



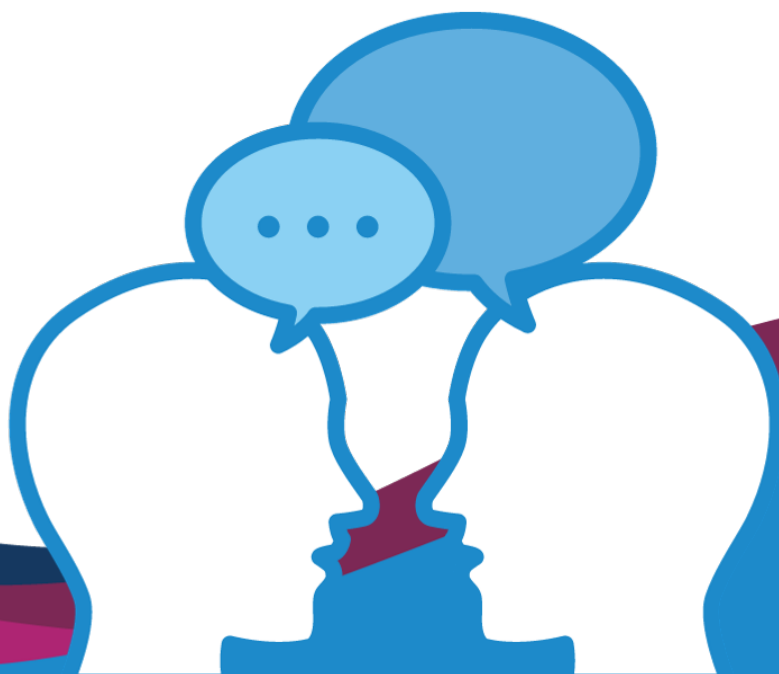
**Lancashire and
South Cumbria**
Integrated Care Board

Coniston Village Surgery

Listening to communities report

February 2025

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Introduction

Coniston Village Surgery is a GP practice in the village of Coniston, South Lakes, serving 1,102 registered patients.

Dr Katharina Frey will retire from her role as a GP partner on 1 August 2025. Dr Ahmed Abbas who runs the surgery alongside Dr Frey is unable to maintain the surgery as a single-handed GP. This means the partners are handing back their contract to provide general medical services at Coniston Village Surgery to the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB).

NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) is the organisation responsible for organising primary care services – including GP practices – across the region. The ICB must now determine the future of the practice and has several options, including attempting to find a new provider to run the current practice or asking patients to register with another local practice.

As a statutory NHS body, we have a legal duty to seek the views of patients. We want to consider how changes to services will affect local people and take measures to minimise these. We want to ensure that patients continue to have access to safe, high quality primary medical services.

Executive summary

There was an extraordinarily high response rate to this engagement exercise with patients universally making the case for a service to be retained in the village of Coniston. More than a third of the practice population gave their opinion to the ICB survey and/or face-to-face engagement sessions.

Feedback has strongly suggested that losing a service in the village itself would be a significant blow to the population of Coniston. Notwithstanding the additional travel time to surgeries that are further afield – and with limited public transport options available – the loss of access to prescription medications within the village would cause significant inconvenience to those living nearby.

As a tourist hotspot, the village population grows significantly each year, and patients explained the current surgery also provides excellent healthcare services to those temporarily residing in the village either for leisure or seasonal employment and the loss of this local service would cause major difficulties in this regard.

There are also concerns about the standard of care that would be received at surgeries outside of Coniston in comparison to that currently experienced. Additionally there is a strong perception that practices are not currently accepting patients or are at least close to capacity.

Who have we heard from?



How many people got involved?

118 people were spoken to face-to-face. **10** people attended virtual evening drop-in sessions.

281 completed responses to the survey were received, including online and paper copies.

With a list size of **1,102**, this means around **36.2%** of patients took part in the engagement exercise.

In addition, residents of Coniston set up a petition to keep a surgery in the village. A hard copy was signed by **673** people and an online version had **289** signatures.

How did we speak to people?



To ensure feedback opportunities were as accessible as possible a range of engagement techniques were adopted.

