Dear Ms McDonagh

Re: Wilson changes and plans to improve primary and urgent care access for Merton residents

Thank you for your letter of 1st February. NHS Merton CCG has noted the points you raise on behalf of your constituents. Set out below is the CCG’s position on the changes discussed on 31st January and how the CCG intends to meet the needs of its patients going forward.

The CCG has had a long-standing commitment to improve access to general practice for Merton residents and to ensure better integration with GP out-of-hours and 111 services. In the last year we have taken on delegated responsibility for commissioning primary care from NHS England (NHSE).

In local engagement over the last two years people have told us that they want more sites with extended GP opening hours and better use of technology. Patient feedback (including recent “community conversations” in east Merton) has repeatedly highlighted that many people have difficulty getting through on the phone and getting an appointment when they want one.

With NHSE and our local GP practices the CCG has looked at how it can best use its finite resources to create a sustainable and affordable model that responds to that feedback and also supports local GP practices (some of whom are facing significant challenges) to deliver good quality care and access to appointments at times that people want.

The CCG and its Primary Care Committee has developed a proposal which NHS England supports. As a result we have secured over £1.5m in transformation funds, through the GP Access Fund, over the next two years to use alongside our own investment to put these plans in place (this is in addition to and dependent on the full reinvestment of the money released from the closure of the GP walk-in centre). The funds will help Merton to provide from April 2017:
• Two Primary Care Centres (“hubs”) open at least 6.30pm-8pm Monday to Friday, one in the east and one in the west of Merton, with both open 8am-8pm Sat, and one open on Sun 8am-8pm.
• Improved GP access for all patients by additional investment in all Merton practices.
• Improved patient experience through better telephone answering, online access and support for patients with communication difficulties.
• More appointments and priority for children 0-5 years.
• Better integration with existing 24/7 111 and out of hours GP services.

As a result of the plan, we expect the number of GP appointments available in Merton to increase by over 50,000 over the next twelve months.

The scheme will provide more appointments in existing practices during the current Monday-Friday core hours (8am to 6.30pm) and also during ‘extended hours’ (6.30pm to 8pm) and Saturday mornings in some practices. These appointments will be available on the day and in advance and a proportion will be allocated to children. Practices will have to deal with all patients within 2 hours and to offer same day appointments to all those who need them.

This will provide better and safer care as patients will be seen in their own practice with full access to their records.

Additional evening and weekend capacity will be created in two local hubs and these appointments will be able to be booked in advance either via a patient’s practice or by calling NHS 111. The hubs will operate in the evenings and on Saturdays 8am to 8pm with the east Merton hub open on Sundays 8am to 8pm as well. The hubs will be provided from two existing primary care sites and there are plans to have shared records with patient consent to allow the consulting clinician to see the records. There will also be nursing provision for those needing surgical /wound dressings at weekends.

At this time it is anticipated that the hub for west Merton will operate from the Nelson Centre. The current 111 and out of hours service is operated from Cricket Green Practice and we are proposing that we co-locate the east Merton hub there until such time as the Wilson site is ready for occupation following its redevelopment into a community health and wellbeing centre. The choice of these two locations is pragmatic and is based on practical considerations such as CQC registration and capacity.

We know that the GP service and walk-in care provided by Concordia Health Ltd has been popular and that the walk-in service is widely used by people with young children and working aged adults. We have built in capacity to cover that in our new model. Further we know that many people want appointments at weekends or late in the evening. The plans include that too.

It is in this context that the decision to close the urgent and primary care services on the Wilson site needs to be seen.
As Dr Murray said on 31st January, the CCG, NHSE and CCG Primary Care Committee took great care over their decision not to continue to commission GP and walk-in services from the Wilson Hospital site at this time. In reaching this decision the CCG, NHSE and Primary Care Committee took into account the fact that:

- Both service contracts (for GP service and walk-in) expire on 31 March 2017
- The GP Practice contract has been extended three times and there is a significant risk of challenge if further extended - a full re-procurement would be required;
- The walk-in service does not meet the new NHS requirements for urgent care (rapid access to X-ray and blood-testing);
- Planning permission for the portacabins used to provide the services expires in May 2017;
- NHS Property Services are unable to provide any alternative accommodation; and
- The Wilson site project is progressing with plans to clear the site in the next year for redevelopment.

