

Executive Summary

This strategy paper outlines the transformation required for the Ludlow Hospital League of Friends to evolve from a traditional hospital-focused charity into a modern community health partner aligned with 21st-century healthcare models. It summarises national trends, the local rationale for change, and proposes a future direction that strengthens the League's impact and relevance.

Across the UK, Leagues of Friends are adapting to new expectations driven by shifts in NHS delivery, a stronger focus on prevention, and increasing complexity in community health needs. For Ludlow, the case for change is particularly strong: health support increasingly happens outside the hospital building, and the League is well-placed to help address these broader determinants of wellbeing.

1. National Context: The Changing Role of Hospital Leagues of Friends

1.1 Evolving beyond traditional roles

Hospital Leagues of Friends across the UK are moving beyond historic functions such as purchasing equipment and providing "extras" for hospitals. Integrated Care Systems (ICS) and national strategies emphasise early intervention, prevention, and community-based services that improve wellbeing long before hospital care is required.

Modern Leagues are now involved in:

- Community wellbeing programmes
- Social prescribing partnerships
- Carer and dementia support
- Anti-loneliness work
- Local health and fitness initiatives

1.2 Emerging models

Some former cottage hospitals have been transformed into Neighbourhood Health Hubs offering:

- Preventative health programmes
- Community mobility and fitness classes
- Dementia-friendly activities
- Volunteer-supported wellbeing services

1.3 Risks of not adapting

Leagues that retain a narrow, hospital-only fundraising role face:

- Reduced relevance due to fewer inpatient services
- Ageing, declining volunteer bases
- Difficulty aligning with ICS priorities
- Reduced opportunities for meaningful community impact

Modernisation is essential for long-term sustainability.

2. What the Ludlow Hospital League of Friends Is Today

2.1 Core strengths and legacy

The League of Friends currently:

- Raises funds for Ludlow Community Hospital
- Purchases equipment and items not covered by NHS budgets
- Supports patient experience and wellbeing
- Acts as a community link to the hospital
- Runs fundraising and engagement events
- Provides volunteers and practical support

For decades, the League has ensured that Ludlow Community Hospital is well-resourced, well-supported, and connected to the local community.

2.2 Emerging challenges

As health needs evolve, a purely hospital-centred model captures only part of what affects local health outcomes. Issues such as isolation, mobility, mental wellbeing, transport, and early prevention sit outside the hospital but profoundly affect demand for healthcare.

The League can expand its vital role by supporting health where it increasingly happens: **in the community.**

3. Why Change Is Necessary

3.1 Healthcare is shifting out of hospitals

National policy emphasises:

- Virtual wards
- Community-based care
- Early intervention
- Social prescribing
- Integrated community partnerships

A hospital-only remit risks disconnecting the League from the areas where health improvement now takes place.

3.2 Health needs are increasingly social

Major health pressures today include:

- Loneliness and rural isolation
- Frailty
- Mental wellbeing concerns
- Transport access issues
- Housing and economic stability

These cannot be solved solely through equipment funding.

3.3 Demographic and volunteer changes

South Shropshire faces:

- An ageing population
- Increased complexity of health needs
- Younger people seeking flexible, purposeful volunteering
- Greater expectations for community-based support

3.4 System reform demands collaboration

Integrated Care Systems require strong partnerships between:

- NHS organisations
- Local authorities
- Voluntary sector partners
- Community groups

The League must evolve to remain an effective partner and advocate.

4. What a 21st Century Model Looks Like

Traditional Role	Future Role
Purchasing equipment	Investing in prevention & wellbeing
Focus on hospital only	Supporting the broader community health ecosystem
Volunteers within the hospital	Community connectors reducing isolation
Event-driven fundraising	Partnerships & impact-driven funding
Hospital-centred approach	Population-health-centred approach

The League will **continue to support Ludlow Community Hospital** while also funding and enabling wider community health initiatives.

5. Strategic Mandate for Ludlow

5.1 Extending our remit

The League will support both:

- Hospital-linked services
- Community-based programmes across Ludlow and South Shropshire

Including:

- Social prescribing initiatives
- Anti-loneliness and connectivity programmes
- Prevention and early-intervention activities
- Community-based health and wellbeing classes

5.2 Continuing advocacy

The League will maintain and strengthen its advocacy for local services, including:

- Enhanced diagnostic facilities
- An upgraded Minor Injuries Unit into a 24/7 Urgent Care Centre
- More localised clinics to reduce long-distance travel
- Long-term investment in local healthcare infrastructure

5.3 Partnership working

The League will work closely with:

- Ludlow Community Hospital
- NHS partners
- Local authorities
- Local voluntary and community groups
- Elected representatives

This includes supporting efforts to secure a replacement hospital on the Eco Park site.

5.4 Governance and identity

To reflect the League's modernised role, we will:

- Update our constitution
- Clarify our purpose, objectives, and scope
- Consider a name change to reflect our wider community health mission

6. Conclusion

The Ludlow Hospital League of Friends has a strong tradition of supporting high-quality hospital care for local people. By evolving into a broader community health partner, the League can remain a vital force for decades to come—helping people live healthier, more connected lives, preventing illness, and supporting wellbeing across South Shropshire.

This transition reflects a simple but fundamental shift:

From “supporting the hospital” to “supporting the health of the community.”