included a questionnaire, which readers were asked to complete and return to a PO Box or send to an e-mail address.

This survey has been prompted by proposals to open a brand new hospital at Ystrad Fawr in 2010 and to subsequently close older hospitals in the area, including the Caerphilly and District Miners Hospital. The Local Development Plan Deposit Version, published in October 2008 earmarked the whole of the site for housing. Since these plans were first mooted late in 2005, the public has expressed disappointment that no alternative uses for the hospital were being considered. Thus it was decided to set up a Steering Group to seek to develop alternative community uses and to ensure that the public was kept aware of developments. The Group was established in September 2008. Part of its work has been to undertake this survey.

What happens to the building will depend on what is technically and financially possible and will stand the test of time (i.e. feasible, viable, and sustainable). Building and project feasibility studies and business plans will be needed for the project. There is also a need to align proposals with the wider strategies for land use, housing, and health and social care, young and older people, environmental sustainability and regeneration, community safety, volunteering, the arts and culture, and learning.

A total of 52 people returned their questionnaires or responded by e-mail. The profile of the respondents was as follows:

Where respondents came from

Postal code	Area	Number
CF83 1	Caerphilly South	28
CF83 2	Caerphilly - Abertridwr	10
CF83 3	Caerphilly - Pontygyndy	7
CF83 8	Bedwas	7
Total		52

Age and sex of respondents

Age	30-39	40-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80+
Number	1	2	4	6	13	10	4	8	3

One respondent did not give her age, but said that she was retired.

Of the 52 respondents 38 were female and 14 were male.

This is in line with non-targeted community surveys, where responses tend to be higher from people living nearest to a proposed development (Caerphilly and District Miners Hospital is located in CF83 1), and from older women.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAERPHILLY MINERS HOSPITAL BUILDING

It should be stressed that this was not a 'free' survey in that there was no freepost address for returning the results of the questionnaire. Thus, the response is an indication of the importance people placed on having a say in the future of the building.

I'm pleased to see that the locals are being given the opportunity to have a say in the hospital's demise.

Comments on the sacrifices made by the miners in investing in the community included:

At the very least the façade should be retained and a plaque on the site stating that the original building was paid for by miners in very hard times, at great sacrifice.

Since it was built with Miners money, I think this should be considered when its use as a hospital is no longer needed.

It was built with the money of the miners for the people of Caerphilly and the Valleys.

It should be retained for the community, as the original was built with money paid for by the miners.

It should also be remembered that this hospital was built through the contributions of local miners – not developers.

The miners could probably ill afford their individual contributions to provide a hospital to the local community

The building was built using contributions made by the miners who died in their work. They left it for [us] to inherit and maintain with pride

My father was one of the colliery workers who helped pay for the hospital, and he was very proud of the fact. Please don't just take the building down! It's history for us.

Respondents valued the history of the building and its importance for the cultural heritage of Caerphilly:

We should not forget our mining history. When coal was king, the miners suffered and contributed such a lot to the country. Not only did they contribute to building the hospital, but to parks, bowling greens, miners' institutes, working men's halls.

I think we should not lose this important part of our heritage

A strong sense of community ownership is vested in the hospital building, as is reflected in these comments.

A lot of hard work from the community was done to pay for this building – these people need to be remembered and the building needs to be treasured – not pulled down!

Caerphilly Miners Hospital was built in 1923 with the miners' and community's hard earned money; it should continue to serve the whole of the Caerphilly Community in a similar and honourable way – a memorial to the miners who lost their lives paying their dues each week for a health facility for the community and their families. The Miners Hospital could house a museum to these community minded people, and their spirit could be added to by the hospital becoming a centre of local achievements and learning. Caerphilly has lost a lot of its character and seemingly its history and community spirit over the years – I truly hope this is not going to be the case with the Caerphilly Miners Hospital building.

Retain the building wholly for community use – as the miners helped build this for the community.

This building exists for the people because of the sacrifices made by the miners – the council has no right to dispose of it.

The building also gives the community a sense of its history:

The whole of the original structure should be kept and restored, as the Welsh people should be very proud of their history.

Caerphilly Miners Hospital has been an integral part of the community for many years and should remain so.

Our local history is being eroded for homes, bit by bit. How long before the Castle is built on?

There are few, if any buildings of this size or historical significance in Caerphilly that would lend itself to conversion for the community. We have enough new build housing.

