

Patient views on the future of Blakeney Surgery

September 2023

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Please contact Healthwatch Norfolk if you require an easy read; large print or a translated copy of this report.

Who we are and what we do

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather people's views of health and social care services in the county and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

The people who fund and provide services have to listen to you, through us. So, whether you share a good or bad experience with us, your views can help make changes to how services are designed and delivered in Norfolk.

Our work covers all areas of health and social care. This includes GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists, care homes, pharmacies, opticians and more.

We also give out information about the health and care services available in Norfolk and direct people to someone who can help.

At Healthwatch Norfolk we have five main objectives:

1. Gather your views and experiences (good and bad)
2. Pay particular attention to underrepresented groups
3. Show how we contribute to making services better
4. Contribute to better signposting of services
5. Work with national organisations to help create better services

We make sure we have lots of ways to collect feedback from people who use Norfolk's health and social care services. This means that everyone has the same chance to be heard.



Please note that for this survey we worked in partnership with Blakeney Parish Council.

Summary

Holt Medical Practice are proposing to close their branch surgery Blakeney Surgery. Healthwatch Norfolk were asked by Blakeney Parish Council to find out the impact that the proposed closure might have on the local community. We wanted to find out how people might be impacted, positively or negatively, whether some groups would be more likely to be impacted than others, what questions local people and patients have for Holt Medical Practice, and any suggestions for how Blakeney Surgery could be used in the future.

We worked with Blakeney Parish Council to create and distribute a survey to the local community. The survey received 270 usable responses which are summarised in this snapshot report.

We found out that nearly all respondents thought that the closure would have a negative impact on them and others in the local community. The biggest impact and concern was around travel and transport for an aging community with limited public transport options. In particular, respondents were worried about collecting regular prescriptions which they currently collect from Blakeney Surgery. Their questions for Holt Medical Practice were mostly around how patients will be supported to travel to other branches of the practice for appointments and collecting prescriptions.

Most respondents told us that they would like to see a return to full GP services at Blakeney Surgery with nurse and doctor appointments and the ability to collect prescriptions.

This report will be shared with Blakeney Parish Council and Holt Medical Practice. We hope that our findings will contribute to the ongoing consultation and discussions around the future of Blakeney Surgery.

Why we looked at this

Background

Holt Medical Practice currently consists of three branches: Holt Medical Practice (Kelling), Melton Constable Surgery, and Blakeney Surgery. Holt Medical Practice are proposing to close the Blakeney Surgery branch and have applied to the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board to do this.

Blakeney Parish Council were concerned about the impact this proposed closure would have on local residents who currently rely on the branch for collecting prescriptions with many residents being elderly and/or unable to easily travel to the other branches of Holt Medical Practice. The Parish Council asked Healthwatch Norfolk to assist them with exploring patient and other local people's views of this proposal and the future of Blakeney Surgery.

Aims and objectives

To find out people's views on the proposal to close Blakeney Surgery and the potential impact this would have on them and their local community.

To find out how Blakeney Surgery is currently being used by patients and how they would like to see it used in the future.

To find out what questions patients and local people have for Holt Medical Practice around this proposal.

How we did this

Survey creation

Working in partnership with Blakeney Parish Council we created a survey to share with local residents. The survey can be found in Appendix A.

The survey consisted of questions about how Blakeney Surgery is being used and how patients currently travel to the surgery. It also asked about the impact the proposed closure would have on patients and other local people and any questions they might have about the proposal and the future of the services currently offered by Blakeney Surgery in the area.

Survey sharing

The survey was hosted on SmartSurvey and also available as paper copies with freepost envelopes to return the survey to Healthwatch Norfolk. The survey was live from 5th May 2023 to 16th June 2023.

Blakeney Parish Council led the sharing of the survey and this included sharing it on local social media sites and posting it to local residents. We also shared the survey through our own newsletter and people were also able to call us and complete the survey over the phone. Paper surveys were returned to Healthwatch Norfolk and we entered them into the online survey to collate all responses.

Analysis and report

This is a snapshot analysis and report of the survey findings. We exported the data from SmartSurvey and cleaned it removing seven responses which came after the closed date, two responses which were duplicates, and one spam response. We then used Microsoft Excel and the qualitative analysis software NVivo to analyse the data.

Please note that not all questions were compulsory so the number of responses per question will vary. Percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest

whole number. Spelling and grammar errors in responses have been kept to ensure originality of responses, any major errors will be noted with [sic].

Limitations

We acknowledge that some local residents may have been able to complete the survey multiple times, particularly with the ability to complete an online and a paper survey.

We also acknowledge that the patient population of Holt Medical Practice is over 14,000¹ and consequently our 270 responses to this survey is only a self-selecting subsection of these patients.

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¹ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities. Public Health Profiles. 6 September 2023. <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk> © Crown copyright 2023

What we found out

Who we heard from

We received 279 responses to this survey and after data cleaning as mentioned above, we had 270 responses which make up the following analysis.

More survey respondents were female (58%, 151) than male (40%, 105). Two thirds of respondents (67%, 169) were aged 66 or over while only 6% (15) were aged 45 or under. Nearly all of the people who filled in our survey were 'White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh' (95%, 247). In addition to this 44% (115) had a long term condition, 15% (39) had a disability, 8% (20) were carers, and 6% (15) were parents/carers for child/children under the age of 16. For a full demographic breakdown please see appendix B.

Most people who responded to this survey were aware of the proposal to close Blakeney Surgery (90%, 241).

The impact of the proposed closure

We asked respondents what impact the proposed closure of all GP and dispensing services at Blakeney services would have on them, 76% (205) of respondents told us that it would have a negative impact on them. However, it is worth noting that everyone who ticked that it would have a positive impact indicated in their further comments that they actually expected it to have a negative impact on them, this suggests that the survey was misunderstood. For example, one respondent who selected that the closure would have a positive impact then commented:

"I am disabled I always get my prescriptions from Blakeney and used to see doctor and bloods from there. I live at Cley a mile away and easier to get myself there than Kelling and Melton, an 18mile round trip and not good road when in a lot of pain. Easier to get taken up road to Blakeney if unable to drive than anywhere else."

Those who said that it would make little or no difference to them (4%, 11) told us that this was because they *"don't live in Blakeney so have to travel to get there."*

So I normally use holt", that they "are registered elsewhere and therefore closure would not affect us", or that "it would not affect me as I either go to holt or the melton surgery".

The most common theme in responses about the impact the proposed closure would have on respondents was that it would make access to services more difficult for them due to travel and transport, this will be discussed in detail in the section below. However, other concerns about the impact of the closure included:

- That it "would reduce the availability of appointments" and increase demand on other services such as the pharmacy at Holt "cannot cope with existing demand (queues sometimes 10 deep, standing outside in the rain)",
- The closure would be removing an "asset to our community", others explained how they had chosen to live in the community was because of access to local GP services: "one reason I moved to Blakeney was because it had a surgery!",
- The impact on the environment: "my carbon footprint would increase by driving to holt",
- Concerns about having to use online services such as "I am 89 years old [...] I have an ipad but am VERY unsure of technology so would NOT like on-line order",
- The impact on anxiety with one respondent telling us how they "have been going to this surgery since I was a child as have the rest of my family and children" they added that they "suffer with anxiety and the easiness and familiarity of being able to go there really helps".

Travel and transport

Respondents told us that closing Blakeney Surgery would result in patients having further to travel, for collecting medication and prescriptions and how this will be less convenient for them. They also told us they may be unable to travel due to being unable to drive, a lack of public transport, or unable to afford to travel.



“I have premature twins born at 26 weeks so lots of appointments and prescriptions to pick up, I would find it very hard to get to Holt each time the girls needed something.”