Public engagement sessions

Public drop-in sessions took place at the Coniston Institute on Tuesday 4 March from 10am to noon and Thursday 6 March from 2pm to 4pm. These were promoted via direct letters and SMS messages to patients, as well as via social media and websites, and the local media.

The sessions provided an opportunity for people to speak with ICB staff and ask questions about how they would be impacted should there be any changes, and to make any comments.

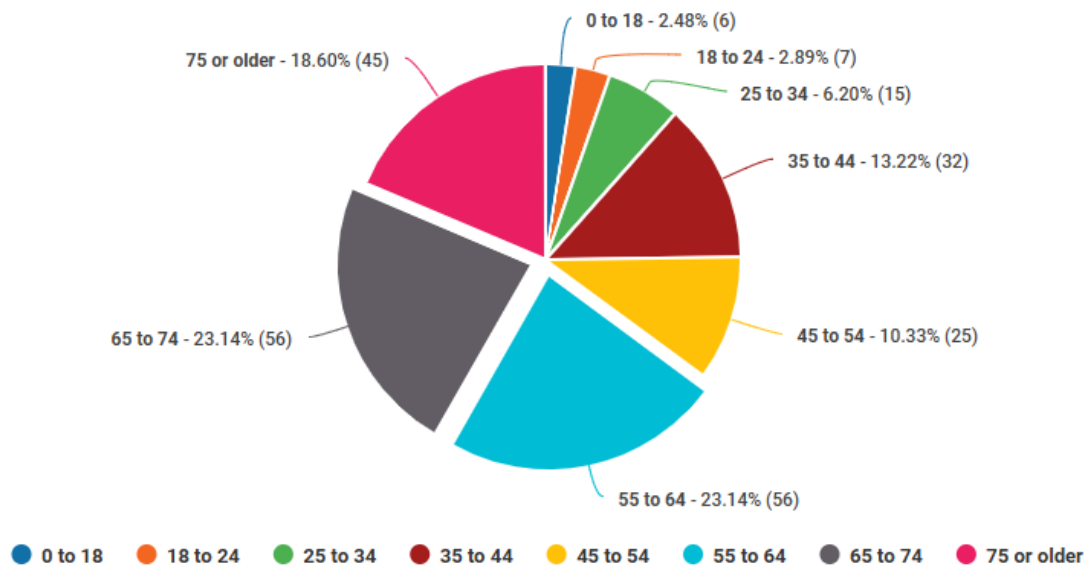
To allow for those unable to attend due to working during the day, opportunities were made available for people to book an appointment for a virtual drop-in in the evening of Tuesday 11 March. Twelve appointments were arranged between 6pm and 8pm for people to speak with members of staff from the ICB and in total 10 people attended.

Survey

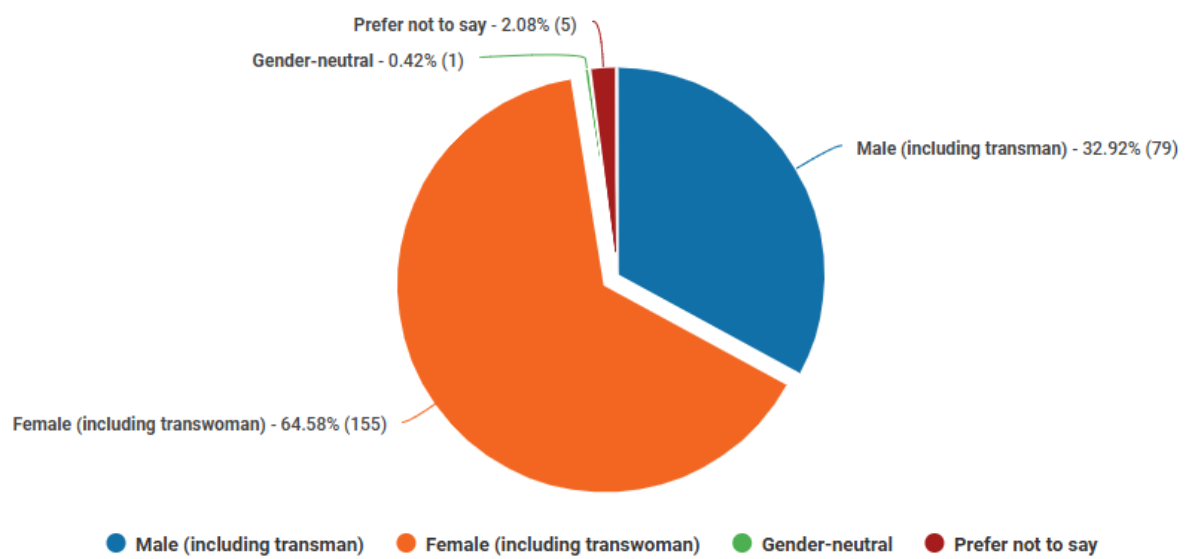
An online survey was developed and promoted via websites and social media, as well as via direct communication to patients and local media. The survey was live from Friday 14 February to Monday 17 March 2025.