I can remember my father and my grandfather helped pay towards the hospital – why destroy the past, I wonder?

Nice looking building. It should be kept for the community as the original miners wished. There is already too much new housing – roads and facilities can't cope.

The Miners Hospital could be used for the community, for young and old people's use. It would be a travesty to have it demolished, when there are few really historic buildings left in Caerphilly.

At least the façade should be kept, if only for historical reasons. It would be nice to see a new purpose built building there, but these days new-builds just don't seem to stand the test of time, therefore perhaps a mixture of part original building and perhaps something new adjacent to the old. There is a fairly new mosaic on the floor near reception – depicting the colliery and winding wheel, perhaps this could be preserved.

There is also a sense that whilst the economic life of the building may be exhausted, there is nevertheless further utility for the building:

It would not make sense to destroy a building of character and history, with all the essential utilities existing, and replace it with an expensive new building, which may not be an improvement

I care passionately regarding the future of Caerphilly Miners Hospital. It would be a tragedy if the hospital were demolished. Much money has been spent over the years to make it a fine building with excellent facilities – good car parking too.

Finally, the comments suggested that the retention of the hospital may act as a brake on the ordinariness of modern urban development:

In recent years Caerphilly has been overdeveloped with new housing, much of it small, crowded and towards the lower end of the market. There have been little or no accompanying facilities and the town and area is slowly becoming a soulless blot on the landscape. The hospital is a valued part of the town's heritage, particularly as probably half the local population were born there. To replace the hospital with yet more housing would be a crime. Retain the hospital buildings and use them for community facilities, whichever prove to be most needed or most neglected.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN TO THE BUILDING?

Readers were asked to select one of five possible options for the 'original' hospital building (The Beeches), which was purchased by the miners for the hospital:

1. retain the whole building for community use
2. retain the ground floor of the building for community use
3. retain only the front façade for community use and replace the building with a new purpose built centre
4. take the whole building down
5. other / don't know

Of the 52 respondents, a total of 40 wanted to retain the whole building for community use; 3 wanted to retain the ground floor only and 6 wanted to retain the front façade. No-one wanted to take the whole building down or suggested another option.

WHAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED?

The survey suggested that 'local community facilities' might be provided and asked readers to suggest what these might be. The responses outlined below suggest a wide range of possible uses.

Some people wanted to keep the hospital as a hospital:

This building should be kept open as a hospital – beds are not always available in other hospitals, resulting in patients being kept on trolleys for hours. The new Ystrad hospital will have fewer beds

Caerphilly has grown so big, we need a 24 hour emergency department

We think it should be retained for accident and emergency.

Keep it for outpatients – too difficult to get to the new hospital by public transport.

Despite the assurances of the Gwent Healthcare Trust and Caerphilly Local Health Board there is a widespread belief that the new hospital will be unable to cater for the needs of an ageing population, and particular, to stop 'bed blocking'.

The new hospital will never be big enough

Annexe to help the [shortage of] beds at the new hospital.

As an annexe to the new hospital. Patients could be cared for there when there are delays causing bed-blocking in the main hospital. Also a physiotherapy dept.

Retain the building to provide temporary accommodation to address bed-blocking, thus freeing hospital beds for more urgent patients?

Many respondents believed that the hospital should become a respite care home or convalescent home.

Support for older people, who need respite care or don't need to be in hospital, but are not well enough to go home for a few weeks. Respite care. Day clinics. This could solve bed blocking.

As the majority of the population are senior citizens, it would be wise to have plenty of community hospitals or hospices to care for these people after they have had hospital treatment, when they still need medical attention. This will help to reduce bed-blocking.

A convalescent home / nursing home – solution to bed-blocking – not everyone can return home – for elderly or frail person to go to until they can return home or find a place in a nursing home.

Convalescence facilities – people discharged home very quickly after operation and illness – incorporate healthy eating, care, therapies, health information

The complete hospital should be retained to provide health care for older people. With the closure of Ystrad Mynach, Oakdale, Aberbargoed and Redwood hospital, where are older people going to be cared for. It won't be in the new hospital as there are fewer beds.

I do feel that there is a need for some kind of convalescence centre for people nearly well enough to leave hospital, but who either live alone and /or need a final bit of TLC. I'm sure hospitals like the Heath, Caerphilly, Newport and Ystrad Mynach are so short of beds for new admissions that they would welcome an intermediate place to free their beds as quickly as possible (aged 88).

