

## **Future Health and Care Services for the Local Community in Victoria Park**

### **Report on the Engagement Meetings Held on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

#### **1. Purpose**

This report describes the engagement meetings held on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022 to update interested members of the local community and to ask for their feedback. It has been drafted by the Somerset CCG communications and engagement team for consideration by the Victoria Park Steering Group.

#### **2. Background**

The very difficult decision was taken to close the Victoria Park Medical Centre on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2021, due to ongoing clinical staffing shortages and the risk to patient safety. The medical centre is co-located at the Victoria Park Community Centre, which is well-supported locally and provides a hub for a range of community groups and activities. There is also a pharmacy based at the community centre.

During the closure, the CCG made a commitment to engage with the local community to understand the impact of the closure of the GP practice and to start conversations about what health services could be provided from the site in the future. It set up a project working group and steering group to ensure possible solutions were explored and the local community kept informed and engaged appropriately.

To start the process of engagement, three drop-in sessions were held in October 2021, along with an online survey to gather views and feedback from former patients and the local community. All views given were gathered and analysed by an independent expert who produced an engagement report which was published in December 2021. A copy is available [here](#).

People who attended the drop-in sessions or completed a survey were asked if they would like to be kept informed of progress. A total of 39 people gave their details.

### **3. Purpose of the 10<sup>th</sup> January Engagement Meetings**

Two engagement meetings were held by the CCG on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The purpose of these meetings was to:

- Share the key themes from the October engagement
- Describe the process to explore, assess and narrow down a range of possible solutions for future services at Victoria Park
- Provide details of the range of options currently on the table for consideration
- Ask for people's views/thoughts and to answer their questions

### **4. Attendees**

The CCG contacted those people who asked to be kept informed and stakeholders to invite them to one of two online meetings held from 3pm to 4pm and from 5pm to 6pm.

A total of 26 people attended the meetings.

10 were representatives of the CCG

16 were members of the public, representatives of local community groups, the Town Council and the Victoria Park Community Centre.

### **5. Format and Content**

Due to the rising Covid-19 concerns, the CCG decided to hold the engagement meetings online via zoom.

Each meeting followed the same format and agenda, to give people a choice of which meeting to attend.

The meeting was chaired by David Heath, Non-Executive Director (Patient and Public Engagement) and Chair of the Somerset CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee. Presentations were given by members of the Victoria Park working group.

The agenda was as follows. A copy of the information presented is available in Appendix B.

	Item	Lead
1.	Welcome and Background	David Heath Non-Executive Director (Patient and Public Engagement) and Chair of the Somerset CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee  Chair of the meeting
2.	The Engagement Report	Corrine Yates Engagement Lead
3.	The vision for primary care Identifying the possible solutions and how they will be assessed	Michael Bainbridge Associate Director of Primary Care
4.	Questions and answers	All
5.	Next Steps and Close	David Heath Chair

## 6. Key Themes

There were several key themes and questions raised during the feedback session. Anonymised verbatim feedback is available in Appendix A. Key points raised are summarised as follows:

- Funding:** The Chair of the Victoria Park Community Centre, Councillor Mick Lerry, raised with the group his understanding of the challenge of GP practice liabilities and their impact on the willingness of GPs to take on a practice. He reported that the Community Centre had secured additional funding to reduce the lease by 50 per cent over a three-year period as an incentive to encourage GPs to take on the practice and so that the covenant within the lease could continue to be upheld. He explained that he understood the lease to contain a covenant about the use of the community centre premises for healthcare.
- Inequity of service provision:** Attendees expressed their view that the removal of primary care services from the west of Bridgwater (Victoria Park) caused inequity of access to services, particularly given its geographical

constraints. One attendee told the meeting that she and her husband (with a long-term health condition) had moved to the Victoria Park area because of its primary care services and local community centre – amenities that had contributed to their decision to move as they had retired and were thinking of their future needs.

The Chair of the Community Centre pointed out the removal of primary care services had impacted on older people and those with caring responsibilities who relied on the availability of local services. He wished to see some level of GP outreach to meet these needs.

The manager of the community centre explained that he heard daily from visitors to the centre asking when GP services would be available again and that this showed a local desire for primary care to be delivered again from the medical centre.

- **Geographical access:** Several people raised the geographical constraints of the west Bridgwater area that made access to other parts of the town more challenging. There is no public transport (the bus stop was taken away a few years ago) to get to other parts of Bridgwater meaning residents need to rely on cars, lifts, or taxis or go into town to catch a bus to get to other GP surgeries and other health services. This was severely impacting on residents' ability to access services.

An example was given of an elderly wheelchair user who now must hire a wheelchair-enabled taxi to get to her new GP practice across the other side of Bridgwater.

