

# Community Conversations In East Merton



July – December 2016

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# Foreword



Firstly a huge thank you to all of you who given your time to be part of the East Merton Community Conversations. I truly believe that it is only through listening to each other as people, that we might as professionals and communities connect in a different way – a way that puts the health and wellbeing of people living in Merton uppermost in our hearts, minds and actions.

I remember my second full day as a councillor, when we were given an introductory talk by the Chief Executive. After the initial warm congratulatory words he set out the stark reality. The message was: 'OK – right now to work – you do realise that if you live in East Merton your life expectancy is significantly reduced and you are likely to have more long term conditions that limit your life chances than if you lived in other parts of Merton? That's why we are here Tobin! Do you care enough to do something?' My answer was 'yes of course!' And my work on the Health and Wellbeing Board has provided me with an opportunity to put that commitment into action.

Our priority focus as a Health and Wellbeing Board is reducing levels of deprivation in East Merton and as part of this, the development of the Wilson as a health and community campus. We don't pretend to know what is best for you as people living in Mitcham and beyond – so beginning to have conversations with you about what its like to live here, your health needs and how the Wilson might be the very best health and community campus is our starting point. We would like to be led by you, the East Merton Community doing this with you from the word go. This is a very different approach, a new way of doing things and, to be honest entering new territory!

We have been very moved by the conversations we have had so far – but know you want to see action not just words. Our hope is that together, as we move forward, we can develop the Wilson Campus as a place of pride in East Merton – a place that brings us together as communities and supports us to live longer, healthier, happier lives. This is what you have told us you want.

We hope you enjoy reading this document, which gives an account of what people have said and points the way forward. This cannot be a one-off conversation. We would like to invite all those who participated to be part of a Reference Group that shares ideas and views as we go forward. We will be in contact with you about this. We also want to communicate with the people who we have not yet had conversations with.

I want to thank the Leadership Centre who have provided funding for this work and Mari Davis who has guided us. I also want to thank Dr Dagmar Zeuner, the Director of Public Health, and all of the other board members who have contributed to this process. Most of all, I want to thank you for your time, energy, ideas, comments, hopes and fears.

Looking forward to building our relationship and taking action together

Councillor Tobin Byers

**Chair of Merton Health and Wellbeing Board**

# Introduction

## Our purpose was quite straightforward

Reduce the inequality and deprivation in East Merton

Listen to, enable and empower the East Merton community to develop its capacity to take action

Shape and develop the Wilson site as a health and community campus with local people

Learn about and change the way we as professionals understand and hand over power to our communities

Having Community Conversations is far more than a consultation exercise! It is ultimately being about being led by the community.

Our purpose as a Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) is to deepen our understanding of life in Mitcham from the perspective of those living here. Longer term to empower people living here to feel they have the control they want to have of their lives – with a belief that better health and wellbeing are the key to improvements in others aspects of life. Over time, we (HWBB) want to build momentum to create change with the people of East Merton so that it is no longer regarded as a 'deprived area' – but as a place where those living here feel proud to be part of a vibrant community.

We have the humility to believe we can't do this on our own – we would love to do this with you as the people who live in East Merton - if you are prepared to do it with us.

What follows is the story of the East Merton Community Conversations told from both the perspective of those people we had conversations with and ours as a HWB.

The community conversations took place over a 4 - month period in late 2016. As a HWB we worked alongside people who were well connected in East Merton – we call them Community Connectors – and went out and had conversations with over 450 people – people who were willing to give us their time,

from as many different backgrounds, age groups and interests as possible.

The proposed redevelopment of the Wilson site came at an ideal time for us. We listened to stories about what its like to live in East Merton, about people's health needs and importantly about how the Wilson might act as a catalyst to improve health and at the same time develop an even greater sense of community and belonging – indeed become a health and community wellbeing campus.

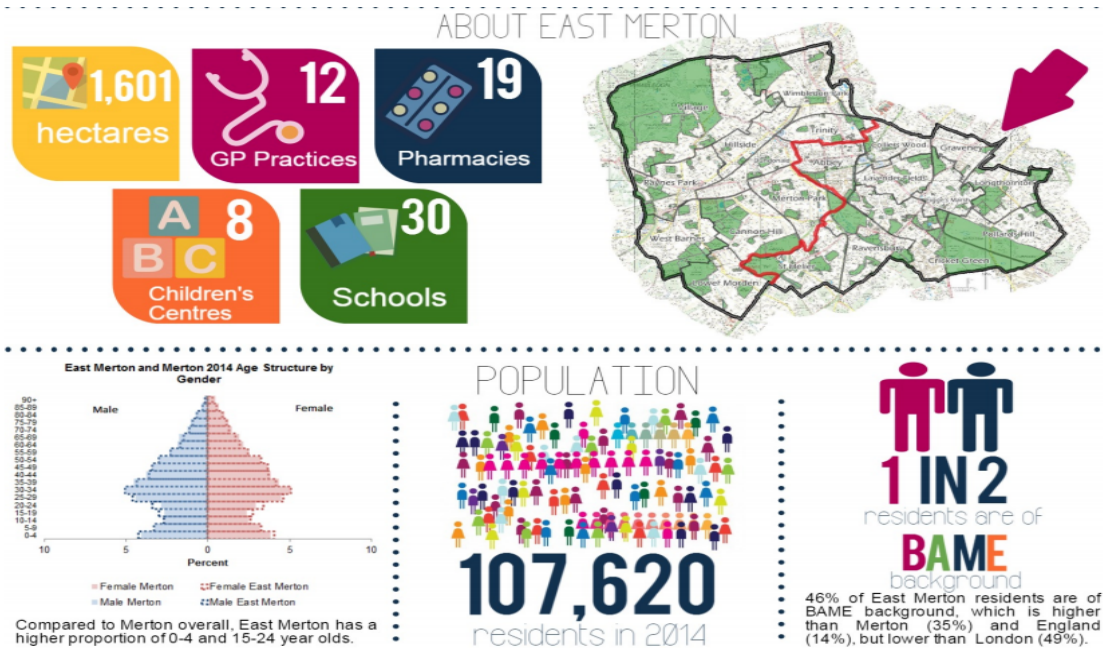
We recognize we have made a start in changing the way we understand and relate to people as decision makers in East Merton but accept we have a long way to go to.

We hope you enjoy reading this story and will feel you want to get involved going forward.

## PURPOSE

Reduce the inequality and deprivation in East Merton

# East Merton the place



## A picture of East Merton

In real terms East Merton has a population similar to inner London. In a nutshell, when compared with the averages for England and Wales it has

- Higher deprivation levels
- Younger population
- Higher number of BAME residents
- More long term conditions
- Lower life expectancy

We know that Mitcham was once a thriving village where agriculture was active and there is an extremely proud history. It was once a thriving coaching stop, has many buildings of architectural significance and is home to both the first industrial railway and the oldest cricket club in the world. We know people have always celebrated a sense of community – even back to the Carnival that began in Elizabethan times.

## The Wilson

The Wilson has a proud place in this history and has long been a central part of the community.