As part of the survey, demographic data was captured. Around 86 per cent (242) of respondents agreed to provide this data. The responses, detailing who responded to the survey, are below:

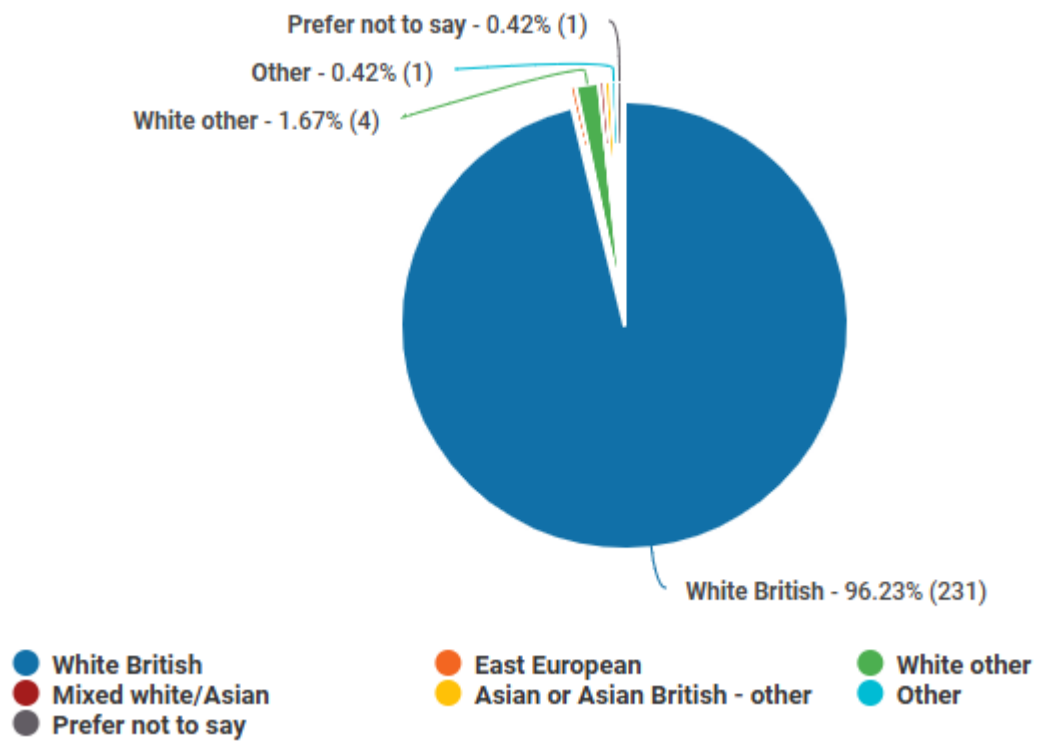
Age



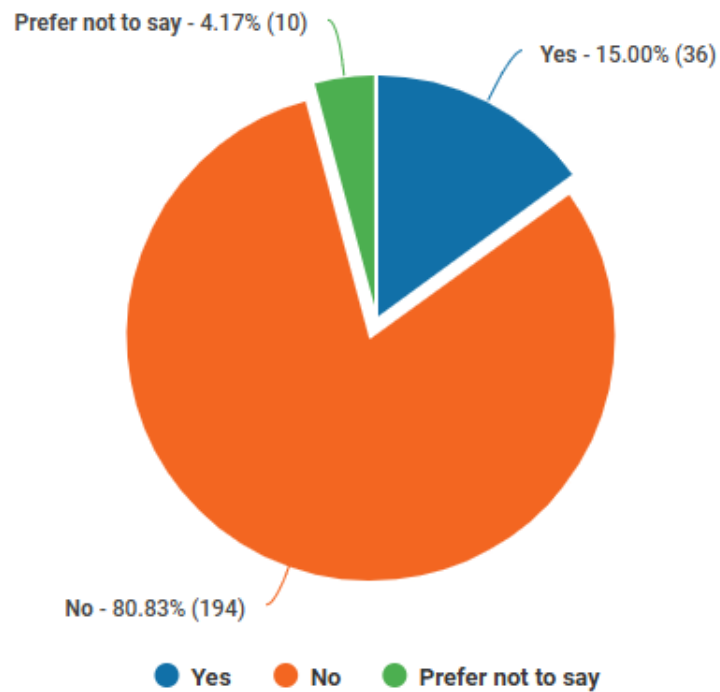
Gender



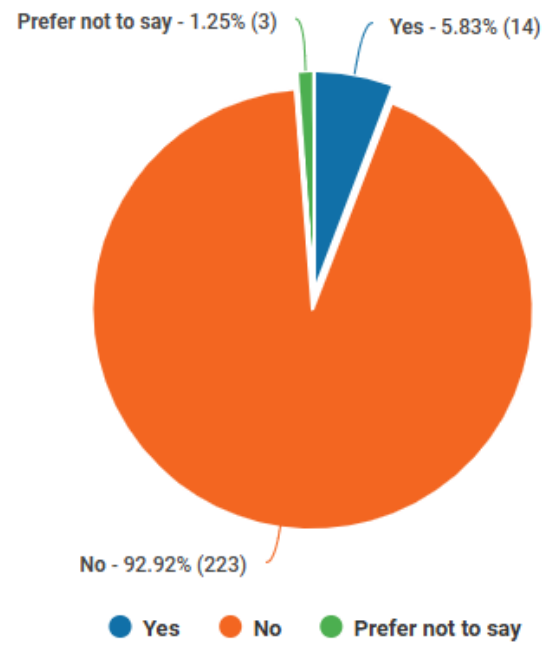
Ethnicity



Disability



Carer



What did we hear?



Public drop-in sessions

Two public drop-in sessions took place at the Coniston Institute on Tuesday 4 March from 10am to noon and Thursday 6 March from 2pm to 4pm. Across the two sessions, a total of 118 people were spoken to.

As some people who work during the day were unable to attend the drop-ins, a further opportunity was advertised to patients for a virtual evening drop-in, with appointments available from 6pm on Tuesday 11 March. A further 10 people were spoken to via these sessions, either over the phone or on Microsoft Teams.

Below is a summary of the comments made and concerns raised:

- **Fears of closure:** There is significant distress and fear about the implications of losing the GP practice. Many emphasized the excellent service they receive from the current surgery and the negative impact of losing this service. Patients feel penalized for living in a rural location.
- **Travel issues and parking:** The irregular and infrequent bus services make it difficult for elderly residents to access healthcare, especially since the bus doesn't stop outside the GP surgeries in Hawkshead or Ambleside. There is only one taxi in the village. The majority of residents are elderly and unable to drive, or approaching an age where they will find it more difficult to drive, increasing the need for local healthcare services. Ambleside surgery has poor parking facilities, which is problematic for frail or infirm patients.