We heard how the closure could also impact on the independence of some patients: *“it would make it very difficult for me to collect meds or to get to appointments independently”*. Others told us that they collect prescriptions for family members or other members of the community and have to make multiple trips to the surgery so having to travel further would be more inconvenient as illustrated in the below two experiences:

“It would affect me as a have to pick up tablets. For ALL the family so I go to Blakeney Surgery all most every week. Because they all have to take a lot of tablets it would make it very hard to keep going to Holt Surgery”

“I work within Blakeney for the elderly and people who have Dementia! For example Holt Medical Practice didn’t put a tablet in a dossett box, rang the surgery to get the tablet, come at 5.30 they said- I did but the client had to pay me and mileage, when I got there I had to wait an extra 1/2 hour, by the time I got back to hers it cost HER nearly £60 to pick up her prescription.”

We asked respondents what options are available for them to travel to GP services, 78% (211) told us that they have their own car, this is displayed in Figure 1. Please note that ‘other’ responses included walking, cycling, and using mobility scooters to get to Blakeney Surgery, and relying on family or carers for lifts.

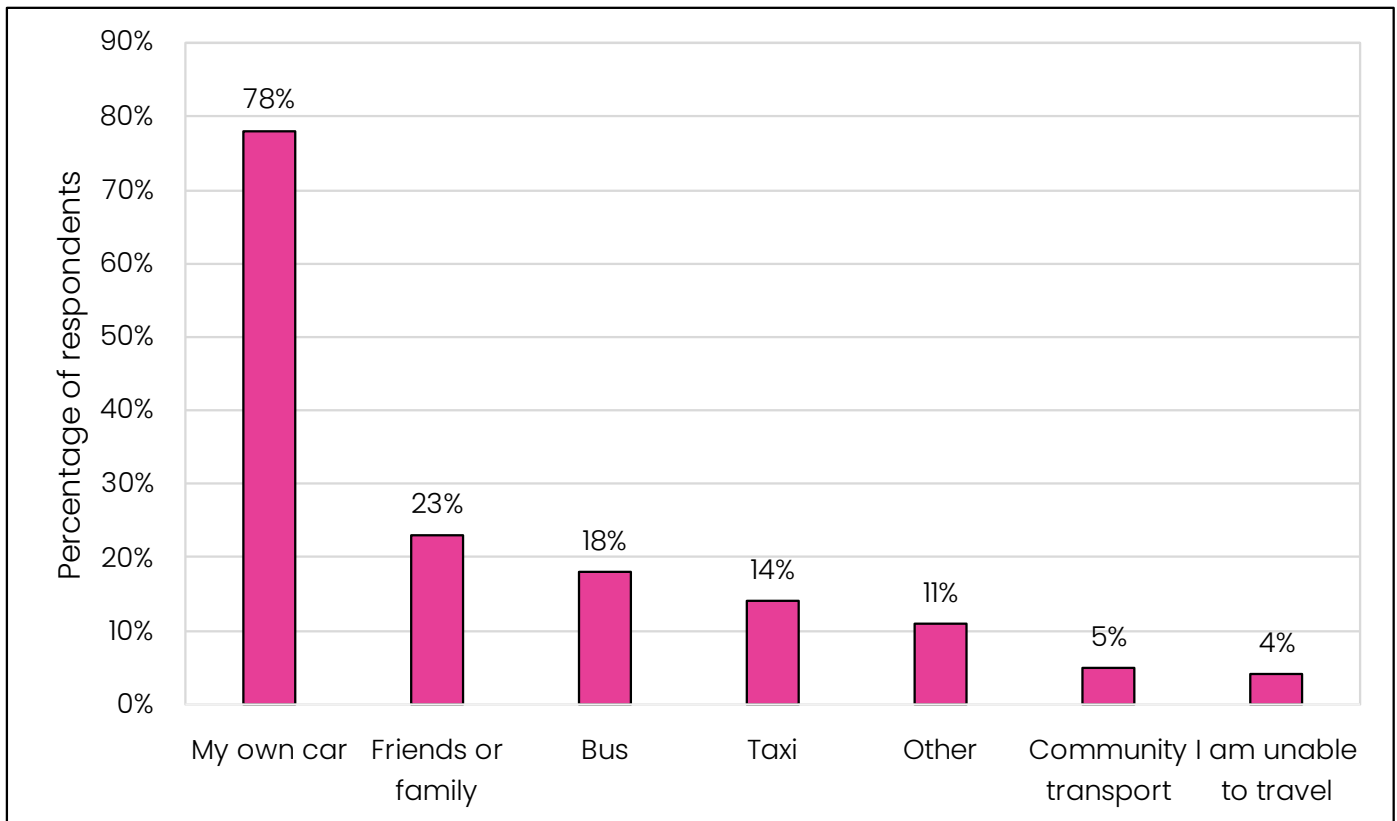


Figure 1. Responses from 268 people to the question 'which of the following options are available for you to use to travel to GP services?'. Respondents could choose more than one answer.