The Wilson was opened as a cottage hospital by Princess Mary, in 1928, with donations from the business developer Sir Isaac Wilson. It was seen at the time as a fine hospital with public and private wards. It was home to the Carnival with all proceeds from the event being used to support the communities' health. In 1939 the event was attended by 25,000 people wearing fancy dress, a May Queen, and ended with a torchlight procession.

Just imagine being there!

## So what has changed about the place?

We know that:

- The area was heavily bombed during the war
- That the closure of the fabric industry led to heavy job losses
- That the Phipps Bridge estate was built in the 30s to compulsorily rehouse families, many of whom still live there
- That the number of people from the BAME community has risen significantly over the last two decades
- That transport and getting to and from Mitcham has long been an issue but has improved with the tram links.



1939: Wilson May Queen



2016: Kristina Burton doing yoga with the SHINE Saturday club

## PURPOSE

Learn about and change the way we as professionals understand and hand over power to our communities

# Our approach to the Community Conversations

## Developing an East Merton Model of Health and Wellbeing

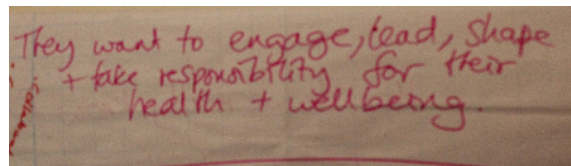
Between November 2015 and April 2016 the HWB and local partners worked with Consilium Partners. We wanted to develop an understanding of how care might be developed in East Merton over the next 5 years and agree the design principles that might underpin the way we worked together.

Our first thought was that 'health' was a better word to use than 'care'. It was important to us that people were at the centre of all we did and supporting people not to get ill – to stay healthy - in the first place was our priority.

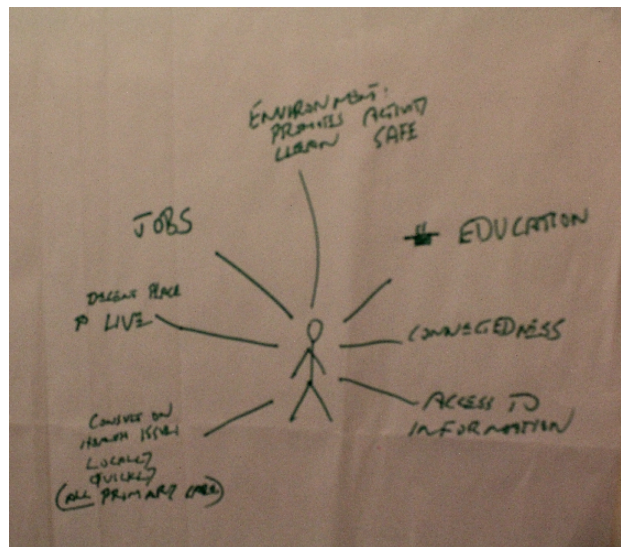
## Merton Health and Wellbeing Board as system leaders

The HWBs on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 agreed they would focus their energy and do all they could to support people in East Merton having the best possible 'chances' in life. Why shouldn't its people be prosperous, have a good education, jobs, and live healthy lives?

As a Board we were able to hazard a view about what mattered to you as people living in East Merton and all the factors that contributed to your health, care and wellbeing. But we were acutely aware that we did not **really** know what your hopes, fears and aspirations were, so decided to embark upon a series of Community Conversations to begin to listen to you and find out.



Then came the news in January 2016 that we had approval to develop the Wilson site as a health and community campus. So the Community Conversations might have the dual purpose of also finding out how you as residents might envisage the Wilson in the future.



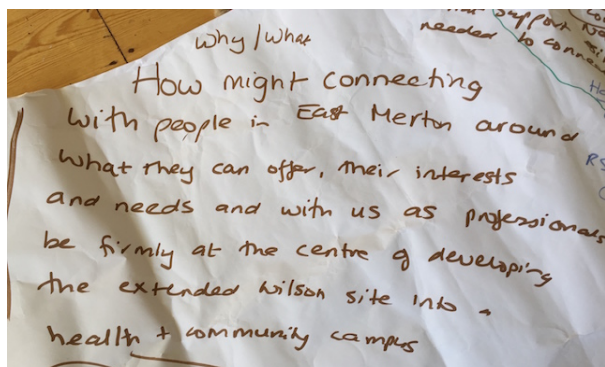
## Bromley-By-Bow visit

In March 2016 we visited the Bromley-By-Bow Centre. This is an innovative community organisation in East London, working with children, families and adults to secure skills and work and also provide a GP facility. Their ethos chimed for us as visitors from Merton! But we had the sense that replicating their model would not work and we would need to translate it to the Mitcham context.

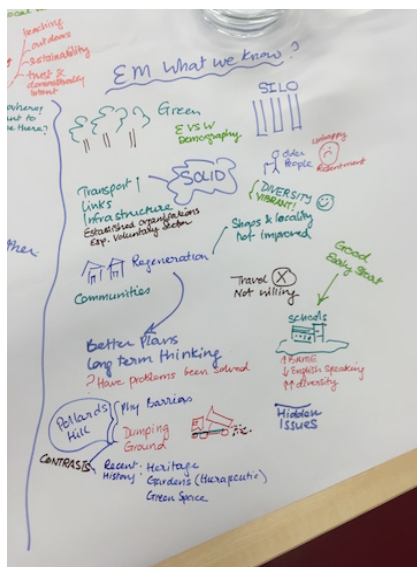
## Planning the community conversations

A small design group of HWB members, professionals and 'Community Connectors' (people who knew a wide group of people in East Merton) - met for breakfast on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016. It had started! We

- Agreed the shared purpose of the community conversations was to explore **this question..**



- Identified the shared values that made doing this together important for us
- Captured what we knew about East Merton – people and place



- Shared ideas about the people and communities we might have conversations with
- Agreed we would invite all HWB members and Community Connectors to a workshop to plan the Community Conversations

## Workshop 1 – 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016

More than 30 of us met and:-

- Shared the Mitcham story since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and its impact today
- Discussed what we knew about the people and their challenges
- Identified the communities we knew and agreed where we might have conversations
- Paired up as HWB and community connectors and planned dates to meet and have conversations with the community

## Conversations with the community

Between July and October 2016 we had more than 30 conversations with over 450 people. These were all recorded and photographs taken. See appendix 1 for a full list of the conversations we had and also those we are yet to have.





## Workshop 2 – 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016

We came back together having heard many stories and invited some of those people whose stories we had heard to join us. We

- Identified the people we had had conversations with – and those we hadn't yet met
- Shared the stories we had heard and the interests and offers made by people and groups over the last 3 months
- Used what we had heard in the conversations to design a vision for the Wilson development – the building and its uses
- Considered what we needed to do next to take action

### What do we mean by conversations?

Consultations are the way we have always done it. One of the first things many of you told us is that you were fed up of being consulted and nothing happening. If this was another consultation exercise then you were not interested. We agree totally!