Respondents who cared for relatives with Alzheimers Disease, dementia or other mental infirmity pointed to the benefits of having better provision in the locality.

We have an ageing population in Caerphilly and the elderly deserve a centre of excellence to meet their needs. Utilise the staff from Ystrad Mynach hospital and create an innovative place for all elderly needs including stroke, Alzheimers and dementia. A respite place to help tired and desperate carers would be welcomed – to look after their loved ones – just like a hospice.

With an ageing population, we need more facilities for people with dementia etc. There are very few EMI places in the town. This means that relatives have to travel all over the valley to visit their loved ones. These people are often aged themselves.

Provision for dementia patients – not much exists locally and some people have had to be moved some distance from their families; hospice care; facilities for respite care; convalescence provision; all day centres; clinics of various types – e.g. chiropody; accommodation for rent by people offering private treatment.

Day centre or elderly care assessment unit – as part of primary care

Serious consideration should be given to the long term care for older people with special needs. We recently visited our sister in law in a very modern and caring home for people with Alzheimers disease in Nottingham – it appears that we need this sort of accommodation in Caerphilly.

It was also suggested that the building could provide for the needs of older people living in the community.

The elderly are a forgotten part of our community. Can our infrastructure cope with more housing development? It would be nice to see the hospital

retained and refurbished for our elderly people for affordable housing and their well-being.

Part of the site could be developed on the lines of Bronrhiw – i.e. apartments that elderly people could purchase, but have security and a warden. There is a dearth of such facilities in Caerphilly.

Mostly sheltered provision for the elderly.

Health and well-being activities for older people

It was suggested that the building might become a community centre with a variety of different provision under one roof: It was stressed that the building should be accessible for all (i.e. meeting the Disability Discrimination Act requirements), with better public transport provided. Some ideas are:

- youth centre, children's clubs with snooker / pool, darts, dance, juice bars
- teen activities to get young people interested in varied community issues and activities
- education centre for adults and children
- training centre for the unemployed
- arts, craft / hobby, pottery, sewing, art exhibitions
- performing arts - concerts, plays
- social functions
- gymnasium, basket-ball, 5 a side football, tennis, yoga, judo, karate
- 10 pin bowling
- library – will the development in Cardiff Road happen?
- lectures and culture
- meeting place for local societies, groups and clubs
- mixed ages – old and young
- a museum providing the local history of the original house and how it came to become the hospital
- single parents' meeting place with crèche
- educational facilities
- problem solving centre for all ages, eg Samaritans, money advice etc
- therapies
- part of the infrastructure to support housing - surgery / nursery school
- general community activities & public meetings, council meetings

Some ideas were more developed – for example:

An arts / adult education centre similar to the Riverside Newport; a theatre cinema space with wooden floor for dance groups/ dance studio, rooms for hire for conferences, community meetings and adult education.

Should be a community arts, conservation project and /or museum – would it be too expensive to move it to Penallta Park, where it could be used for conservation projects?

The whole site should be developed into a new school to replace St Martins – the present school could then be a good quality housing development to pay for the school

It should support community care for all the community of Caerphilly – not just for 50+ - this would be a wonderful opportunity to encourage better understanding in the community between the age groups creating a more caring community.

THE FUTURE

I'd like to see a celebration of the passing of the Miners with art exhibitions and story telling, a march or parade starting from the miners with people in costume from when it began dressed as nurses, miners and general townsfolk with old union banners accompanied by colliery brass bands and choirs, carrying lit miners lamps.

NEXT STEPS

The Steering Group for the Future of the Caerphilly and District Miners Hospital wishes to thank all those members of the public who took part in the survey and sent information materials to support their views. We wish to reassure you that your views have been given serious consideration, even though the future uses that emerge may not meet your priority.

The Steering Group will use the survey results to develop future plans for the building, working with strategic partners in health, housing, and voluntary groups in the area.. Initially we will develop a brief for a future feasibility study, to assess the feasibility, viability and sustainability of the building in relation to the wider strategies, other developments on the site and the possible uses of the building.

We are committed to providing feedback and information to the wider community as this project will only be successful if (like the original miners' hospital) it is supported and owned by the public. A project 'blog' is currently being developed, which will include the results of three surveys – the Local View survey, a Fifty Plus Forum Survey and the results of the survey conducted in Outpatients at the hospital. .

Thank you!

Katherine Hughes
On behalf of the Steering Group
March 2009

Blog: