

Town may lose the Dilke but not a hospital

by Colin Ricketts

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NHS chiefs have promised that Cinderford will keep its community hospital but possibly not at the Dilke Memorial site.

Ilma Williams, North Forest boss for West Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust, gave the news to a meeting of Cinderford Town Council.

He told councillors that a review of the community hospitals would not mean closure of the Dilke.

He said the options were:

- Keeping the status quo and spending £12 million on a new heating system.
- **Significant** investment and expansion at the current site.
- Relocation, **probably** closer to Cinderford and, if practicable on a site to be **Shared** with the newly-purchased dental practice and the

town's health centre.

The announcement of the trust's ideas comes hard on the heels of the newly-published Strategic Service Development Plan.

It shows how the trust aims to reshape healthcare to meet the challenges set by national targets, and its own delivery plan.

In a **document** it is admitted that **improvement** bids will far outweigh public funding oppor-

tunities. **The** trust might have to **consider** doubling up with civic buildings and shops, as the post office has done, to meet Whitehall targets for future primary care.

Without **substantial** investment, many local premises, especially the Dilke, will be rendered unusable.

Describing the Dilke as "a Forest shrine", town councillor Graham Morgan said any plans to move the hospital would put the town council in a dilemma over whether to support better services at a more efficient site or defend a revered Forest institution.

"The value of the Dilke, particularly for foresters is largely in its setting in beautiful woodlands," he said.

People come back from Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, which is a tower block in a pretty **dismal city**, to the Dilke and this helps them get better.

■ The setting and the fact they can look out the window and see the squirrels dancing about is therapy in itself."

Councillor **Lloyd** Wile told the meeting that a recent hospital appointment in Gloucester had meant planning a 6.30am bus journey

"I cannot give you a categorical assurance that the Dilke will not close but what I can commit to is community hospital provision in

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Cinderford." replied Mr Williams.

Any new hospital building would be **funded** by the NHS in partnership with private investors.

Councillor Frank Heard was worried that plans to move the Dilke could already have been hatched, something which Mr Williams denied.

"For 20 years it was discussed that Oakdene Special School would be moved to Dean Hall and in the end it went there, totally **against** the wishes of local people," said Mr **Beard**.

"You're not telling me everything and long-term. I think the Dilke will close."

Mr Williams said the town council would be kept closely informed of the review process, which, he said, had only just begun.

"In six months, we will present an outcome to the people of the Forest if Dean and they will be asked what they think," he added.