- **Tourism and seasonal workers:** There are concerns about how the large number of tourists will access primary care services as the surgery currently supports a number of tourists each year. The presence of seasonal workers adds to the complexity of healthcare provision.
- **Provision at other practices:** Some patients have negative perceptions of the other practices and are concerned they will experience a less efficient service. There are also worries that other practices won't have room for new patients. There was a perception that some other local practices are not currently accepting patients.
- **Building solutions:** There were multiple suggestions of venues or alternative means of providing a service in the village. These included using portacabins, new builds, or converting existing buildings like the Institute itself.
- **Pressure on other services:** Without a local GP, there will be increased pressure on ambulance services and other healthcare providers.
- **Access to medication and services:** Patients value the convenience of a dispensing practice and are concerned about having to travel for medications and pay for parking. Having an ECG in Coniston has saved lives, and traveling to another practice for this service could be dangerous.
- **Home visits:** Currently, there are plenty of home visits, which are highly valued by patients.
- **Local campaigning and suggestions:** Patients are willing to fundraise for a new premises or to support administrative roles. A film has been developed to help recruit a new GP. It was suggested to make Coniston a satellite practice, similar to Hawkshead's relationship with Ambleside. A new large car park is being built, and there is a suggestion to speak to the Lake District National Park Authority about leasing the Tourist Information Centre property for a practice. A pop-up practice was also suggested as an interim measure.