6 "It will be really difficult to collect prescriptions. I work all week and don't have the opportunity to make 50 minute round trip to Holt. Boots is closed on a Saturday so that's no help . It's a valuable local service"

We then asked respondents what difficulties they might have travelling for GP services. In these responses we heard how they were concerned that their situation might change, at the moment they might be able to travel okay for services but that in the future this might not be possible: "as I get older I might find it increasingly difficult" and "when I am too old to drive". Others mentioned "lack of public transport" in the area and "the time and cost involved" of travelling, including the cost of taxis. Below are some of the comments around transport and travel:

“Public transport is almost no existent to surrounding villages. Getting from Cley to Blakeney is relatively easy using the Coasthopper assuming you can get on it as it's not full of oap tourists. Getting from Cley to Holt and back is next to impossible there's maybe 2 buses a day plus it's out of town so it's 2 buses each way so if you don't qualify for free bus travel you're looking at nearly £10 return if you can do it. The times the surgery screws up prescriptions too so you have to make multiple trips is horrendous too.”

“I am registered blind, there is no direct bus would get to Holt Surgery”

“I would need to be driven to Holt by my wife, twice in respect of each monthly repeat prescription - once to deliver, and once to collect.”

“If I'm unwell I can't drive. I'm on a pension , taxi unreliable & expensive. Bus service is not direct and have to catch at least two busses there and a danger I will be lte [sic.]”

“I currently drive for Holt Caring, taking people who have no transport to appointments. There are not currently enough volunteer drivers to cover this function. If more are needed for collection of prescriptions where are they?”

Who will be impacted by the proposed closure

We asked respondents if they thought that some individuals or groups are more likely to be affected by the proposed closure and what the impact on these people would be. Nearly all respondents (98%, 257) told us that they thought some people would be more likely to be affected. Only the negative impact on people or groups was discussed by respondents.

These groups were mainly:

- Older people and the elderly, with three quarters of comments (75%, 187) mentioning this group.
- People without transport or have difficulties travelling including those who:
 - are unable to drive, including for medical or age related reasons,
 - cannot afford to drive or afford taxis and public transport,
 - do not have access to reliable and regular public transport,
 - only have one car in the household.

- Disabled people or those with mobility issues.
- People who are pregnant or have young children.

Other individuals or groups included vulnerable people, working people, young people, those who prefer a quieter surgery for mental health reasons, those on multiple medications or have regular check-ups, and the staff at Holt Medical Practice.

Below are some of these comments and the impact the proposed closure might have on particular groups or individuals:

“There is a well-established older peoples' community in Blakeney- and indeed North Norfolk including Thistleton Court literally within walking distance of this surgery.”

“Anyone without their own car especially people with mobility issues. People who can't afford transport. People with disabilities or the elderly who can only leave the house for a short period. A neighbour might be willing to assist to Blakeney but not all the way to Kelling. People with anxiety issues.”

“Alternative arrangements for travelling to Holt Medical such as public transport are not viable”

“Older people who do not drive would have to rely on other people all the time and even if they could go on a bus it is probably very difficult to do that. Also some younger people who do not drive or do not have car and might have young children, difficult to get to other surgery”

“The closure will affect people who have no transport of their own or who cannot afford a taxi to be able to collect their prescriptions and severely restricts them from visiting a surgery”

At the end of the survey, we gave respondents the opportunity to share ‘any other comments’ on the proposed closure of Blakeney Surgery. While some of these comments reiterated themes already discussed such as the impact the closure may have on themselves as patients, we also heard more generally the impact the proposed closure may have and is having on the local community. We heard passionate responses to this and how respondents felt *“it would be a*

huge loss” and how they think it “is an essential local service that is needed” and they “would be extremely sad to see this service go”. Others mentioned the anxiety this proposal has created in the local community: “Please do not allow this closure to happen, this questionnaire does not get to the depth of anxiety and unhappiness that this proposal has created.”