Consultation has its place but the power remains with US as decision makers. We ask you what you think but you have no control over whether we listen and make decisions on this basis.

We wanted the Community Conversations to be different.

Our hope is to build a different relationship between us - with you as people living in East Merton, with us as people providing services. Relationships that are built on trust, relationships; where we share interests as human beings.

The Wilson is an ideal vehicle to begin to do this. What if we turned our relationship on its head – so that you as the community shaped the use of the Wilson rather than us as professionals telling you how it might be used?

So we arrived without questionnaires and in listening mode – not trying to reach solutions but really wanting to get to know and understand each other better.



**Dagmar Zeuner and Anthony Hopkins having a conversation with the Pollard's Hill Library Group**

## PURPOSE

Listen to, enable and empower the East Merton community to develop its capacity to take action

# East Merton voices

This section captures some of the voices heard in the Community Conversations. Many of the voices talked directly about the Wilson as a health facility and its uses as a community campus. These ideas are captured in the next section under thematic headings.

## Voices of Children and Young People

### SHINE ing stars

.....having a conversation with Kristina Burton

SHINE is a Saturday study support group for 9 – 10 year olds. The 'triangle' of family, children and school means we can take a holistic approach.



**Kristina Burton holding a discussion group conversation with SHINE Saturday club**

Children really like to be asked what they think and feel their voices have been heard and acted on – our role is to support them to make it happen. At SHINE we are trying to encourage them to be agents of change not just a voice. If you ask children what they enjoy, time and again they say arts, drama then sports. Parents say the same but also

want exam support.

Softer outcomes are often missed at school but can be so helpful in supporting mental health and wellbeing. Social contact and making new friends bring more confidence and develop into a major life skill. Anything that supports a child's mental health has to be encouraged – so mindfulness, play therapy for example are valuable. Learning outside the classroom is very powerful for children and stimulates learning. The WOW factor of the Wilson could be that it is outside the classroom.

### St Marks Academy

.....having a conversation with Yvette Stanley and Keith Shipman

6<sup>th</sup> form geography students at St Mark's academy have been surveying Mitcham town centre and would like to share their findings as they impact on the Wilson. We would like to hear about it guys!

The sense, listening to the students, is about the uniqueness of Mitcham amid the bustle of the wider city. People know each other and look out for their neighbours. Highlights include the Fair each year when everyone comes out. If

your bike gets stolen someone knows where to go and get it back. That's cool!

Mitcham lacks a communal place to eat and meet that welcomes young people. This emphasises the importance of spaces and belonging in creating a sense of community at the Wilson.



**Yvette Stanley and Keith Shipman with St Mark's Academy**

## **Merton Youth Parliament**

*...having a conversation with Katy Neep and Chelsea Renehan*

What's striking when you listen to the Youth Parliament is how many ideas they have about the Wilson site and ways it might be used. Really novel ideas that we could never have come up with alone! Also ways we might use young people as volunteers. These are all captured later in this document. Thank you Youth Parliament.

## **Unique Black Talent**

*...having a conversation with Beau Fadahunzi*

Unique Black Talent supports young black men aged between 14 and 30, especially those at risk of getting involved in gangs and anti social behaviour. The young men speaking with Beau said they felt excluded, misunderstood and judged – some of this they put down to racism. No one cared about them or listened. They thought what

they said wouldn't make a difference but they are willing to help nevertheless. Working with services that support young black men really might be part of the solution.



## **Pollards Hill Youth Centre**

*...having a conversation with Katy Neep and Chelsea Renehan*

The young people at Pollards Hill love living in Mitcham and are proud of the Pollards Hills Community which in their view is strong. They have a real sense of place and community and like the fact they know everyone and that people look out for each other. There are fun things to do like the park and the youth centre. They are aware however that other people think it is a bad place to live and they feel adults judge their accent and their community. They want the Wilson to be representative of the community and to work with them to add to the great things that they already see like the schools, the green space, the people, the youth centre. Like the Youth Parliament they had great ideas about how the Wilson might work which are shared later in this document.

## A gathering of the BAME community

....having a conversation with Andrew Murray & Hannah Neale

This community conversation possibly marked a breakthrough in the relationship between the BAME communities – 8 organisations and 30 people – and the Health sector in Merton. ‘Possibly’ because without follow up action it will have been yet another consultation meeting – but its not going to be that!

The groups spoke about their experience of health care in Merton, expressed frustrations and particularly poignant was that they felt passed from pillar to post, not treated as humans, rather like cattle. Much of the conversation focused around reduced funding and the impact of this. There seemed to be limited provision for and understanding of BAME groups, especially older people; and groups who don't know how to access health services or understand their own needs e.g. Tamils. Ultimately the question was posed about how the BAME communities can help the Health sector to do things differently and vice versa. So hopefully by no means the end of the conversation .....

## The Tamil Community – Jagath Jenani Sampath

....having a conversation with Khadiru Madhi and Karen Parsons

East Merton has a very large Tamil community, many living in over-crowded housing and on low incomes. The South London Tamil Welfare Group offers a lifeline and is in tune with its community, offering welcome advice and practical support. Above all the Wilson offers the opportunity to have all health and wellbeing services in one place. Diabetes is the number one health issue and so awareness and advice is vital. The older generation is often isolated – language being part of this. Health advocates used to offer translation but this is no longer available. Exercise classes with other older people could go

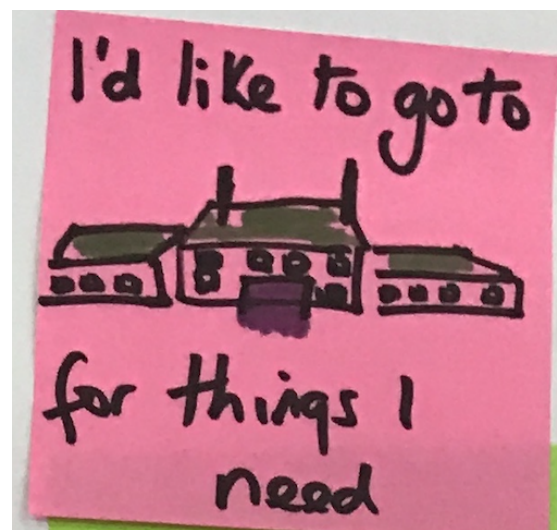
some way to bringing different communities together. The younger generation are more open to using services although taking time off work is an issue – weekend opening would be welcome!



Karen Parsons with Jagath Jenani Sampath

## The Polish community - Slawek Szezepanski

....having a conversation with Khadiru Madhi and Adam Doyle



The Polish community expressed a mix of emotions - frustration and anxiety. As a group they feel they are self-motivated but feel discriminated against 'although they are white' and wonder if they are doing something wrong post Brexit! Would like to understand the system better and use the Wilson for advice, information and guidance and for services to be joined up.