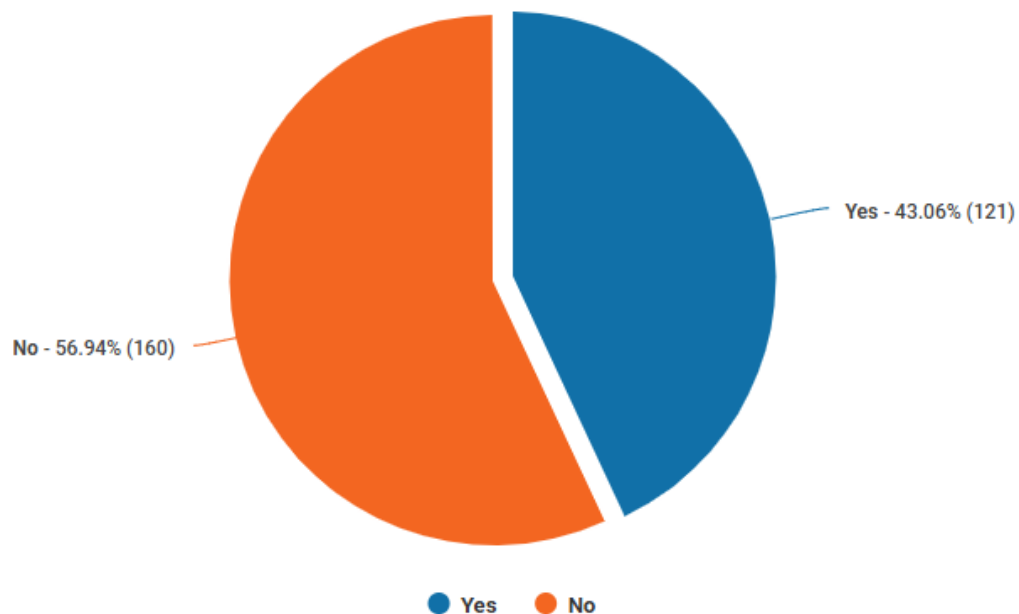
- **Relocation decisions:** Some people who have moved to Coniston over the years did so specifically because there was a GP practice in the village. The lack of a GP practice makes the village less attractive to live in, leading to potential depopulation and economic decline.
- **Family Logistics:** Families with one car face challenges in getting to appointments, especially if the working parent takes the car to work. Taking children out of school for appointments will become much more time-consuming. Obtaining sick notes for students at Barrow Sixth Form will be difficult.
- **Video appointments:** Video appointments are not feasible for most of the local population.

Survey: Please tell us about any difficulties or concerns you might have about registering with a new GP practice