- **Impact on travel times:** Consequently, people raised the point that this has a significant impact on travel times, particularly for those who must use public transport.
- **Lack of parking at other surgeries:** Following on from the point about location, because people must use a car to travel to their new surgeries they also have to then find somewhere to park. They pointed out that there are very limited car parking facilities at other surgeries.
- **Impact on the pharmacy:** A long-standing local patient raised her concern about the impact on the local pharmacy. She described recent problems with being able to collect her medication due to the lack of on-duty pharmacist.
- **Need for a community-focussed solution:** There was a desire to see services delivered from a local hub to address the local community's needs now and into the future. By having a range of services at the medical centre, and community centre attendees felt a wide range of health and care needs could be addressed.

- **Concerns about a 'do nothing' possible solution:** Attendees were concerned that the medical centre would be left unoccupied and wanted to understand if this was a viable option or one that would be taken off the table as solutions were narrowed down.
- **Concern that the medical centre could have been used as a Covid-19 vaccination centre:** The CCG was asked why the pharmacy was used as a vaccination centre when the medical centre could have been used.
- **Impact of new housing developments:** Concerns were raised about the impact of new housing developments in the area on already stretched services.
- **The needs of families and young people:** A representative of the Somerset Parent/Carer Forum asked that the needs of young people and families with young children were considered, particularly as the Victoria Park area and west of Bridgwater had a younger population, compared to other parts of Somerset. This was particularly important when planning for future as well as current health needs as the sort of services and support required would be different and not GP reliant.
- **Timescales:** attendees noted that the medical centre was closed five months ago and wanted to understand when a solution would be found. Questions were asked as to whether the October engagement had asked residents if they would register at a re-opened Victoria Park practice and the view that local people would register if these services were available.

Questions were also asked about whether any solution was 'fixed in stone' or whether a level of flexibility could be built in so that services could be adapted if necessary.

- **Loss of other valued health services:** The withdrawal of other well-used services was raised as an issue which was impacting on the local community. Council run services such as the breast-feeding clinic, baby and early years' clinics had been moved to the other side of Bridgwater at the start of the pandemic. These had been very popular services, particularly as they had been available close to the local community where there was ample parking at the community centre.

## 7. Next Steps

- The feedback from these engagement events will be considered as part of the assessment of the range of possible solutions.

- A summary of the information presented at the meetings will be provided to the local community so that residents and those not attending the meetings are kept informed
- Somerset CCG will gather further information on the other services delivered at the community centre which have stopped or paused
- The CCG will continue to inform and engage with the local community as possible solutions are evaluated.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Future Health and Care Services for the Local Community in Victoria Park**

#### **Anonymised Question and Answers**

##### **1. Question:**

I have had discussions with people on the team on this call regarding the importance for healthcare on the west side of Bridgwater and also within that the survey that highlights the need for the return of a GP practice or in some way an overarching or over outreach work from another branch in that way and what I want to say in terms of trying to help and aid this whole process in terms of looking at solutions, one of the things that have come through to me by speaking to a local Doctor was sometimes the liability's that Doctor's might take on in terms of a practice. At the Victoria Park Community Centre we have secured some funding to try to help with this which could reduce the lease for the premises by 50% over a three year period and this is to try and help kick start the process of trying to make sure that local people do have health care that they desire which also means GP services locally as well. This is something we want to put into the solutions to help.

##### **Answer:**

We welcome the opportunity to have these discussions. For me, Primary Care isn't just about GP services and the solution we find will actually be stronger with a range of professionals working from the site who can meet the needs of the community, but we recognise the GP is the central care given medically.

##### **Question:**

I was a patient at VP for 42 years, it is a big concern that the surgery has closed but also the pharmacy, I do have my concerns that I rely heavily on my medication for various illnesses. I go to the pharmacy to collect my medication only to be told that I cannot have it today as there is no pharmacist here to sign the medication over. Also, on three occasions I have been given other peoples medication. Is this in general that a pharmacist is not always available?

##### **Answer:**

There is a national shortage of pharmacists. In the way that the regulations work there are many things that the pharmacy can't do unless they have a pharmacist on the premises. This is being reviewed nationally to try and reduce the impact of occasional shortage of pharmacists. We want to make sure the pharmacy wants to remain open and we have had conversations with the company who operates the pharmacy and NHS England. We want it to provide high quality service.

**Question:**

I am new to Bridgwater, moved here in lockdown and one of the reasons we chose to move to our property on Victoria Road was because we had all these resources on our doorstep. We are aging and my husband has been diagnosed with Parkinsons and it was very convenient to find somewhere with a hub which would address all our needs. We were shocked to hear that the services would be ripped away from us. We are getting older, and it is a walk to the other surgery. Huge concerns about that but looking at your solutions to support the community by using the hub to provide blood tests, physio etc this seems to appeal.

Thinking of what Cllr Lerry said, getting Doctor's to fill the post, giving someone an incentive e.g., cheap rent seems like a good idea.