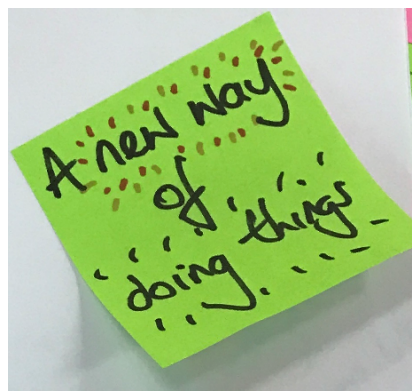
# Voices of People with Mental Health Challenges

## Service users and providers

.... *having a conversation with Anjan Ghosh and Aalaa Jawad*

There can be a stigma attached to being labeled as having a 'mental health problem'. The Wilson offers an ideal opportunity to 'blend in' and at the same time have the privacy of support from the right health professionals. Staff at the Wilson are already applauded for being very friendly and promoting social acceptance, so long may this continue. A relaxed drop-in centre would be really helpful – for a chat and advice without the pressure to make an appointment. This session generated so many ideas about the way the Wilson might work and what might be available but perhaps the most

powerful message is that it 'its about not just saying its for the community but being for the community'.



## Voices of disabled people

### People from CIL

...*having a conversation with Anjan Ghosh and Aalaa Jawad*

It jumps out from hearing the voices of people from CIL that as disabled people they want to be in right from the start – which means involvement in building design, ensuring the Wilson is fully accessible, maybe working on the Wilson campus. They want to be part of the fabric not segregated or treated as 'special', so seen as active participants not service users please. The sense of belonging disabled people want to feel is palpable and with this a sense of being seen as contributing, being heard and taking action.

Many of their ideas for the building and its uses are included throughout this document. In the conversations the CIL community pointed out that local historian Reginald, also known as Slim Flegg, reports that just 6 out of the 15,000 photos that make up the

photographic archive for Merton include pictures which represent disability, of which two were of toilets. So the challenge for the Wilson is to revise history!



**Members of the CIL community**

# Voices of Local Residents

## Residents of East Merton, Pollards Hill Library Group

*....having a conversation with Dagmar Zeuner and Anthony Hopkins*

Pollards Hill library is more than a place to find books. If you are lucky it is also a gathering place and integral part of the community. The group we met in October lived in different parts of East Merton and were all long-standing residents. They have seen lots of changes and liked the diversity of the area. On the day of the conversation, the local mosque was organising a coffee morning. They do not feel disadvantaged and one resident was especially keen that they were not referred to as 'deprived'. The group specifically mentioned the importance of the church as a community focus. There was mention of youth behaviour on the estate with noisy scooters being ridden, which was dangerous and intimidating especially for smaller children. Also stressed that we need to learn from things that exist in the community already and make sure the Wilson complements rather than duplicates.

## Residents of Cramner Farm Close

*....having a conversation with Simon Williams, Dr Doug Hing and John Horwood*

There is a real sense of the Mitcham story if you have a conversation with the residents of Cramner Farm Close. One person remembers coming to the Wilson in an ambulance at the age of 11, another the thrill of going to the cinema. A sense of community holds people together - it's reassuring to hear that if you are ill, a neighbour will pop in. Living practically next door to the Wilson means the walk-in GP surgery is very valued so any suggestion of losing this is a worry but there is also a lot of interest in wider health activities and not far to walk to get to them. A pharmacy would be most welcome on the new development. Parking outside is a problem now especially with school pick ups so this and transport are considerations for the future.

## Residents of Dolliffe Close Sheltered Housing Scheme

*....having a conversation with Simon Williams, Doug Hing and John Horwood*

It was a pleasure to meet Rosa, Fudge, Bill, Alan, Elaine, Arthur and Marion. They would love to have activities that bring people together around shared interests and help them to meet new people, at the scheme as well as at the Wilson. There were plenty of suggested activities that could take place at the Wilson such as darts, pool and bingo – but transport to the place would be vital, especially as many of the residents have physical difficulties. A café would be most welcome too especially for a cup of tea after a blood test – many other suggestions are included later in the document.



**Doug Hing and Simon Williams with Dolliffe Close Residents**

## Widway Surgery Patient Participation Group (PPG)

*....having a conversation with Dr Anjan Ghosh and Dr Sopika Jayakumar*

PPG members know Mitcham and its

people well. Their sense is that there has been a dramatic change – moving from a thriving interdependent community to one where households are isolated. The Wilson's role is to bring people together from diverse backgrounds – younger and older and create a sense of belonging. The idea of flexibility between 'the community centre and the health centre' is uppermost.

### **Local residents at the Sun Festival**

*...having conversations with Naomi Martin and Tanna Pharmacy*

Children were excited to come into our festival health hub not least because they got to have a ride on the smoothie bike. Of course parents followed and so we were able to talk to them and understand any health concerns they might have. Having the Tanna Pharmacy on hand was a great help as we were able to test weight, blood pressure and answer questions. We also had various sports activities to attract children and young people and managed to talk to

a group of parents mostly from Pollards Hill, Longthornton and Figge's Marsh who had planned to 'watch' the football and get them to do some exercises themselves.

### **Community Leaders at Phipps Bridge**

*.....having conversations with Beau Fadahunzi*

12 local leaders were trained by MVSC last year, aged 23 to 71 – to be local community leaders. What an asset these people are – they are very well connected and can talk to anyone. They are working hard to build relationships in the community, communicate with people, litter pick, painting anything looking as if it needs a lick of paint – build a stronger community. They were delighted to share thoughts on the Wilson and East Merton Model of Health and these are included in the report. Good luck in the Merton in Bloom competition!

## **Voices of Carers and people they support**

### **Carers Support Merton**

*...having a conversation with Dr Karen Worthington*

As soon as you meet this team it's clear they are committed to supporting carers in Merton and improving links with primary care teams. It also strikes you that uncertainty over funding places huge pressures on smaller organisations such as theirs, especially with a caseload of up to 60 people. Their services are tailored to the 4 stages of caring and they also provide level 1 and 2 carers' assessments. Raising awareness of these skills with general practice and providing information and training might close the knowledge gap. Carers often find accessing appointments for themselves difficult and their needs are not always understood. A suggestion was to put in place a system for all carers to be offered the opportunity to register with Carers Support. A take-away action to raise

the profile of carers with general practice!

### **Staff, volunteers and users of the Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Hub**

*.....having a conversation with Gilli Lewis-Lavender and Mariette Akkermans*

Respite is at the top of the list for carers, and understandably so. We heard how carers of people with dementia mostly do so 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, without a break. This brings incredible pressures, multiple demands and very little time for yourself. Places like the Dementia Hub, part of the Alzheimer's Society provide welcome support and friendship. Often the need is for a safe place for people with dementia with qualified staff, transport and meals provided, easy and affordable access to rehabilitative services, as well as a 'sleep in' service to give carers a good night's sleep. Transport matters enormously - physical and behavioural problems make walking, and

public transport impossible.

The conversations pointed to the need for further dialogue and action across Merton to support people with dementia and their carers.



