

PRESS RELEASE – December 20, 2021

Unity Healthcare to close their Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery

Unity Healthcare in Haverhill will be permanently closing its branch surgery in Bower Hall Drive, Steeple Bumpstead, as of December 31, 2021.

An application for closure was made to the NHS West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (WSCCG) following a review of feedback from patients and members of the local community during a public engagement exercise held between August 23 and October 11 this year.

WSCCG granted permission to close the building at its Primary Care Commissioning Committee meeting on October 27.

The application was made after Unity Healthcare amended its model of care to ensure that the needs of all their patients are met, both now and in the future.

The practice has created a 'demand-led' central hub at its Clements Surgery site that provides a range of services via a multi-disciplinary team of GPs, nurse practitioners, physician associates, pharmacists, physiotherapists, paramedics and mental health practitioners working together to provide high quality healthcare for all patients.

Dr David Brandon, Clinical Lead GP for Unity Healthcare, said: "The decision to close our branch surgery in Steeple Bumpstead has not been taken lightly.

"Our innovative new approach towards service delivery has helped us to turn around both Clements and Steeple Bumpstead from surgeries that could not maintain a workforce of regular staff and were failing on almost every regulatory indicator, into a thriving practice that is regularly recruiting to expand the clinical team and is now involved in training and education to secure services for the future.

"The people of Haverhill and Steeple Bumpstead now have an excellent team of clinicians dedicated to helping them, which continues to grow and develop to face the new and upcoming challenges."

"More than 200 patients gave feedback during the engagement process. We would like to thank them and will work to mitigate any negative impact for them. Details of our response to issues raised are detailed below. Printed copies are available from our reception and on request."

For more information, please email info@suffolkfed.co.uk or wsccg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net or visit our website <https://www.unityhealthhaverhill.org.uk/>.

Closure of Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery Q&As

Why is Unity Healthcare closing the Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery?

Unity Healthcare has amended its model of care to ensure that the needs of all our patients are met, both now and in the future.

Historically, the practice has relied on a 'first come, first served' appointment system which has diverted resources away from patients with potentially concerning symptoms, to patients with minor illness or non-medical concerns that can be self-managed with support by more appropriate health and care professionals.

Since introducing triage that embraces innovations and technology, and a 'demand led' rather than 'capacity led' approach towards service delivery, we have been able to ensure that everyone is able to access the healthcare that they NEED, in a timely fashion. Most contacts with the surgery are dealt with on the same day, and if not, by the end of the next working day.

Part of this has involved centralising services at the Clements Surgery and providing a range of services via a multi-disciplinary team of GPs, nurse practitioners, physician associates, pharmacists, physiotherapists, paramedics and mental health practitioners working together in a 'hub' based environment to provide high quality healthcare for all patients.

This allows clinicians to share best practice, to share ideas about patients with more challenging problems, and to be able to allocate the time needed to patients with more complex needs. For example, a doctor who is tied up managing a patient who is dying is no longer forming a queue of frustrated patients in the meantime. It also means that patients do not need to take time off work, wait for hours in the surgery etc. for problems that are straightforward and can be managed remotely.

We continue to see patients in person, either at the Clements Surgery or in their homes when appropriate (as we have done throughout the pandemic), if this is needed to safely manage the person's condition.

This innovative approach towards service delivery has helped to turn around both Clements and Steeple Bumpstead surgeries, from surgeries that could not maintain a workforce of regular staff and were failing on almost every regulatory indicator, into a thriving practice that is regularly recruiting to expand the clinical team and is now involved in training and education to secure services for the future.

The Steeple Bumpstead Surgery building does not offer facilities that are adequate for 21st century healthcare and staff working there would be isolated and unsupported.

We acknowledge that this is not without ongoing challenges but believe that the challenges we now face are no different or more severe than those affecting General Practice as a whole. The people of Haverhill and Steeple Bumpstead now have an excellent team of clinicians dedicated to helping them, which continues to grow and develop to face the new and upcoming challenges.

Why did Steeple Bumpstead Surgery become a branch of Unity Healthcare?

The Steeple Bumpstead Surgery became a branch of Unity Healthcare and part of Suffolk GP Federation CIC from October 31, 2019. The change happened because as a small, stand-alone surgery, it had become difficult to attract and retain staff and there were no permanent doctors or nurses at the site.

After looking at the options at the time, West Essex and West Suffolk clinical commissioning groups felt it was in the best interests of both Steeple Bumpstead and Unity Healthcare patients for Suffolk GP Federation CIC to step-in and provide as orderly a transition as possible.