Other comments included mentioning an assumed financial benefit to the practice through the closure, the increase of houses in the local area needing primary care services, and how they no longer feel valued as patients by Holt Medical Practice. Below are some of these comments.

“I presume the Trust that runs the practice is looking for extra funds and may be planning to sell Blakeney Surgery and its land. If this is the case, ought they to be setting up alternative ways of raising funds? And the villagers might be prepared to contribute to a maintenance fund - maintenance has been (deliberately?) lacking for several years in favour of upgrading Holt/Kelling and Melton Constable.”

“Duty of care for a huge area, particularly affected by the massive influx of new houses that will impact holt and makes appointments less available, means blakeney and surrounding villages can be better equipped for looking after the community. The population numbers in this area is getting larger all the time, so it is more needed than ever.”

“There are many residents in blakeney and surrounding villages who are no longer considered, or valued, by the surgery which is detrimental to long term relationships between surgery and patients. It’s the principle of care that is totally overlooked.”

“Although we have had to deal without a doctor etc since covid this should not be a reason for not reinstating services. Whist [sic.] covid was ongoing we all pulled together and accepted things were stretched but not that the service for Blakeney and surrounding area would not be restored after the pandemic.”

Questions for Holt Medical Practice

We asked respondents if they understood how Holt Medical Practice plan to continue to look after patients who are currently using the Blakeney branch surgery. Nearly two thirds of respondents told us that they did not understand (63%, 166) as displayed in Figure 2, please note that this survey was distributed before Holt Medical Practice started formal public engagement for this proposal.

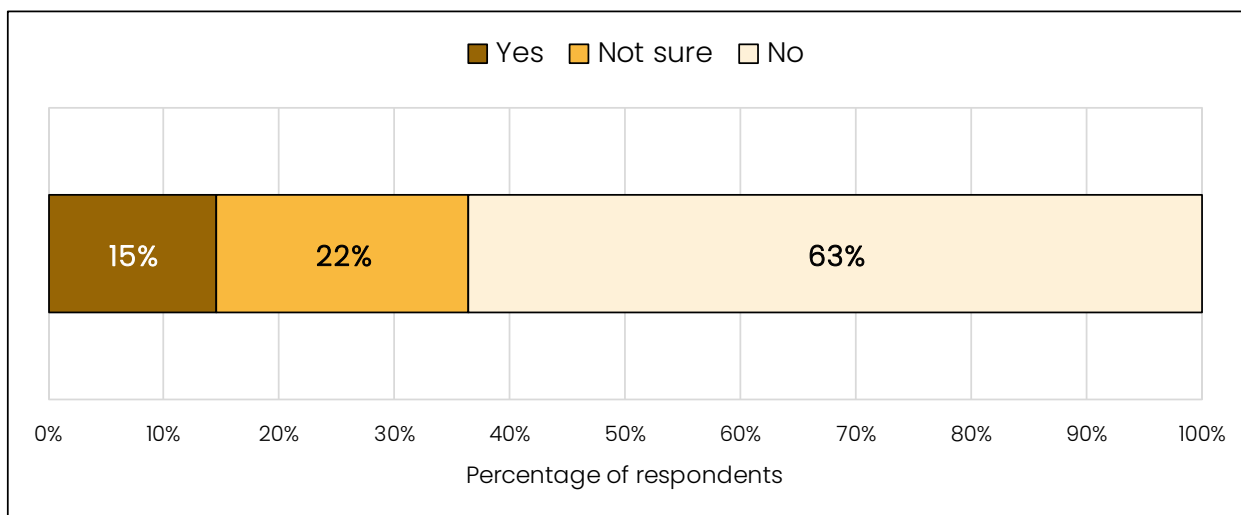


Figure 2. Responses from 261 people to the question 'Do you understand how Holt Medical Practice plan to continue to look after patients who are currently using the Blakeney branch surgery?'.
Blakeney

Respondents were asked what questions they have for how Holt Medical Practice continue to look after patients. The most common questions were around how patients will be supported to travel to other branches for medical appointments or if home visits will be offered. Patients also asked whether a bus service would be provided by the surgery.