**Gilli Lewis-Lavender with staff and people using the Dementia Hub**

## Voices of Older People

### People at the New Horizon Centre

*...having conversations with Naomi Martin*

Older people spending time at the New Horizon Centre run by the Commonsense Community Development Trust, were very happy to discuss their health needs and share ideas. General issues included anxiety about picking up prescriptions and getting appointments with the GP. Staying safe at home and avoiding scams were also on their radar. Some had anxieties around money and money management, others around ways to avoid being lonely and becoming over-dependent. Some of the older Asian women were concerned about not having good English and being unable to access classes to learn. Older people were very keen to access advice on benefits and other related issues. So all in all, plenty of food for thought. Many thanks for

bringing the community together for these conversations.

### Age UK Merton

*...having conversations with Clare Gummatt*

There is so much going on at the Age UK centre – lunch clubs, exercise classes, stitches activity. When you talk to the people there they are very happy to tell you their stories about living in Mitcham. For some there is a sense that the place has gone downhill with little to do in the evenings and shops not as good as they were; others that it has become very multicultural and can feel uncomfortable; others say they are very happy and its clean and quiet. One thing is clear though – the Centre is a welcome place and a ready-made community. Many of the stories heard are to be found in the next section.



## PURPOSE

Shape and develop the Wilson site as a health and community campus with local people

# Community Conversations – emerging Themes

The Community Conversations were wide ranging and started from many different angles. This section pulls together the main themes emerging and covers:-

- What its **like to live** in Mitcham
- **Health matters** at the Wilson
- How the Wilson might **FEEL**
- What the Wilson might **LOOK** like
- What we might **DO** at the Wilson

- **Offers of help** at the Wilson

We have looked at each of these themes separately but ultimately all are connected.

The overarching sense is that the Wilson might be a Community Village conveying the message to all that health and wellbeing are integral to all aspects of life in East Merton.

## Theme 1: What it is like to live in Mitcham

Some of our conversations started by asking people what it felt like to live in East Merton. The stories speak for themselves and have been left intact as quotes from people.

We moved from Tooting to Mitcham in the early 80's. The houses here were cheaper and we could get a house with a garden. I love the houses here in Mitcham, my neighbours, the Common and the pond. I do think Mitcham is neglected compared with other areas of the borough. Transport is difficult. The roads around Commonsides West are now too narrow and ambulances cannot get through. For us to get to Wimbledon we need to get to the tram, that means walking across the Common. There is a seedy side to the Common, people who are homeless camp there, drug dealing takes place. The town centre is still a tip although I like what has been done so far. But the majority of the shops are still barbers, charity shops. Sadly, the pubs around Cricket Green are being closed and it is tearing the heart out of the place. Development in Mitcham to date has largely been about developers constructing hideous buildings, in the heart of what is in essence a beautiful area. That is the key difference between what happens to us here in Mitcham and what happens in Wimbledon – many of the buildings here would not have been built in Wimbledon.

We really like living in Mitcham. It's homely and feels safe. At its best with the Fair – when everyone's out and all the communities are mixing. I like the Peri Peri shop in Mitcham town centre and the green areas best.

There are no warm and dry public places since MacDonald's closed for us young people. The café in the middle is not welcoming to us young people. Be great to have communal and cheap food in the middle of town.

I met this old lady at the bus stop and she said Mitcham used to have a cinema so everyone had a reason to go into the town centre. You need a reason to go into Mitcham.

Phipps Bridge is good, even if people think its bad. We all know our neighbours. If say you have your bike stolen as you haven't locked it up someone will go and get it for you. In other areas people don't know each other so that wouldn't happen.

We are a bit worried about the Wilson and around it becoming gentrified and then we would lose the soul of Mitcham.

We've lived in Mitcham for 39 years. We feel that the area has gone down, but then so has the whole of Britain: a 'no care' attitude, no discipline, no pride.

Since Brexit, some local people have been less friendly. I get complaints about hate crime for example in the Pollards Hill and Lavender Hill areas.

I cherish the green space in East Merton even if I cannot walk much in it. It makes me feel good and it is part of local identity of the place. I never hear English spoken any more so I feel like a minority. This isn't a problem but can make me feel uncomfortable.

There are more people, more traffic, not enough parking, more alcoholics out on the street, and also more police to move them on. It does not feel as safe to me as it once was.

If someone is ill here at Cramner Close a neighbour will notice. There is a sense of community here. There used to be a cinema here and there is not so much to do any more. Cramer Close.

It is a very nice area for a number of reasons: nice little market, some lovely houses and a nice 'middle' and Green. It is also affordable and I feel safe here. It is a bit boring too, the shops are not interesting but there is lots of potential for improvement. The traffic is awful but that's the case everywhere in London.

## Conclusion

This is a real opportunity to think about Mitcham collectively for the first time with the people of Mitcham – hearing perspectives over time, deepening our shared understanding of deprivation and poverty. If we all understood our different identities and the sense of being 'outside', 'excluded', 'in the minority' we might be able to celebrate communities coming together and having conversations with each other as well as the communities themselves. In the sense that the Wilson is part of the fabric of Mitcham so it can be one part of future that is emerging.

## Theme 2: Health matters at the Wilson

This section considers the health aspects of the Wilson and wider health, wellbeing and social needs identified by the people we had conversations with.

### What is going well .... specifically at the Wilson

- The Mental Health Service staff were applauded for being very friendly, co-operative, and promoting of social acceptance by mental health service users
- Primary care services (including GP services) at the Wilson are seen as invaluable
- The Walk-in service is used and thought of as an asset to the community

- **Staff not always caring:** Some people's experience of health services found that health professionals do not seem caring enough
- **Perceived lack:** of in-borough health facilities in East Merton
- **Mental health care:** doesn't seem to focus on early intervention and access to psychological services could be improved
- **Carers:** seem to have difficulties accessing help for themselves
- **Hospital beds:** are being used for respite where ideally these would be available at the Wilson

### Funding matters

There is a recognition that the Health Service is struggling financially! This uncertainty creates pressure in the community, especially on smaller organisations, who often know the community needs better but live with the constant threat of losing funding.

Conversations with BAME communities and with young people indicated some specific health concerns and needs. This suggests a real opportunity to develop a different relationship with these groups – one that empowers them to become involved in shaping health and wellbeing for the future in East Merton.

### Some of the frustrations ... generally in East Merton

- **Access to GPs:** Many people have difficulty accessing their GP for appointments with systems seemingly designed to restrict or make access difficult. This is exacerbated if people have language and culture differences. People talked about waiting 2 to 4 weeks to get an appointment
- **GP opening times:** Taking time off work is difficult so GPs opening at weekends and evenings would be very helpful

## BAME community specific health concerns and suggestions

### Tamil community and diabetes

The Tamil community said diabetes is a major health concern for them and they need awareness and support to manage this. This includes better diets and increased appreciation of the impact of junk foods linked with tackling obesity in the younger generation.

### Young black men

More perhaps than any other group, young black men speaking as part of Unique Black Talent describe a negative experience of health services. They feel ill at ease going to a GP, think the booking system is a blockage, find receptionists hostile and feel uncomfortable in the waiting room. Many go straight to A&E or a walk-in centre

only when their symptoms get unbearable. Sounds like a big opportunity to build a different relationship.