**Answer:**

I agree with you that Victoria Park is an important hub. We are determined to make the most of it and provide the best services that we can at the VP site.

GP recruitment – we are doing all we can to increase the numbers of GPs in Somerset. We have all sorts of innovative schemes to try and improve the number of GPs that are coming to Somerset for training and, also the number of GPs that come to Somerset to fill posts, which includes support for relocation and incentive payments for GPs who are prepared to become partners and take on a leadership role. We would like a lot more GPs, but we are confident that we are doing all we can to increase GP numbers in Somerset.

**Question:**

One of the solutions was that we just accept it and that we don't do anything with the building. How likely is that going to be an option? Looking at what has happened to the old hospital and the state of the condition that this is in, I think it would be better if we could try and make it some sort of hub with mixed services. I don't think leaving it empty is an option.

**Answer:**

When we look at potential solutions this is one we always consider. This is partly why we set out the principals of what we want to achieve so we are fully committed as an organisation so we have healthcare services delivered from this site. Next time we talk to you this option will not appear there.

**Question:**

Seeing as the medical centre is shut, would it not be useful to use the building for covid vaccinations instead of people going into the pharmacy? This would mean that people would have somewhere to sit for the 15 minutes instead of people waiting outside or in their car.

I have been moved to Easy Quay Medical Centre and to get a car parking space is impossible. At least at Victoria Park you could always get a space. This is a big problem for me to access the Doctors there.

**Answer:**

The issue about travel/bus routes and car parking are very much in our minds as we work through the options as we decide what the best thing is to do. In terms of the building and the use of it, we have been working closely with the Community Centre who are the owners and the landlords of the premises and, also Dr Lewis who ran the practice before it's closure. It has been slightly more complicated than we had hoped. We have not overlooked this, and we agree this would be a perfect place to provide this.

**Question:**

They are now going to start building on top of Wembdon hill. Where will all these new patients go? This is a little bit concerning.

**Answer:**

We do understand that and part of looking at the options is looking at the plans for housing developments and where they are going to be built and when. We do recognise that the current distribution of the practices isn't even across the whole of Bridgwater and that is an important decision-making factor for us so we haven't completed that work yet but we are in touch with the planning authority for these new builds.

**Question:**

A concern is the population growth. Talking about developments surrounding Bridgwater and the demo graph of people who live in the local area. We have very young families and as time goes on this will put pressure on the system. If you are going to do something now you need to think ahead about how this population will affect medical needs.

**Answer:**

Yes, absolutely.

**Question:**

With these plans what is the financial input that makes the decisions over this and as we all know there is a shortage of GPs, is it worth getting different support? Are there services that could be put in that could be more supportive than just a GP? The survey is coming more from young families.

**Answer:**

Bridgwater has a younger population and this has to be part of the thinking of how we serve the families.

The closure of the surgery had nothing to do with money. The money that we have to commission alternative services is based on the money that was

previously used to fund the practice but that is not to say we would not put more money in.

We would like a lot more GPs in Somerset. So, we have increased the number of Primary Care staff quite considerably and we are continuing to do so in non GP roles so this is Pharmacists, Nurses, Health Coaches Physiotherapists etc.

**Question:**

I am the Community Centre Manager and I have been for the last nine years and the biggest thing that we have noticed since the GP has closed is that people are coming in to speak to us asking when it is coming back and the fact how far people now have to travel. The closest Pharmacy and GP is now Taunton road. There is nothing on this side of Bridgwater. The local people are having to go a significant distance to access a GP.

**Answer:**

This came up in the earlier session and even people with cars have difficulty with parking with some of the other places that they now have to access rather than onsite as Victoria Park.

**Question:**

When you held the last engagement event in October 2021, what was the percentage of people that said they would go back to the surgery should it reopen?

**Answer:**

We did not directly ask this question. We were trying to understand the impact the closure had.

**Question:**

Pre surgery closing and pre Covid, the NHS had Health workers and Midwives leave the NHS and went to work for Somerset County Council (SCC). Just before Covid, SCC chose to close the children's centre at the Victoria Park and since covid, the breast-feeding clinic and healthy child clinic have been pulled from this side of Bridgwater. So since losing our GP surgery we have also lost this service.

**Answer:**

No answer was given.

**Question:**

I am thinking about time scales as this closure happened in August 2021 and I know you say you will have something to consult in March but when will we see something on the ground running? How quick are we going to see this movement?

**Answer:**

We are hoping to not do a full consultation (12 weeks) as this will delay things even further and we want to involve people in the design of these services. This will enable us to get something in more quickly. Ideally, we would want services up and running in April 2022 but whether that is achievable, we don't know, that is dependent on the solutions that are found.

## Appendix B: 10<sup>th</sup> January Presentation



10th January  
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