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COUNCILLOR GERALDINE STANFORD
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Dear Mr Elkeles

I am writing to you with regards to the ongoing 2020-2030 engagement. As a local Merton Councillor I am firmly of the opinion that St Helier hospital should remain fully operational on its current site at Rose Hill, and that this must include full Accident & Emergency services and a consultant led maternity unit. Five consultations over the last 18 years have had the same outcome. St Helier should stay fully operational on its current site. I can't understand why yet another engagement is needed, and why that engagement is being held during summer holidays when schools are closed and many residents are away on holiday.

The residents in Figges Marsh, the ward I represent, are reliant on the acute services at St Helier, as it is one of the most deprived wards in the east of the London Borough of Merton. Therefore, they have more health needs than those at the proposed other sites at Epsom and Belmont. Why would acute services be moved away from an area that has more health needs to an area that has less?

There is a considerably higher population living within a mile of St Helier Hospital than the population living an equivalent distance to either Epsom or Belmont – 70,154, compared to 28,691 in Epsom and 39,297 in Belmont. There are also more dependent children - 15,053, compared to 5,715 in Epsom and 6,851 in Belmont, and more people over the age of 60 – 12,121, compared to 6,801 in Epsom and 9,931 in Belmont. Therefore, the acute services are currently used by more people at St Helier Hospital than at Epsom Hospital, illustrating both the demand and their importance. The statistics couldn't be clearer – if acute services from St Helier were moved to Belmont or Epsom, you would literally be taking acute health services from an area of poor health to an area of considerably better health.

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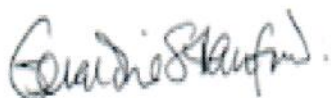
My residents in Figges Marsh ward already use facilities in St Georges Hospital as it is more accessible because of its close proximity to this area of Mitcham. But St Georges is already struggling due to the increased demands on their services, and this situation has recently been exacerbated by the closure of the Wilson walk-in centre earlier this year. The Wilson was the only direct access NHS facility in East Merton, so when it closed residents looking for alternative out-of-hours services ended up going to A&E at St Georges or St Helier. So at a time when St Georges is already under great pressure, it relies on St Helier as a safety valve.

St Helier Hospital is the biggest employer for the local area, and in addition brings many people to Rose Hill who support the local businesses, shops and cafes. If the services were to be downgraded or removed from Rose Hill, there would be a dramatic impact on the area which already has a large number of households without work. The percentage of neighbourhoods within a mile of each hospital site considered in the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods for employment are St Helier – 50%, Belmont – 8% and Epsom 0%. Also, the shopping precinct in Rose Hill is reliant on the staff, patients and visitors attending St Helier Hospital. The precinct has recently lost both a Co-op and a Post Office so if St Helier Hospital were to lose services to Epsom or Sutton, the local shops would lose crucial custom and many may then find it financially unviable to continue to trade and have to close. You must be aware that we are already losing many small local shopping parades as businesses are moving to more centralised superstores, leaving many residents who haven't got transport or who have mobility problems without access to nearby local facilities.

I would seriously question the engagement process itself, and do not think it is a justifiable use of public money. The same consultation has been run several times already in the past to a huge expense of an estimated £40-50 million. Running the same process again is a waste of vital public funds at a time of austerity. The consultations have consistently shown that Rose Hill is the best site for St Helier – nothing has changed. There is no indication in the Government budget that funds are available for the building of a new hospital, therefore, spending money on an engagement or consultation is a misuse of public funds. Any capital available should be invested in improving St Helier Hospital on its current site.

So I would urge you to take notice of the views and concerns that have been expressed time and time again over the past 18 years. They have consistently come to the same conclusion – St Helier should retain all its acute services and investment should be made in improving St Helier on its current site at Rose Hill.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Geraldine Stanford
Figges Marsh ward
London Borough of Merton