## Polish community and health systems

The Polish community said that very different services are provided by GPs in Poland and therefore people do not have realistic expectations or know how to make best use of what is available in this country. This means a 'walk-in centre' is an unfamiliar concept and people go straight to A&E.



Adam Doyle and Slawek Szezepanski

Also people come away disappointed from a GP appointment, as their expectations are often not met. The suggested way forward by the community was information and guidance to understand health and related systems.

## Suggestions for action from BAME

- Recruit people to work on the site, especially the GPs, who are representative of the communities that they are serving. This would mean getting one doctor from the ethnicity of the major ethnic groups in East Merton
- Medical trainees on site so they can learn from what the Wilson is doing well and spread the good ideas
- Doctors being aware of their community make up and the health issues impacting on specific communities
- Aim for different health offers forming a core principle of the Wilson with relaxed lengthy consultations as well as quicker business-like interactions

## Young people's specific health suggestions for action

- Sterile and clinical environments can be scary and so work needs to be put into adding colour and soft furnishings
- Mental Health is a key issue and young people would like more help with support around stress management and resilience and to be able to sign up to courses that have a peer support element
- Confidentiality is key. They want to know that they are told first and that they have the opportunity to manage their own health, make their own appointments and choose who they share information with. They want to be spoken to directly, not in the third person through parents and carers
- Rooms where young people can access games, browse the internet and feel safe and comfortable while they wait for their health appointments
- They want to build relationships with the doctors, nurses and receptionists and to be able to have a normal conversation as well as discuss their health issues – this builds up trust and engagement. Perhaps there could be activities on site such as sport challenges that bring everyone together
- A link with social workers who work out of the health centre so there is more discussion with families and young people in a safe space on the site
- Facilities to rate the service and their experience like a trip advisor site with ipads available to use in order to do this

- The reception needs to be anonymous so that you remove the stigma as to why you would be visiting the health centre and enable young people to have confidential support.
- Volunteers under 20 years to help to build relationships and communicate

with the young people who come in to help engage them with the different facilities and options open to them

- Staff to wear accessible and friendly clothes – not ties and suits and things that create a barrier but outfits that expressed a bit about who they are

## YOUR Vision for YOUR Health at the Wilson

The desire for a state of the art health facility at the Wilson is unanimous – and this being fully integrated with the community campus is a MUST.

We heard questions like:-

- What if the Wilson was seen as a multi focused space, catering for young and old and with culturally aware health workers?
- What if we were all treated equally but not the same, coming in the same front door and speaking to the same person?

Some of the key **health** features you would like to see include:-

- A wide range of health facilities in one place to include GPs with blood and other testing facilities, dentists, mental health services, opticians, pharmacy, physiotherapy, blood donation and specialist clinics such as GUM, diabetes, falls prevention, dementia
- A multi-focused space so no stigma with using the health services
- Flexibility between the health centre and community centre so there is no stigma with using the health facilities
- Relaxed and flexible with a move away from appointments, consultations and

### Conclusion

The health offer could be very different but it is difficult to imagine what this might be because we see it in terms of what we already know rather than what might be possible. This is a golden opportunity if we dare take it!

Building relationships between groups representing the BAME communities and young people might deepen our understanding about their different health needs and give the opportunity to work together to change health outcomes.

referrals



**Vision for the Wilson – workshop on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016**

- A single point of access to all services with knowledgeable staff
- Open for groups that might find it difficult to gain access to health services such as the homeless
- A drop-in centre with flexibility where people do not feel pressured by appointments
- All services and clinics to include a link to key community support and groups such as Carer Support, Alzheimer's Society
- Flexible with a unified 'feel' between the community centre and the health centre
- Relational where voluntary groups, local people and health services all talk to each other regularly

## Theme 3: How the Wilson might FEEL

“We want a sense of belonging. Not just saying it’s for the community, but BEING for the community” MH service users

“A place where we are recognised as being able to give value and are valued for what we give”  
MCIL

Our sense from the conversations is that the Wilson could be far more than just bricks and mortar. Everyone we met was very keen to get involved in the development of the site and welcomed a community-led approach to the design and running of the community campus. People traditionally in receipt of services saw themselves as active participants with talents and skills not just service users.

Young people at Pollards Hill had an idea that there should be a wall or area where all the community could come and sign their names – they felt this would show it was owned by the community and would be proud to show it to their children in the future when they used the centre as parents themselves. Also that the campus might

have a motto or a saying that was created by the community and owned by everyone – they use these successfully at the youth centre and liked the idea that everyone would know what it meant to use the campus.

People said they wanted the Wilson to **feel**

- As if it embodied the spirit and the ideas of the people living in East Merton and avoided gentrification
- A fun, vibrant and exciting place that creates a sense of belonging
- A calm, relaxed environment where people feel listened to
- Intergenerational and a sense of family where all ages feel welcome and work together
- Inclusive and culturally sensitive

## Theme 4: What the Wilson might LOOK like

There are all sorts of ideas about the ‘LOOK’ of the campus.

### Capturing history

Mitcham has a rich history being home to the first cricket club in England and also having the first industrial railway. The Wilson itself dates back to 1928 and has always been a place where health is important. So building the history and memories into the fabric of the building will give a sense of continuity going forward.

### Spaces

If the layout is designed with ‘spaces’ rather than fixed structures in mind more groups and individuals will be able to make use of the Wilson campus. It can be a ‘focal point

for social activity and also a place to be quiet’. These spaces might be available for voluntary organisations to rent, so allowing Vestry Hall to expand for other uses or be open to rent by local entrepreneurs or private individuals.

People said they want these spaces to be safe and comfortable to meet in. Some spaces might be specialised, sensory rooms to support people with specific needs; spaces for carers to have some respite; spaces for young people to meet and discuss health issues; space for a chalk wall for people to draw.

What about a large enough space that 150 people could gather – almost a village hall for community use.



An amazing visual representation of how the Wilson Campus might look developed during the community conversation with CIL

## Colourful not clinical

Simplicity will be all – a colourful site with local artwork, maybe with members creating a design piece to mark the start of a new era. There were any number of good ideas such as local art used and displayed; tiles like Bromley-By-Bow; photography projects; visual and audio story sharing of the Wilson in the PAST. That said, teenagers prefer not to sit in a room with Winnie the Pooh wallpaper!

## Green leaves

Outdoors is as important as indoors so the message is to create vibrant and growing greens spaces. Many ideas were suggested such as community growing and a herb garden; an accessible allotment with raised beds; good seating so people can relax; a sensory garden with the sound of water and smell of herbs, especially lavender given the large number of lavender fields Mitcham used to be home to. The outdoor space to include a children's playground and fitness area. This will be an important part of encouraging families to use the Wilson and especially important as many families live in flats with no open space.

## Parking

It is assumed there will be some car parking so outdoor safety also matters with pedestrian safety and good lighting on the list too. Clear signage is vital and advice available on this. Parking outside the Wilson is already seen to be a problem as parents dropping children off block the pavements which is an issue especially for people with mobility problems.



