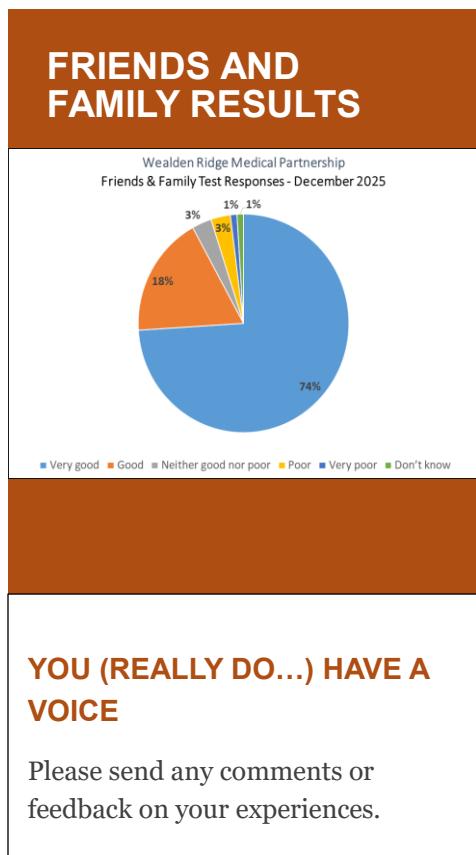


WEALDEN RIDGE MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP PPG

January 2026



MESSAGE FROM JACKIE, THE PPG CHAIR

Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in general practice are volunteer groups of patients, carers, and staff who meet to discuss practice services, patient experience, and improvements, aiming to put patients at the heart of healthcare by representing their views and offering feedback. These groups provide a vital link, helping surgeries communicate changes, understand local needs, and even lobby for better services, working flexibly to suit diverse communities through physical meetings or online tools like social media.

What PPGs do:

Provide patient voice, work to improve services, communicate changes, initiate projects, support practice needs. They are volunteer-led and aim to focus on the collective patient interest, not individual grievances.

WEALDEN RIDGE MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP PPG We have a supportive and proactive PPG with some very experienced members. Following the merger, some of the members from Newick and Chailey have decided to step down, and we do feel that it would be beneficial for the Group to have some new representatives from Newick and Chailey. If you might be interested in joining us, please let the Practice Manager know and we will be happy to talk to you and provide more information about what is involved in being part of this important and helpful group.

'Good health is the best wealth'

WINTER ADVICE

The NHS provides comprehensive advice on staying healthy during the winter months. Here are some points to consider:

Flu and COVID-19 vaccinations: It's crucial to get vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 especially for those at higher risk. The flu vaccine is available every year from September to March. The COVID-19 vaccine is available until January 31, 2026. Spring COVID-19 vaccinations start in April 2026.

Home Heating: Keep your home heated to at least 18°C in regularly used rooms. This is particularly important for those with health conditions.

Wearing layers: Dress in several layers of thin clothing to stay warm. Avoid wearing one thick layer.



Diet and Hydration: Ensure you are eating enough and having hot drinks.

Physical Activity: Stay active to maintain physical and mental well-being. If you're out and about, think about taking your phone with you and that it contains an In Case of Emergency (ICE) number. It's sensible to have contact details in your purse or wallet too, perhaps even with a list of your medication.

Mental Health Support: Consider mental health support options, such as counselling or mindfulness apps, to help manage seasonal affective disorder (SAD). **Did you know our practice has mental health support workers working at our sites?**

For more detailed information and to book vaccinations, visit the NHS website or contact the practice.

NEWS FROM THE PRACTICE

Staffing

We are thrilled to confirm that **Dr Hannah Barnard** who joined the practice as a trainee GP under Dr Rajan has now joined our team as a permanent GP. Dr Barnard will be located at the Newick site and will have clinical sessions on a Monday, Tuesday and Friday.

Dr Jane Sherlock commenced her maternity leave in December, we are pleased to advise that Dr Sherlock had a baby girl shortly before Christmas. All of Dr Sherlock's patients have been moved to the care of Dr Barnard.

Dr Helen Glasspool, who is based at our Heathfield site, will shortly be commencing maternity leave, we are pleased to confirm that **Dr Owen Rafferty** will be covering her leave and will be available at the Heathfield site on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, where he will be looking after Dr Glasspool's patient list.

AI in General Practice

I'm sure many of you are aware that AI is increasingly being used in general practice and at Wealden Ridge we have been trialling a number of AI solutions, the main change being to our on the day demand for appointments.

Demand for appointments has increased exponentially over recent years and since our practice merge in 2023, we have been working with Visiba Care to review ways we can utilise our capacity as best we can. We started to use the AI tool for people who wanted to be seen urgently on the same day, with all AI triaged requests being reviewed by a GP. This has helped the practice to understand our demand vs our capacity and understand how many patients could actually be seen a day or two later and which clinician would be most appropriate for the presenting complaint or illness.

We are also thrilled and proud that NHS England selected Wealden Ridge Medical Partnership to work with them on expanding the partnership with Visiba Care to enable access directly from the NHS App to our patient population. This pilot went live in early December and indications show that uptake to the NHS App has increased, with more patients requesting an on the day assessment via the App, the knock on effect of this is our phone lines are quieter which in turn will allow greater access via telephone for those patients without a smart device.

Other ways we are using AI in general practice is to support our back office team in the admin function of coding and filing of our clinical correspondence. I am sure you can appreciate the amount of electronic as well as Royal Mail post we receive and this solution is proving to be an invaluable support to our team.

Training Dates

The practice will be closed for staff training on the following days, from 12 noon.

Tuesday 14th April 2026

Thursday 9th July 2026

Thursday 8th October 2026

Tuesday 2nd February 2027

An out of hours telephone number will be provided whilst we are closed for any urgent matters that cannot wait until we re-open, details of which will be provided on the practice website, telephone message and front doors at the time of the closure.

On behalf of our team I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our patients a happy and healthy 2026.

Julie Acey
Practice Manager



DID YOU KNOW?

The NHS has national screening programmes for cancer of the cervix, breast, and bowel, for various conditions during pregnancy and the neonatal period, and for aortic aneurysm.

APPOINTMENTS – BETH’S EXPERIENCE

We all know the frustration of feeling very unwell and having to sit on the phone at 8am trying to get to see the Dr that day for ourselves or a sick child or older person.

You don’t have to do that now....

Pick up your smart phone with the NHS app and you can book that urgent appointment or assessment easily and without stress. The process is **very simple**, and it isn’t difficult to use.

Most importantly, you get the chance to explain in your own words **why** you need to see the Dr that day. You will be asked a few more questions in detail to get a clear idea of the problem. At the end of this you will be told that the surgery will ring you back.....which they did in my case within fifteen minutes. If the duty doctor feels that you do need to see a GP that day you will be informed by phone and text of the time of your appointment time. Mine was that morning.

It was all so much easier than I expected and made me feel very proud of the way our surgery is trying to support its patients. You can still book an urgent appointment through reception, but it will be the old and rather stressful process of waiting on the phone. **Get the NHS app if you can.**

Contact Us

Newick Health Centre
[01825 722272](tel:01825722272)

South Chailey Surgery
[01825 722272](tel:01825722272)

Heathfield Surgery
[01435 864999](tel:01435864999)

The Firs
[01435 864999](tel:01435864999)

All numbers flow to one reception team, who can book appointments at any site

but it will be the old and rather stressful process of waiting on the phone. **Get the NHS app if you can.**

Not all appointments are urgent, and you can still book appointments for the future at the surgery either in person or by phone.

Wealden Ridge is at the forefront of using digital technology to give the best service that it can to its patients.

DON’T MISS YOUR APPOINTMENT

DO YOU FEEL FRUSTRATION WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING AN APPOINTMENT?

992 appointments were missed in the period October to December 2025

These are broken down as follows:

338 GP Appointments. This equates to **over 64 hours** of GP time

604 wasted Nursing & HCA appointments. This equates to over **100 hours** of nursing/HCA time

Please help us to help you – if you no longer need your appointment, please let us know.

INTERESTING INFORMATION

The government has recently published its NHS 10-year Plan. This is very important because it gives our patients an idea of what is likely to happen to all our health services in the next few years. The Plan envisages three major changes over the next 10 years.

1. **From Hospital to the Community** – bringing care into the community through the provision of neighbourhood health centres (starting where life expectancy is lowest) offering multiple health services under one roof and open for at least 12 hours a day for 6 days a week. Financially this proposal would reduce finances for Hospitals and increase resources for Primary care including diagnostic testing and vaccines).
2. **From Analogue to Digital.** – this envisages the use of modern technology to transform lives by giving patients much more control of their health through the NHS app and other technologies. In addition, the greater use of these technologies will assist doctors, nurses and other NHS staff in diagnosis, tests and administrative tasks. The changes could allow patients to choose their health provider, book tests directly and get instant advice for non-urgent care.
3. **From Sickness to Prevention** – This laudable aim is directed at the prevention of smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, obesity and mental health of young people. The plan sets out anticipated legislation on smoking, alcohol consumption, restrictions on junk food and caffeine, together with health tools such as obesity drugs, mental health teams in schools and colleges, HPV vaccines and a full roll-out of lung cancer screening.

The 10 year Plan is something we can support but its implementation no doubt will depend on finances and the resistance by vested interests and world events that affect what any UK government or Health service can do, e.g. Pandemics, tariffs, climate change etc.

The current state of the NHS also means sorting out the long waiting times for non-emergency surgery, the difficulties in obtaining a GP appointment in some areas and the awful problems in most of our Hospital A and E departments in the winter months.

Regrettably short-term fixes sometimes mean that the long-term Plans take a back seat.

If 10-year Plan is implemented, it is important to envisage what the changes will bring to our GP surgery. It is unlikely that Heathfield or Newick will host one of the envisaged Health Centres as life expectancy in this area is much better than most of England. The Heathfield Surgery already includes Pharmacy and the ability to take some diagnostic tests.

The main change will be a greater use of digital facilities through the NHS App and other Artificial intelligence (AI) for medical and admin staff and patients. This in terms of patients means a greater ability to make appointments on-line, longer opening hours for the surgery, the end of the 8am rush and more choice for patients over health providers and hospital appointments. For medical staff if they fully embrace AI there will be more time for patients and less paperwork for medical staff. (e.g. one application could allow a GP consultation to be recorded and summarized by AI so avoiding the GP writing up the consultation).

Our surgery is well in advance of many others in terms of the switch from analogue to digital but there will be many changes ahead. Our surgery is also aware of the problems that this can cause to those of us who are not tech-savvy and those who can neither afford internet, computers or smart-phones and the surgery will arrange help for those of us who cannot access the new digital services.

Overall, if implemented the 10-year Plan should improve the National Health Service for all of us and our patients' access to health services locally.