“Will they put on a new direct regular bus service every half hour to Kelling and back to Blakeney?”



Other questions included:

- how people who currently use Blakeney Surgery for prescriptions will be supported,
 - will there be any prescription delivery options,

- how any additional pressure at the Holt branch will be managed,
- why it is necessary to close the branch and what the plans are.

“What will happen about the putting in of prescriptions/collection of prescriptions for Blakeney residents? If one tries to see the Pharmacist in Holt this can involve a wasted journey as it seems to be often closed, without warning. if I need to go to Boots chemist there.”

How would you like to see Blakeney Surgery used

We asked respondents how they would like to see Blakeney Surgery used in the future if it was able to stay open. In *Figure 3* below is a word cloud for responses to this question, the larger the word the more often it was used by respondents. The cloud shows that the most common words were appointments, prescriptions, doctor, nurse, collection, and service.



Figure 3. A word cloud displaying the most common words in the responses to the question ‘If Blakeney Surgery is able to remain open, how would you like to see it be used?’

As the cloud suggests, the most common response to this question was that they would like to see a return to full services, “as it was before COVID”, with GP and nurse appointments and a dispensary. See below for some of these comments:

"To be able to order and pick up our prescriptions see a nurse once in a while or even a doctor I grew up in Blakeney and have always seen the doctor here until it stopped it's a great little practice and it needs to be kept for not only is [sic.] but the older generation everything is getting taken away from us."

"Clinics with different staff mix as necessary; GPs, nurse led/physio/paramedic/CPN specialist clinics eg for people with mobility problems/mental health. Prescription ordering and collection"

"For Doctor and Nurse appointments throughout the day, prescription collections, vaccinations and clinics for diabetes etc. In other words as it used to be and as Holt currently operates."

In addition to this, a few respondents suggested "limited hours but full service at these times", for example: "a Doctor, even if only once or twice weekly, plus a nurse to carry out dressings and minor treatments" and "Existing pharmacy arrangements continue weekly or twice weekly. If nurse/paramedic appointments available + one day a week GP?". Others suggested that continuing as a place to collect prescriptions or used as a pharmacy was the minimum service offered for example: "appointments and prescription collection, or if necessary only prescription collection".

It was also suggested by some that it could also be used for other health or community services alongside GP services such as "special clinics such as chiropody" and "a place to visit the midwife/health visitor for health checks on babies" or "they've got space why not offer it out in the afternoons to groups like CAB?". Similarly, others suggested it could also be used as a "health information hub, advice sessions and the like".

6 "I would like it to become a multi-service health hub, with nurse services, a fully functioning dispensary, appointments person to person on care, care homes, age uk, community connectors, etc. A strong focus on older persons' current and future needs. A 'one step ahead' approach for locals."



Next steps

This snapshot report will be shared with Blakeney Parish Council, Holt Medical Practice, Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, and will be made available on Healthwatch Norfolk's website. We hope that these findings will contribute to the ongoing consultation and discussions around the future of Blakeney Surgery.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Survey Questions

The future of Blakeney Surgery



Who is Healthwatch Norfolk?

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather your views of health and social care services to ensure they are heard by the people in charge.

What is this survey about?

Holt Medical Practice have proposed closure of their branch surgery in Blakeney. Healthwatch Norfolk is working with Blakeney Parish Council to find out about the potential impact of this proposed closure. Blakeney Parish Council are undertaking the survey on behalf of all Parish Councils whose constituents could be affected by the closure of Blakeney Surgery. We want to find out if you think this will affect you or others in your community and any concerns or questions you may have.

The survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

If you would prefer to do this survey with us over the phone, please call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 and we will arrange a time to ring you back to complete the survey. Alternatively, please email: enquiries@healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk for further support.