## Inclusive of disability

'Dementia could be a theme, or a strand running through every adult service, or building' The last thing people older people or people with a disability want is to be segregated by the design of the Wilson. Widened pathways, adapted switches, adjusted taps, adequate signage and disabled parking will be a great start. Goes without saying that the building will comply with dementia and disability friendly standards.

## All routes lead to the Wilson

If getting to the Wilson is a pleasant and easy experience surely more people will come. The perception is that the Wilson is harder to get to than Vestry Hall, yet it is not too far away. There were significant concerns around the practicalities of getting to the site including being difficult to commute, making it likely that young families will not engage. Some went as far as to say that the traffic flow needs to be redesigned as the Wilson is not accessible and the purpose will not be achieved unless access is a priority. Others highlighted the need to contact TfL for adjusted bus route and increased ease of service; others suggested guided walkways across the Common and safe cycle routes. There are some welcome bus routes already – but improved bus routes, a shuttle service and dial a-ride could drop people off safely.

## Build a hotel

Several people were very concerned that the Wilson land might be sold for development. However one person had a vision that the site should be used to build a very upmarket hotel. 'The building itself is beautiful, the hotel could be located within the grounds. It is close to the golf course and the almshouses – a lovely immediate location. Why? This would bring money in to develop the area'.



# Theme 5: What we might DO at the Wilson

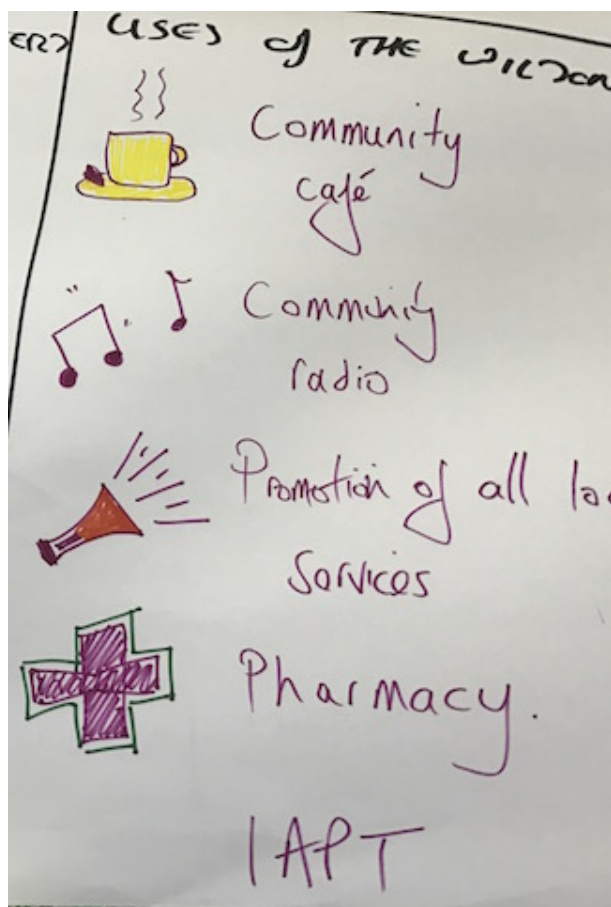
“We want activities that can bring us together”

Residents of Doliffe Close Sheltered Scheme

People have so many ideas about what they would like to see and do at the Wilson that to produce a list has the potential to lose the essence of how what happens at the site might fit together. But at this stage, a list it is.

## Features

- Affordable spaces for community use
- Reasonable prices or free of charge
- Activities available at times people want to access them
- Offering what isn't out there already so avoiding duplication
- Staff who can offer advice on a range of services



## Café at the heart

‘Food brings people together’.

Most frequently suggested was having a café at the heart of the Wilson, perhaps near the reception area to increase footfall and encourage people to socialise. The idea of using ‘food’ (avoiding the word nutrition) as the vehicle to learn and bring people together included

- A training kitchen for people with learning disabilities that develops cooking skills and fosters independence
- World food days to encourage people from different cultures to share their national foods
- Community cooking days where families can share recipes and people learn to cook. Great in bringing the generations together
- Links to cooking for food bank users and alleviation of poverty through recycling of food
- Food that young people like and where they can come together as friends

## Information and advice

This might range finding out what is going on in East Merton and the promotion of local services to specific advice services.

Although people saw the health and community services as integrated there were a number of requests to keep the Job Centre and CAB separate from social areas to prevent negative connotations. As a concept this would need to be explored further if the ‘feel’ of the Wilson is positive and around integration.

## Community facilities

Highlights include

- Community radio
- Hairdressers
- Community Library, book swapping
- Community supermarket
- Small businesses and community enterprise

## Emotional and psychological support services

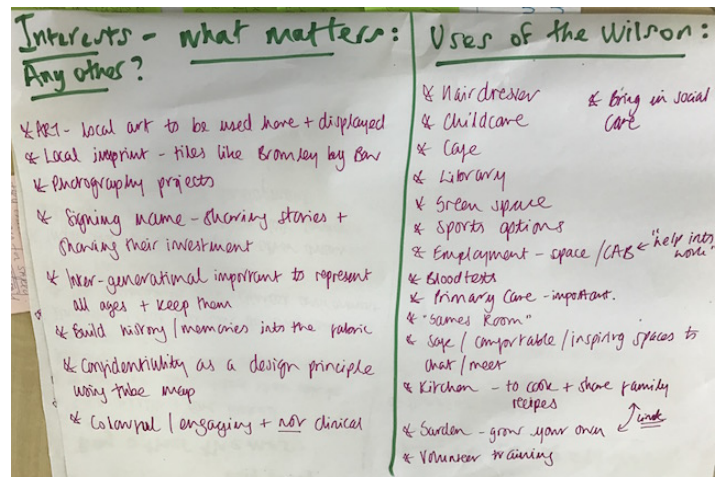
A range of support activities and services were suggested, ranging from advice, information and guidance to specialist counseling and psychological support. These would cater for a wide range of ages and needs and potentially use generic and specialist workers. Examples included befriending, advocacy, support into work, homeless people outreach, dementia support, 'Headspace' for young people concerned about their mental health, anger management courses

## Activities for children and young people

Essential. Somewhere that children and young people feel welcome and where they can play games, have organized activities and have space to be with each other. This might range from a formal crèche with a nursery teacher to a more informal drop-in and group activities organized by the local community.

## Sports

Sporting activities were highlighted as a way to draw in families and children as shown by Naomi at the Sun Festival. This might range from low cost football for young people to street cricket and darts to walking groups. Sports celebrities might be encouraged to run sessions from cricket to tennis and act as role models for young people. Endless opportunities here!



## Learning opportunities

If the Wilson is seen as a place to learn suggested ideas include:

- Learning English through conversations or lessons – potentially prescribed by the GP
- If an IT suite is possible - skills development and on line learning
- A community training venue
- Classes such as art, keep fit, wellbeing

## Social events

Bringing the community together for talks, debates, meeting places for societies, Young Mum's groups, drama groups, community days, afternoon tea celebrations. Also for theatres and performing arts gathering.