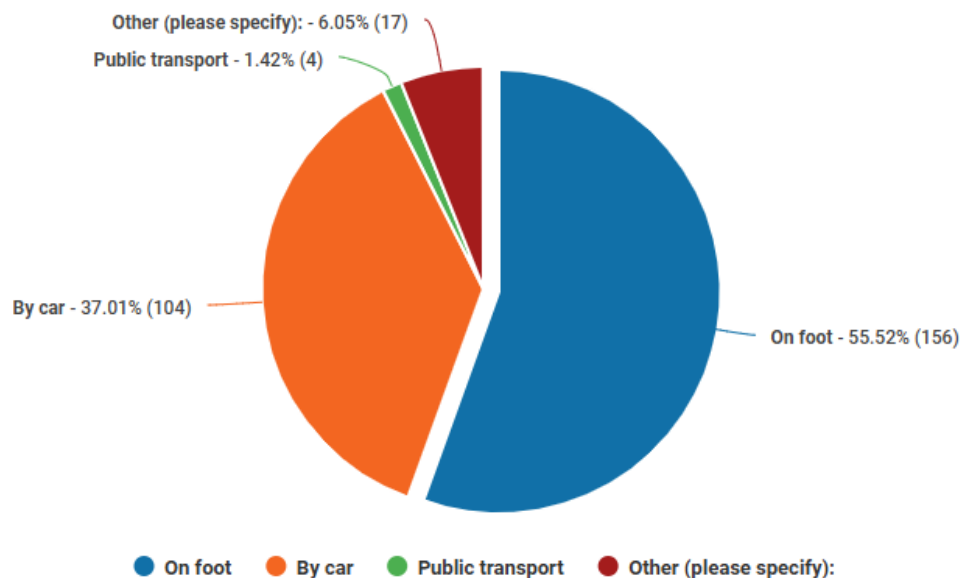
Responses to this question can be broadly themed as below:

- **Travel distance and accessibility:** Many residents are worried about the increased distance they would need to travel to reach alternative GP practices. This is particularly challenging for those who do not drive or have mobility issues. The nearest alternatives, such as Ambleside and Hawkshead, are not easily accessible and involve long travel times along country lanes that can be difficult to navigate, especially in bad weather conditions.
- **Public transport limitations:** The lack of reliable and frequent public transport is a significant issue. Many comments mention public transport options are scarce, infrequent, and not viable for regular medical visits. This is a major concern for elderly residents and those without personal vehicles.
- **Impact on vulnerable populations:** The closure of the local practice would disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children, and those with chronic health conditions. These individuals rely heavily on the proximity and accessibility of Coniston Village Surgery for timely medical care and prescriptions.
- **Capacity of other practices:** There is a strong concern that nearby practices, such as those in Ambleside and Hawkshead, are already at capacity and would struggle to accommodate the influx of new patients from Coniston. This could lead to longer wait times for appointments and reduced quality of care.
- **Continuity of care:** Many residents value the personal and consistent care they receive at the current practice. They fear that moving to a larger, busier practice would result in seeing different doctors each time, leading to a lack of continuity and personalized care.
- **Emergency situations:** The comments also highlight concerns about emergency medical situations. The increased travel distance and potential delays in receiving medical assistance could have serious consequences, especially in life-threatening situations.
- **Community impact:** The closure of the practice would be seen as a significant loss to the village, affecting the overall wellbeing and cohesion of the community. The practice is not only a medical facility but also a vital community asset that provides essential services and support.

Survey responses: Do you know which other GP practices are available in your area and how to register with them?

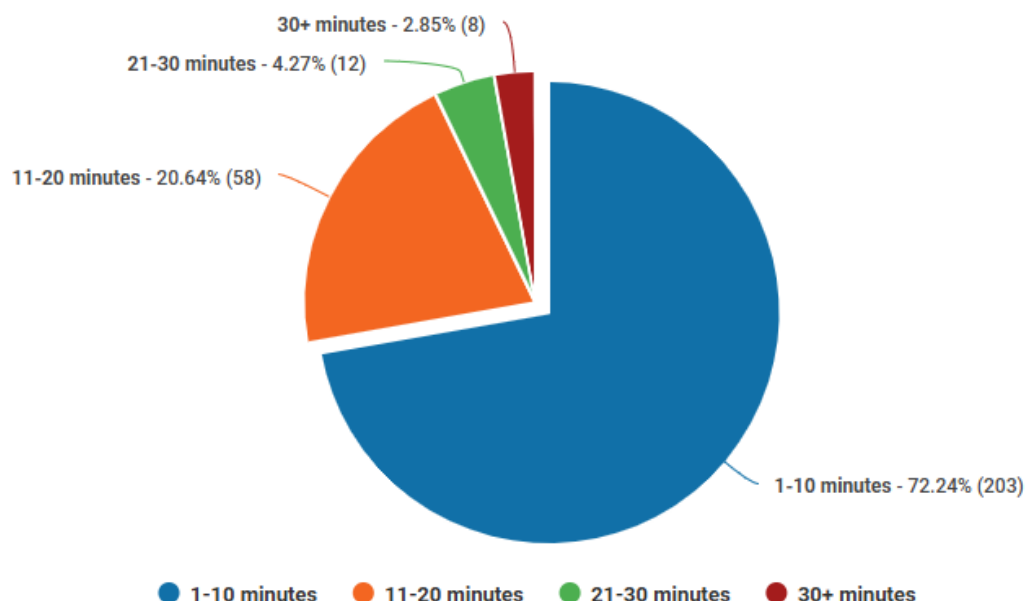


Survey responses: How would you normally travel to your GP practice?



