

Lack of funding for elderly to close

by Luke Jacobs

THE Riverside Café, a centre for older people, is to close this summer after owner Age Concern Surrey finally ran out of money to maintain the service.

The Friary Street centre, which remained open after a fundraising drive was launched in April 2008, will close at the end of next month.

The appeal, which raised a total of £55,000 from businesses and people in Guildford, meant it was able to stay open for two years.

Tony Lee, chief executive of Age Concern Surrey, said the charity held talks with officers at Guildford Borough Council to ask for more funding.

"I think it is fair to say that we need funding to continue to maintain the service," he said.

"The borough council was not prepared to fund it and we can't do more appeals after more appeals.

"The staff were very disappointed, the same goes for our volunteers and for our clients."

Money raised as a result of the appeal also succeeded in staving off what were thought to be inevitable cutbacks at the Riverside, which provides afford-

able hot meals for elderly people, along with foot care, a gardening service and a computer drop-in centre.

It is hoped these will now be provided at the borough council-run North Place day centre in Haydon Place.

Two of the Riverside's five employees are also expected to move across to the centre.

The borough council previously provided £30,000 on an annual basis for three years.

It also continued to allow Age Concern to use the building at a peppercorn rent.

Regular user Michael Embleton said the centre was a lifeline for many elderly people.

"Keeping it going would cost peanuts in the greater picture, considering the money squandered by the council in so many areas," he said.

"We will do all we can to stop this ridiculous decision, it's an absolute disgrace."

Mr Lee said Age Concern Surrey had considered all possible options before deciding to close the centre for good.

"I think you will find that many other local authorities fund their day centres," Mr Lee added.

"We were looking to raise between £35,000 to £40,000 through the appeal and we ended

up raising over £55,000. That shows how much the community wanted to support the centre."

John Kerslake, chairman of Age Concern Surrey, added: "We are extremely saddened at this closure.

"The centre provided so much for our older people and I must pay tribute to all those who have created such a happy family atmosphere there."

A Guildford Borough Council spokesman said the request for funding was made in January 2010 after its budget had already been prepared.

No decision has yet been taken on the future of the building itself.

"Given the level of financial support already being given to the various services and the financial pressures facing the council, it was not considered appropriate to provide additional funding," she said.

"Residents will continue to benefit from high quality day care services in and around the town centre.

"While the decision by Age Concern to close the Riverside centre is disappointing, given the support we provide, we do understand the decision taken by the board of trustees."



St Luke's GP Surgery, Warren Rd, Guildford: shadow health secretary, Andrew Lansley, Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Guildford Anne Milton with Dr Ann Hennell, Sarah Scott (IHP), Dr Barnado (St Luke's), Dr David Eyre Brook (Dapdune Surgery), and Oliver Barnath (IHP), at St Luke's Surgery. Picture: Alistair Wilson.

Praise for GP partnership

A PARTNERSHIP between Guildford's GPs drew praise from shadow health secretary Andrew Lansley last week.

Mr Lansley visited St Luke's surgery in Epsom Road with Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Guildford Anne Milton last Thursday.

St Luke's is one of six surgeries in Guildford taking part in the Integrated Health Partners (IHP) scheme.

The initiative aims to forge closer links between GPs and share information to help simplify care for at-risk patients.

would provide patients with a better service.

"The collaboration has been a great success and shows how we can provide a better service for patients when we work together," he said.

Mrs Milton added: "I'm really pleased GPs have had a chance to talk to the shadow secretary of state for health about the great work that has been done.

"It's great to see GPs working closely with the Royal Surrey County Hospital, social services and with everybody involved with the care of patients."

Mr Lansley said: "The only way to make our NHS truly patient-centred is to put power over decisions and budgets as close to patients as possible - with their local GPs.

"It was great to visit St Luke's surgery and hear that Guildford GPs are ready and able to take on this responsibility.

"We will rely on them to do so and to improve patient care for everyone in Guildford."

Dr Jonathan Barnado, a GP at St Luke's surgery, said he was pleased that the shadow secretary recognised partnerships

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