How the survey results will be used

Survey responses are being collected and analysed by Healthwatch Norfolk. You can read our full privacy policy at: www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/about-us/privacy-statement. Results and analysis will then be shared with Blakeney Parish Council.

All responses will be anonymous and will be used to make recommendations to health and social care providers. The report will also be publicly available on our website and may be used in other Healthwatch Norfolk communications.

Want to keep in touch?

To stay up to date with what we are doing at Healthwatch, you can sign up to our newsletter via our

website: www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk

If you do not use email, you can call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 to ask to receive our newsletter via post.

Survey closing date: Friday 16th June 2023

Please note that questions marked with an asterisk (*) require responses.

Please tick to confirm *

I have read and understood the above statement

Healthwatch Norfolk produce newsletters about health and social care in Norfolk. If you'd like to receive this newsletter please leave your email here:

The impact of the proposed closure

1. Were you aware of the proposed closure of Blakeney Surgery?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

2. How would you be affected by the proposed closure of all GP and dispensing services at Blakeney Surgery? *

- It would make little or no difference
- It would have a negative impact
- It would have a positive impact
- Not sure

Please explain how the proposed closure would or would not affect you:

3. Which of the following options are available for you to use to travel to GP services? Please tick all that apply.

- My own car
- Friends or family
- Bus

- Taxi
- Community transport
- I am unable to travel
- Other (please specify):

Please explain any difficulties, if any, you may have travelling for GP services:

4. Do you think that some individuals or groups are more likely to be more affected (positively or negatively) by the proposed closure than others?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If yes, please explain which groups you think would be more affected and how this would affect them:

5. Do you understand how Holt Medical Practice plan to continue to look after patients who are currently using the Blakeney branch surgery?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If no, what questions do you have:

6. If Blakeney Surgery is able to remain open, how would you like to see it be used?

7. Please share any other comments about the proposed closure of Blakeney Surgery:

About you

In this next section we will be asking you some questions about yourself and your life. All these questions are optional.

Why we ask these questions

Your answers help us make sure that we hear from people from different backgrounds and that we understand the needs of different groups in our community. Remember: all your answers are strictly confidential and the survey is anonymous.

8. How old are you?

9. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Genderfluid
- Genderqueer
- Intersex
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe:

10. What is your ethnic group?

Arab:

- Arab

Asian / Asian British:

- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Any other Asian / Asian British background

Black / Black British:

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / Black British background

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups:

- Asian and White
- Black African and White

- Black Caribbean and White
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background

White:

- British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh
- Irish
- Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background

Other:

- Any other Ethnic Group
- Prefer not to say

If other, please specify:

11. Please select any of the following that apply to you:

- I have a disability
- I have a long term condition
- I am a carer
- I am a parent/carer to a child/children under 16
- I am currently pregnant
- None of the above
- I prefer not to say

12. Where did you hear about this survey?

- Healthwatch Norfolk Event
- Healthwatch Norfolk Newsletter
- Healthwatch Norfolk Website
- News (website / radio / local newspaper)
- Search Engine (e.g. Google)
- Social Media (e.g. Facebook / Instagram / Twitter)
- Through a friend or co-worker
- Through Blakeney Parish Council
- Other (please specify):

Appendix B: Demographics of respondents

		Percentage	Number
Age 253 respondents	16 to 25	1%	2
	26 to 35	2%	6
	36 to 45	3%	7
	46 to 55	6%	16
	56 to 65	21%	53
	66 to 75	36%	92
	76 to 85	23%	59
	86 or over	7%	18
Gender 261 respondents	Female	58%	151
	Male	40%	105
	Intersex	0%	1
	Prefer not to say	2%	4
Ethnicity 261 respondents	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups: Asian and White	1%	3
	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups: Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background	1%	2
	White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	95%	247
	White: Any other White background	1%	3
	Any other Ethnic Group	1%	2
	Prefer not to say	2%	4
Please select any of the following that apply to you 259 respondents	I have a long term condition	44%	115
	I have a disability	15%	39
	I am a carer	8%	20
	I am a parent/carers to a child/children under 16	6%	15
	None of the above	37%	96
	Prefer not to say	6%	16



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