A number of those who stated 'other' said they used a car or travelled on foot. Two said they rode a bicycle. Two said they receive home visits.

Survey responses: Approximately how long does it take you to get to your GP practice?



Survey responses: Please rank the following in order of importance to you in terms of your GP practice (one being most important)

| Rank | Item | Total score* |
|------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Getting an appointment | 2703 |
| 2 | Having a face-to-face appointment | 2528 |
| 3 | Seeing an appropriate health professional for my needs | 2129 |
| 4 | Contacting the surgery by telephone | 2079 |
| 5 | On-site pharmacy available | 1871 |
| 6 | Helpful reception staff | 1814 |
| 7 | Availability of home visits | 1379 |
| 8 | Car parking | 1051 |
| 9 | Accessibility of the building | 1046 |
| 10 | Booking appointments online | 1011 |
| 11 | Having a virtual appointment | 869 |

* Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first are valued higher than the following ranks. The score is a sum of all weighted rank counts.

Survey responses: Any other comments

A number of comments were made which can be themed as below:

- **Travel and accessibility:** Many residents emphasise the difficulty of travelling to alternative GP practices, especially for the elderly and those without personal transport. The lack of a reliable bus service exacerbates this issue, making it challenging for non-drivers to attend appointments.
- **Vital community service:** Coniston Village Surgery is seen as a crucial and well-loved service in the village. Its closure would be a significant loss, affecting the overall wellbeing of the community.

- **Impact on other practices:** There is a concern that closing the practice would place an additional burden on nearby GP practices, which are already at capacity. This could lead to longer wait times and reduced quality of care.
- **Tourism and seasonal workers:** The village experiences a high influx of tourists during peak seasons, increasing the demand for medical services. The local GP practice is essential for providing timely care to both residents and visitors.
- **Continuity of care:** Residents value the personal and consistent care they receive at the current practice. They fear that moving to a larger, busier practice would result in seeing different doctors each time, leading to a lack of continuity and personalised care.
- **Emergency situations:** The increased travel distance and potential delays in receiving medical assistance could have serious consequences, especially in emergencies. The local practice is vital for providing prompt care in such situations.
- **Community impact:** The closure of the practice would be seen as a significant loss to the village, affecting the overall wellbeing and cohesion of the community. The practice is not only a medical facility but also a vital community asset that provides essential services and support.
- **Suggestions for alternatives:** Some comments suggest exploring alternative locations within the village for the practice, such as the Coniston Tourist Information Centre or the sports and social club. There is also a call for innovative solutions, such as part-time availability or co-locating with other community services.

Next steps

This report will be presented to the relevant ICB committees to aid the decision-making regarding the future of services for patients currently registered at Coniston Village Surgery. It will form part of a larger report prepared by the primary care team, which will take the data provided by those who took part in the engagement exercise into account ahead of its recommendations. Suggested locations will be assessed by the primary care team. The report will be published on the ICB website.

Insights we have gained from this process



Community drop-in sessions

A number of concerns were raised regarding the drop-in sessions at The Coniston Institute. The organising of these sessions followed a tried and tested method that had successfully allowed the ICB to support similar changes to service provision in other parts of Lancashire and South Cumbria. However, with hindsight, perhaps the demand and level of interest in the sessions was slightly underestimated.

The process could possibly have benefitted from a larger venue which would allow easier management of large groups of people and for them to be spaced further apart to minimise issues with hearing ICB attendees.

However, the lack of choice within the village of suitable locations for such events and budget constraints did mean the organisation was somewhat limited in where these events could take place.

In future projects of this nature, where GP practices in especially rural and/or isolated locations are affected, additional consideration will be given to the venues and also the format of the sessions.