Without such a move, Steeple Bumpstead patients may have been dispersed with less time for neighbouring practices to plan and adapt. With CCG support, the Federation's aim was to extend Suffolk services to the people in the practice area to help minimise disruption and build a sustainable practice for the future.

How are you responding to issues raised by patients about the closure of the Steeple Bumpstead Surgery?

More than 200 patients gave feedback during our engagement process about our proposal to close the Steeple Bumpstead surgery building between August 23 and October 11, 2021. We would like to thank them and provide details of how we will work to mitigate any negative impact raised:

- **Transport**

Some patients are concerned about transport to the Clements surgery including the cost of taking a taxi and the lack of a frequent and direct bus service from Steeple Bumpstead and the surrounding areas.

Feedback received in our patient survey suggests that there is low uptake of the community transport options available. Going forward, we intend to provide support to both The Voluntary Network's Connecting Communities service in Haverhill and Braintree Community Transport to improve awareness of these services as an additional travel option for patients living in Steeple Bumpstead and the surrounding Essex villages.

Details of these services are listed below, included on our website home page and in our newsletters. Printed information is also available in the surgery waiting room.

- ❖ **The Voluntary Network** provides **Connecting Communities** rural transport for when there are no regular bus services to make your journey, or you are unable to get to your nearest bus stop. All journeys are pre-booked.
For more information visit: www.thevoluntarynetwork.org/community-transport
or call **01638 664304** or **01440 712028**
- ❖ **Braintree District Council** provides a range of community transport schemes.
For more information visit: <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/community>
or call **01376 557883**

We would also like to thank the many local volunteers who support active neighbourhood assistance schemes in Steeple Bumpstead and the surrounding areas.

- **Prescriptions**

Some patients have mentioned issues with the length of time in obtaining repeat prescriptions as there is no local pharmacy in Steeple Bumpstead.

Patients have the choice to drop their scripts in the box outside the surgery which is emptied three times a day during working hours. The dispensary team can also keep the medication repeat prescription to automatically issue it for patients to collect each month. Patients can collect their medication from a nominated pharmacy of their choice - this can be set up on the system by either contacting the dispensary team or by speaking to the nominated pharmacy directly for them to submit the change. Prescription turn-around period is 4 working days.

For more information visit: <https://www.unityhealthhaverhill.org.uk/prescriptions> or call the practice on **01440 841300** and ask to speak to a member of the dispensary team.

- **Dispensary opening times and service**

Some patients have asked if the dispensary at Clements can be open for longer hours to accommodate those who are unable to get to the surgery at the times stated.

We have made a lot of improvements to our service and will continue to do so. The dispensary opening times were changed last year to fall in line with other GP practices in the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group locality. We have discussed it with our Patient Participation Group (PPG) to find the balance between all cohorts of the surgery population. It is now open 09:00-11:00 and reopens again 15:30-18:30. The gap in the middles allows for stock and home deliveries, staff lunch and training.

- **Issues with eConsult**

Although many patients are happy with using eConsult, some patients have said that they find it complicated to use and it often times-out which means having to begin again.

eConsult can be accessed during our normal working hours: Monday - Friday 08:00-18:30. If patients are having a problem with the technology, they can report the specifics to the practice, and these can be investigated by eConsult to understand why the problems are arising. In the same way as the telephone system, eConsult allows patients to choose from different options to enable the query to be actioned by the correct member of staff or team. The information that is added to the form is to help the clinical team triage the information.

- **Missing face-to-face appointments and annual health checks**

Many patients appreciate that it has been difficult to have face-to-face appointments during the pandemic but are missing them and the ability to have their annual health check. Some feel that online and phone consultations are not as good as face-to-face and would like to see them reinstated more.

We continue to see patients in person, either at the Clements Surgery or in their homes when appropriate (as we have done throughout the pandemic), if this is needed to safely manage the person's condition.

If a clinician requires to see a patient face-to-face, the patient can request a time that is more suitable for them if relying on public transport or a lift. Patients are seen from 08:00-18:30 Monday to Friday.

Annual health check appointments are organised via the surgery admin team who work by a recall system for eligible patients. All yearly reviews are done face-to-face via the nursing team - first stage appointments are 08:00-18:30 Monday to Friday, with extended hours on Saturday 09:00-12:00. Home visits are all booked for any patients who are housebound and requiring an annual review.

How can I help to improve services at Unity Healthcare?

If you would like to join the Unity Healthcare Patient Participation Group (PPG) – please ask at reception or email wscg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net for more information.