## Wider regeneration in Mitcham

**"The regeneration of the Wilson on its own would be a big mistake. We need to look more widely at the whole area and connect the two"**

The loss of the cinema in Mitcham was mentioned often along with not having access to things to do like a bowling alley, pool tables, places for young people to hang out. While there was not an expectation that the Wilson would have these facilities there is a question about how Mitcham might be healthier as a town if it had more ways for people to come together and socialize as a community.

## Theme 6: Offers of Help at the Wilson

### Involvement in the design of the Wilson

Most of the people involved in the conversations wanted to be involved in some way going forward, even if this is just keeping them in touch with plans as they progress. This suggests everyone needs feedback to show their ideas have been heard but also some suggested setting up a reference group to meet a two or three times a year.

### Schools involvement

There is a real opportunity to involve young people at all stages of the redevelopment.

- Involve schools through ideas boxes or pupil projects that are part of the design process
- 'A' level Geography group at St Mark's Academy have been surveying in Mitcham town centre and would be interested to present their findings or be part of the process in some way to inform the design in some way
- Idea of a Junior Health Jury similar to the one in Wandsworth

### Resources offered

- Volunteers were flagged as a valuable resource - ranging from a bank of community translators to drivers to take people to and fro the site. There is an opportunity to tap into existing resources but also grow the pool of volunteers
- Huge local knowledge that can be tapped into as contacts and connectors
- Canon's Heritage project as a resource to link into the Wilson development
- Links to social prescribing work across the area
- Fundraising expertise of MVSC and others
- Carers Support Merton offer of 'carer awareness' training; marketing material for GP practices and other advice areas from Carers Support

## PURPOSE

Learn about and change the way we as professionals understand and hand over power to our communities

# Learning for the Health and Wellbeing Board

As a HWB we set out to listen and have a different sort of conversation with the people of East Merton and in so doing deepen our understanding about how we might work with each differently going forward. These are some of our learning and insights.

### **Insight 1: Its left a lasting mark**

Hearing the voices of people in East Merton and seeing the faces behind the organisations has been very special and reminded us about what we are here to achieve. Our time is often spent in “professional mode” processing papers and reports. This begs the question about what else we can bring to the table – and maybe it's a touch of humility. Ultimately we are better decision makers if we are connected to how people and communities genuinely feel. It has been powerful to recognise how we as HWB members have been changed by this experience.

### **Insight 2: We have to act now**

People have given their time willingly to have conversations with us in spite of skepticism that they have done this before and nothing happened as a result. It's clear that our credibility is on the line here. We have a deep sense of responsibility and trepidation mixed with hope that we will be able to involve them in a different way. Absolute commitment from us as senior leaders is essential.

### **Insight 3: It's time to build a deeper rapport with the community**

There is a need for us to really understand the communities and life in East Merton at a deeper level by listening and paying attention and avoiding the urge to

provide ready-made solutions. Even after these conversations and the insights gained we realise that we have but a partial understanding – we need to listen more! We think we might be able to learn by actually working together on a small number of things that really matter to us all. We don't need to wait for the Wilson build to be completed to start this. If we generate more energy, enthusiasm and action now by building capacity in the community, then when the Wilson is re-opened there can be an immediate impact.

### **Insight 4: We can't do it the way we always have**

People really can speak and act for themselves. As a HWB we don't know what is best for people so going forward is about being led by them not doing things 'to' or 'for' them. The idea that professionals know best is really misguided. This is about moving from engagement to co-production considering shared issues and shared solutions.

### **Insight 5: Pride in the Area**

People are rightly proud of the history of the area. This is reflected in views on the future – the story of East Merton in the fabric of the Wilson building, building something together here that future generations will be proud of, the next chapter in our history.

### **Insight 6: Honesty pays**

People will understand the constraints we are working with so sharing our dilemmas, what is possible at the Wilson and what isn't enables a bigger conversation - one that shares possibilities and builds the future together.

### **Insight 7: Handing over control to the community can be scary**

The real test here is whether we are brave enough to hand over the development of the community campus to the community. Its easy to sit round the table as a group of experts and plan a solution but radical change will only happen if we trust the community to lead it. This approach will feel uncertain at times and will mean letting go of control and

moving out of our comfort zone into a messy world! Being a conduit and enabler for the change.

### **Insight 8: Listening to all the voices**

Our conversations have been partial and there are many more people and groups who may want to be involved and would welcome a conversation. Hearing all the voices not just the loudest ones can be a challenge.

### **Insight 9: Young people are our future**

We need to keep reminding ourselves and others that young people can represent themselves and have an optimism that many of us can't remember. They are key to the future of the Wilson and so need to be integral to us moving forward.

# Tentative Questions

So this concludes our record of the Community Conversations. We would like to close with some questions that we might inquire into together.

## A deeper community conversation

- *How might we deepen our shared understanding of what it means to live in East Merton and what together we might do to alleviate poverty?*
- *How do we balance the need for rapid action with the need for wider ownership and deeper understanding?*
- *How do we increase our reach to include people whose voice has yet to be heard?*

## Development of the Wilson

- *What do these conversations tell us about life in East Merton and what might this mean to the development of the Wilson?*
- *What might 'gentrification' of the Wilson mean and do we want to avoid it?*
- *There is a will for the community campus to be community-led. What does this mean in practice and who are the right people to be involved?*
- *How do we ensure the health and community campus are seamless and have the feel of a 'community village'?*
- *What if the Wilson was a place to celebrate communities coming together – young, old, from diverse backgrounds - rather than simply celebrating individual communities?*

## Health behavior change at scale

- *Beyond the Wilson, how might Mitcham be 'healthier' as a town if it had more ways for people to come together and socialize as a community?*
- *How do we mobilise people in the community to take action around their own health and wellbeing?*

# Appendix 1:

## People we had conversations with

African Educational Cultural Health Organisation (AECHO)

Age UK Merton

Alzheimer's Dementia Hub- Tuesday Activity Club

Alzheimer's Society

Asian Diabetic Support and awareness group (ADSAG)

Association for Polish Communities  
BAME Voice

Centre for Independent Living (CIL)

Chamber of Commerce

Community Leaders Group Phipps Bridge Estate

Cramner Farm Close- Circle Housing

Doliffe Close Sheltered Scheme - Circle Housing

Healthhub, Pollard's Hill Sun Festival

Local Councillors

Carers Support Merton- managers

Merton Mental Health forum - users and providers

Merton Youth parliament

SHINE, Saturday club - school children

SHINE Saturday club - parents and families

Mitcham Town Community Trust

Pakistan Welfare Association

Pollards Hill Library Residents Meeting

Pollards Hill Lunch Club

Pollard Hill Youth Centre

Positive Network

Sixth form students at St Mark's Academy

South London Tamil Welfare Group – 2 Conversations

Unique Talent - young black men

Wide Way Surgery - PPG

Wood World Ministries

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