

PRIMARY CARE PROVISION IN THE HEATHROW VILLAGES OF HARMONDSWORTH, LONGFORD AND SIPSON

The Heathrow Villages of Harmondsworth, Longford and Sipson have not been directly served by a GP for nearly 40 years. The last GP service provided in the three villages closed circa 1979. This was a satellite practice led by a GP from an Ickenham Surgery which opened for one afternoon each week. Due to it being open only one afternoon a week, it was not popular with the villagers and those who could went to Cranford (Hounslow) and West Drayton to register with GPs who were more regularly available.

The closest GP to the villages was Dr Singh's Practice on Harmondsworth Road, West Drayton. When Dr Singh died in 2008, the NHS Hillingdon Primary Care Trust (PCT) sent the 1,500 registered patient list to The Green in West Drayton for six months and then permanently.

The surgeries in Cranford, Heathrow Medical Centre and Glendale Medical Centre are almost two miles away from the villages and, with no direct bus route, residents found it difficult to access them without a car. As a result, most residents went to The Green in West Drayton. The Green struggled to accommodate these additional patients, it was difficult to recruit additional GPs and the waiting times to routinely see a GP rose to nearly 4 weeks, which was unheard of at that time.

In January 2010, as a solution to the issues at The Green, the PCT proposed controversial plans to move the surgery to a new medical centre to be built on the former National Air Traffic Service site at Porters Way. Villagers, fearing further loss of services, joined residents at two public meetings with NHS managers to oppose the proposals. They asked for a new GP surgery at Porters Way in addition to The Green to ease pressures and waiting times for a GP. Plans to move The Green were abandoned, as was the building of the new medical centre in Porters Way.

The PCT then outlined a plan in 2011 to provide additional GP services in West Drayton, at a new medical centre to be built on the site of the Yiewsley Pool. Although demolition took place in early 2012, no medical centre was built.

Healthwatch Hillingdon, and their predecessor Hillingdon LINK, first became involved with the residents of the villages during the proposed plans to move The Green. This coincided with LINK receiving calls from new residents who had moved into Longford being refused registration at a GP practice as they lived under a postcode that fell outside of any GP catchment area. LINK arranged registration for those residents with the PCT and met with the residents of the villages to get an understanding of their experiences. At this meeting, the residents explained that not only were there no GP services within the villages but, similarly, the closest dentist and chemist were also in Harlington and the residents used West Drayton, Uxbridge or the Terminals at Heathrow Airport as they were all served by buses.

LINK, and subsequently Healthwatch Hillingdon, continued to support the villagers to raise their concerns with commissioners and, in 2013 joined them to meet the new NHS Hillingdon Clinical Commissioning Group at a meeting arranged by Harmondsworth resident Mrs Armelle Thomas.

GP registration for new Longford residents continued to be an issue, with NHS England assigning patients to GP practices. These patients were mainly from a hotel being used in the village by the Home Office to house refugees.

In 2015, Healthwatch Hillingdon began to receive a number of calls from new and existing residents of the three villages complaining that GP Practices were refusing to register them. Investigation showed that, with rising patient lists and pressure growing upon GPs, practices were becoming stricter in applying their boundaries.

Whilst a solution was being sought to the registration issue, as a temporary measure, patients were also assigned to GP Practices over 2 miles away in Hayes Town who had agreed to take them.

Led by Mrs Thomas, the villagers were also looking to not only overcome this current issue, but for a more permanent solution for GP provision in the villages. In May 2016, Mrs Thomas was invited to a private meeting with the Hillingdon CCG and NHS England and a further public meeting was held in Harmondsworth in July 2016 with the CCG.

Negotiations between NHS England and practices did not resolve the issue and, in September 2016, Hillingdon CCG, NHS England and Healthwatch Hillingdon met with local practices. As a result of this meeting and further work by NHS England to look at the original boundaries outlined in the contracts signed by the practices, it was agreed that The Green and Glendale Medical Centre had a legal responsibility to register residents from the villages and that both The Orchard Practice and Hayes Town Medical Centre would continue to register patients.

This solution did not provide the permanent solution to GP provision within the three villages that the villagers desired. Their issues were then further compounded in September 2016 by the announcement that the Podiatry Services and Musculoskeletal Services provided in West Drayton would be moved to Uxbridge and the Phlebotomy Services provided on the same premises would be adversely affected. This prompted the villagers to write to the CCG to express their extreme concern, "Following your visit to the villages in July, we were hopeful that our ability to access medical services, as and when we needed them, would improve. However, these cuts suggest the reverse is happening."

The Phlebotomy Service was subsequently fully reinstated in February 2017, but the residents' campaign for provision of primary care services in the villages continues.

Led by Mrs Thomas, the villagers are urging Hillingdon CCG to meet with Heathrow Airport Ltd as a solution to the issue. At the recent Heathrow Local Forum on 6 December 2017, CEO, John Holland-Kaye, said, "We have very little health provision on the airport and I know you are concerned about how Heathrow is a burden on local services. We have upgraded our occupational health area and are organising a drop in GP centre. If this is successful we can look at a centre for colleagues and a place for visitors who need healthcare. We have a plan that is coming together on health provision and are trying to fill that gap"

Mrs Armelle Thomas – For Heathrow Villages
Graham Hawkes – Healthwatch Hillingdon