

The Northern Echo
The North's campaigning newspaper

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COMMENT

A twist in the library tale

THE Northern Echo has campaigned to save Darlington's Crown Street library from closure, but we take no pleasure in the borough council's evident discomfort after its plan unravelled.

However, the authority only has itself to blame for the whole mess.

It underestimated the strength of public opposition to the closure plan and its cost-saving alternative proposals could charitably be described as inchoate at best.

Although the council said it could move the central library into the town's Dolphin Centre sports complex it had no concrete proposals for the much-admired Centre for Local Studies and the local archives housed in the basement of Crown Street. It couldn't even find the restrictive covenant which supposedly guaranteed the building's use as a library in perpetuity. Now it says the covenant, originally believed lost some time in 1974, never existed.

At times during the consultation process it felt as though the Dolphin Centre plan was a done deal. Fully-costed alternative proposals put forward by Darlington for Culture were rejected as unworkable and in February the council leader admitted: "We cannot afford for the library to stay there. The covenant cannot overrule the facts of life."

Nobody should have been surprised when campaigners launched a legal bid to hold a judicial review – a move which will cost the authority time and money it does not have.

We still think that a library service run out of a leisure centre cannot meet the specific needs of older users, disabled people, young people, the unemployed and those living in deprived areas.

The council's dire financial position means the status quo is not an option. We urge members to reconsider Darlington for Culture's alternative to closure. It might be a solution that makes everyone happy.

 **What do you think?**
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Being mindful of dementia



It is hoped that if patients can be identified at a very early stage, treatment may commence before any damage to the brain has occurred

Dr Zak Uddin

GLIMMER OF HOPE: Research into dementia, notably Alzheimer's, is at a crucial point

Picture: PA/THINKSTOCKPHOTOS

RESearchers at Newcastle University are to share in a £7m grant to help us better understand Alzheimer's disease. Could we be on the cusp of a major breakthrough in our understanding of Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia?

The study, involving 250 participants with the early stages of the disease, promises to be the one of the most in-depth assessments ever, looking at aspects even as subtle as how a person with early Alzheimer's walks, with the hope of being able to identify the disease at an stage before the individual is affected by the classic memory issues associated with dementia.

Although there has been much financial input into researching the disease in recent years, it has been suggested that there has been relatively little progress as most studies recruited patients with advanced disease, where irreversible damage to the brain has already occurred. Unfortunately, these changes to the brain probably start at least ten years before the person suffers with any memory loss. It is hoped that if patients can be identified at a very early stage, treatment may commence before any damage to the brain has occurred.

This will come as heart-warming news for news for many individuals and families affected by the disease. Alzheimer's, named after the physician who first identified the disease, is the commonest form of dementia. Currently, there are around half a million people living with a diagnosis in the UK. Its commonest association is with advancing years, and with an ageing population, this figure is set to climb.

Alzheimer's occurs when normal brain tissue is replaced by non-functioning matter. In addition, there is a reduction in one of the important chemicals, acetylcholine, which is essential in sending messages through the brain itself.

As mentioned earlier, the onset of Alzhei-



Are we on the cusp of a breakthrough in the treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's Disease? Even if we can't find a cure, North-East GP **Dr Zak Uddin** explains how simple lifestyle changes can help improve our chances

mer's is often insidious. Affected individuals may initially have minor problems, including forgetting names or failing to attend routine appointments. As the disease progresses, this becomes more pervasive, to the point where the person is unable to look after themselves. Some people are able to identify their own decline, whereas in others, it is close family members who first raise concerns.

There are several other diseases, varying from depression to an underactive thyroid gland, which may mimic dementia, including Alzheimer's, in its early stages. Low mood and mental slowing can be a feature of all three of the diseases above. It is important to mention that Alzheimer's is not due to old age, and is distinct from natural memory loss associated with getting older.

If you feel that either you or a relative may be suffering from dementia, it may be very helpful to raise these issues with your routine GP, who will be perfectly placed to explore these fears with you, and organise investigations as appropriate. Often, sufferers may have an unnatural worry about being diagnosed with dementia, however all the evidence points to early diagnosis being key to better outcomes.

Current treatment is based on medication, as well as physical and psychological treatments, and aims to keep the individual as active for as long as possible, and in their environment of choice. There is support available for carers and families, including respite care when needed. Sadly, there is no cure for

Alzheimer's, but research is constantly pushing the boundaries of available treatments.

Thankfully we can all help to lessen our risk of developing Alzheimer's and indeed any of the dementias. Although it was previously thought that it was only vascular dementia that was associated with raised blood pressure, obesity and lack of physical conditioning, we now know that treatment of raised blood pressure including smoking cessation, maintaining a healthy weight and regular exercise all help reduce an individual's risk of suffering with Alzheimer's too.

Although there have been several trials looking at foodstuffs which may prevent Alzheimer's, currently there is no evidence to recommend a particular diet, and the most sensible advice would be to follow a balanced, healthy diet, with avoidance of excessive amounts of fats or sugars.

Likewise, it has been suggested that red wine prevented dementia, yet there is not enough evidence to recommend this and certainly should not encourage teetotal individuals to feel the need to start drinking.

In conclusion, a healthy balanced diet and lifestyle may hopefully reduce our risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. However, if you or someone close to you feels they may have the disease, early and prompt recognition is key to maintaining independence and quality of life for the longest time possible.

Helpful websites:

Alzheimers.org.uk

Patient.info/doctor/alzheimers-disease