

Dear Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust,

I write as the Merton Council cabinet member for regeneration, environment and housing in response to your recent Epsom and St Helier document to strongly support the retention of an A&E hospital, the maternity unit and acute services at the St Helier Hospital site on Wrythe Lane.

This is just the latest in a number of consultations that have taken place since I became a Merton councillor in 2002, and I am flabbergasted that yet more money is being wasted on this latest initiative with the intention of closing St Helier and relocating to the former Sutton Hospital site in Belmont.

The current proposal has no guarantee of any funding from the NHS and is yet another attempt to resurrect a past proposal that has already been rejected.

Already we have seen the £219 million that has been allocated by the past Labour government in March 2010 scrapped by this current government which would have led by now to the rebuilding of the hospital and a significant improvement in facilities. The years of uncertainty on the hospital's future led to this happening and I hope that the money is reinstated so that work can get underway. Unfortunately its case has not been helped by the ineptitude of many decision makers on determining future health needs in South London and various proposals on reconfigurations of health services which has led to millions of pounds being wasted.

The Rose Hill area also has considerably increased health pressures compared to Belmont which includes life expectancy, long-term illness and a higher birth rate. In the immediate vicinity of St Helier, 50% of the area is in the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods for employment compared to just 8% at Belmont and zero at Epsom Hospital. It is also a considerable source of employment both for local people and in supporting businesses at Rose Hill which heavily rely on the hospital. Without the hospital, the problems will become even more acute and will inevitably have a major impact on the economy locally and on employment.

Within this proposal, justification for locating a new hospital on the Sutton Hospital site has been given due to the distance between Epsom and St Helier. This is despite both hospitals being located in different regions servicing wholly different catchment areas. The proposal makes no sense to myself and just plays into the hands of some within the health service who would like to close the A&E, maternity and remove acute services from St Helier.

I am also concerned about the burden it would place on neighbouring hospitals like St George's, Croydon University hospital and Kingston Hospital if this proposal was to proceed. In the case of St George's, the A&E has had to be closed on a number of occasions over the past year (with patients' redirected to St Helier) and problems are only likely to happen more frequently if this proposal was ever to see the light of day. Certainly I can see very few people in Merton using any hospital located in Belmont which will only increase the burden placed on neighbouring hospitals and increase waiting times yet further coupled with causing greater health risks to people living within its catchment area.

The time has come for this proposal to be abandoned. Let's get on with rebuilding the hospital which is the only proposal that will improve health service for people living in Merton and I ask that the trust listens to the many voices of local people who want St Helier to remain open on its existing site and to retain its current services

Yours sincerely

Cllr Martin Whelton  
Merton Council cabinet member for regeneration, environment and housing.