All of those factors needed to be taken into account and the decision was taken by the Primary Care Committee giving particular attention to national guidance as well as both regional and local clinical consensus on the best model for out of hours and urgent primary care. In addition, the CCG was particularly mindful of ensuring value from investment in clinical services, the high costs associated with contract extension or re-procurement and needing to ensure the sustainability of all practices in Merton.

In regards to the renewed planning application we have made enquiries regarding this following the meeting and a conversation with Council Leader Stephen Alambritis. The CCG was informed by NHS England that an application had been put in by NHS Property Services and this was stated by NHS England at the meeting on 31st January. We have been informed that while an application was prepared by NHS Property Services it was not submitted. We apologise that inaccurate information was given to those present on the night.

This, however, does not change the position. For the reasons stated above, the CCG, our local GP members and NHS England have agreed a new model for Merton that significantly increases access to a GP, allows investment in wider quality issues and provides a more cost effective and sustainable primary care model for Merton.

It also remains the case that the Wilson Walk-in Centre does not meet the latest NHS Standards for Urgent Care Centres (which apply to all services previously known as Walk-in-Centres, Minor Injury Units and GP-led health centres). This requires an Urgent Care Centre be open and staffed consistently for at least 16 hours per day; where appropriate, co-located with emergency centres on hospital sites and have access to x-ray and blood tests. When asked, users overwhelmingly say they attended the walk-in centre because they couldn’t get a GP appointment. This is what we are committed to addressing.
As stated on 31\textsuperscript{st} January, the longer term plan for the Wilson Hospital site is to create a state of the art health and wellbeing centre, similar to the Bromley-By-Bow Centre in east London. Alongside primary care services on the site, the intention is to be able to provide a whole range of community-based patient-centred services. This is expected to open in 2020. The joint scheme with LB Merton is being overseen by the Merton Health and Wellbeing Board and is a key element of Merton’s 2015-18 Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A project team is in place and is working with Community Health Partnerships (who delivered the Nelson Health Centre) to deliver the Wilson Health and Wellbeing Centre.

We are disappointed that you feel that the plans to develop the Wilson Hospital site are unlikely to come to fruition and that the CCG is taking scarce resources away from east Merton. As you can see from our proposals, rather than cuts, we are actually significantly increasing the investment in General Practice for the people of Merton and are prioritising east Merton for Sunday access. The CCG’s aim is to enhance local care for all Merton residents and also to reduce health inequalities. We believe that the plans for the Wilson site, being developed jointly with Merton Council under the auspices of the Health and Wellbeing Board, offer a great opportunity to provide something much better for the people of east Merton. These plans have already been shaped by voluntary sector and community groups in east Merton and together we have created a compelling vision for the future of the site. The key drivers of poor health outcomes are the social determinants of health which are often linked to low aspirations. The Wilson project will address the social determinants of health, as well as providing health care delivery, and will seek to raise the aspirations of your residents. We hope that you will support this.

All the above proposals have been discussed by the CCG internally, with clinical colleagues, with NHS England and with the CCG’s Primary Care Committee. The shared view is that these plans are the right ones and that giving people better access to their own GP who has access to their records and operates from a modern premises is a better long term solution to Merton’s needs. We are sorry if you still disagree. The decisions taken have not been easy but the CCG firmly believes they are the right ones for Merton.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Murray
Clinical Chair
Merton Clinical Commissioning Group

cc. Andrew Moore, Acting Chief Officer and Director of Commissioning Operations
Clare Gummett, Chair of the Primary Care Committee
Dr Karen Worthington, Clinical Director for Transforming Primary Care
Andrew McMylor, Director of Primary Care