



St Thomas Medical Group

St Thomas

Exwick

Pathfinder

Exeter University Student Health Centre

Pathfinder Village Surgery

Engagement Report

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For**

The Partners of St Thomas Medical Group

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1. Executive Summary

This report details the feedback and next steps following our engagement work seeking the experiences of patients and stakeholders following a two-year suspension of services at Pathfinder Village Surgery and the impact on them of a potential permanent closure.

We wrote to all patients and interested parties detailed in the report to seek the views of those who may have been affected by the current temporary closure. We wanted to determine the impact on them of the closure being made permanent.

337 people living at pathfinder village were given the opportunity to participate in the engagement through the described methodology. 60% (n=68) said the temporary closure had negatively affected them, and 80% (n=92) said the permanent change would adversely affect them.

Most respondents suggesting the permanent closure would have a negative impact on them, cited reasons such as inconvenience, concern over access to GP and/or nursing services, and reliance on public transport.

This report sets out significant mitigating actions in place now and the future to address the concerns raised, such as home visiting services, the use of technology and other contact methods (telephone consultations have increased by 16% since 2019), funds secured for a community transport offer, all of which are being offered by the practice to ensure the patient experience remains as positive as possible.

Following completion of the patient and stakeholder engagement and a review of the feedback received, St Thomas Medical Group is proposing that the temporary closure of Pathfinder Village branch surgery is made permanent.

As part of the closure of Pathfinder Village surgery we are not proposing any boundary changes, so patients will continue to be within the catchment area of St Thomas Medical Group.

2. Introduction

St Thomas Medical Group is a GP Practice covering 25% of the population of the city of Exeter.

All patients living in Pathfinder Village are registered at St Thomas Medical Group and can access healthcare at two of our current sites; St Thomas Health Centre and Exwick Health Centre. We also run the Student Health Centre based at the University of Exeter which is reserved for students only. Our current patient list size is 42,082.

We are a keen training practice, and we teach and supervise GP registrars, medical students, pharmacy students (both pharmacists and technicians) and student practice nurses. We are the majority member of the Exeter West Primary Care Network (PCN).

St Thomas Health Centre is open fully for five days per week, has 25 consulting rooms and is a purpose-built facility with access to a comprehensive range of primary care services from doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, paramedics, and the pharmacy team. It also provides appointments on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday evenings, and all day every Saturday.

Exwick Health Centre is open all week and operated as an acute duty site every weekday afternoon. Our duty clinic is run by doctors, advanced nurse practitioners and a paramedic.

The St Thomas Health Centre is on a main bus route and both Exwick and St Thomas Health Centre have plenty of parking facilities.

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Pathfinder Village Surgery has been a branch surgery run by St Thomas Medical Group, located in the park home site of Pathfinder Village. Prior to March 2020, the surgery was open for two days per week every Monday and Thursday, between the hours of 8.30am and 5.30pm. We provided two General Practitioner (GP) sessions per week and four Practice Nurse sessions per week. The site is a purpose-built modular portakabin with two consulting rooms, waiting room, reception area and WC. This was purchased by the Group in 2010. The property is accessed off the village car park, up a steep slope sited by the Village Hall. Outside space is limited. The site has been closed since March 2020.

Pathfinder Village is 5 miles from St Thomas Health Centre which is a 11-minute car or taxi journey. The No 6 bus service from Stagecoach (Bude to Exeter) provides a 13-minute bus ride to St Thomas Health Centre and runs regularly throughout the day.

During the pandemic St Thomas Health Centre and Exwick Health Centre have remained open and operational.

3. Rationale for seeking permanent closure

The issues around practising modern primary care from the Pathfinder Village Surgery site are mainly limited by space and the condition of the premises, which do not comply with current infection control or confidentiality guidelines.

Over time the work carried out in Primary Care and the workforce required to deliver primary care has evolved. At this juncture there is national recognition from professional bodies and government think tanks that other professional clinical specialists are best placed to support Primary Care to deliver a wide range of services outside the hospital environment.

The national Government strategy continues to fund primary care networks (PCNs) to enable employment of additional roles. At a local level we now have a much more diverse and highly skilled workforce who require facilities more in line with a large multi-functional site including community, volunteer and social care workers and pharmacy services. Many services now exist as an alternative to consulting with a doctor and without the need to travel to a site or to see a hospital consultant or other specialist. The modern workforce expects to be housed in a multi-disciplinary environment with a safe, effective, high standard and range of equipment and facilities; supported with good clinical supervision and education. Many of the procedures carried out in Primary Care need a continuous stock of equipment which is difficult to maintain across many sites.

Without substantial financial investment in the building at Pathfinder Village it will not meet modern standards, nor could it in the future. St Thomas Medical Group has a responsibility to remain financially solvent to maintain Primary Care services to our total patient population. Any decision to invest in modernisation of Pathfinder Village Surgery in isolation would be an unequal allocation of resource across our population footprint, the majority of whom (99.2%) are located near to the other main surgery sites.

Residents can continue to stay registered with the St Thomas Health Centre and consult with a doctor of their choice. There are no plans to change the practice boundary if the proposal to permanently close the Pathfinder Surgery was agreed. Pathfinder residents would still be able to access our home visiting service when they are too unwell to come into the surgery. District Nurse support would remain unaffected, their support would continue.

Primary care now offers online access and text information along with the more traditional face to face and telephone consultations. Since the temporary closure in 2020, 10% of the Pathfinder population have accessed an online consultation, while 49% had a phone consultation in 2019, compared to 65% in 2021. This gives us confidence that the use of modern technology for the residents is a viable alternative to the previous service. We continue to offer home visits from a wider variety of clinical roles and offer additional appointments outside working hours. Of note, there have been no adverse clinical events during the pandemic owing to the lack of on-site facilities at Pathfinder Village.

We have therefore concluded that to invest most effectively across our geographical footprint, we must propose that Pathfinder Village Surgery is closed on a permanent basis.

This led to our engagement exercise with patients and stakeholders.

4. Engagement Methodology

We completed a patient and stakeholder engagement exercise to obtain feedback on the experiences of patients during the temporary closure of Pathfinder surgery and the views of local stakeholders.

We were advised by the CCG to seek feedback from those patients registered with St Thomas Medical Group who live at Pathfinder Village. These total 337 which equates to 0.8 % of the total group patient population.

We invited every Pathfinder patient to take part in the survey by writing them all a letter (Appendix 1) and sending a questionnaire (Appendix 2). We made the survey available online via our website. Paper copies were made available for collection at both St Thomas and Exwick Health Centres. We advertised the engagement exercise on our website.

We also used the methods below:

- SMS/Text message or email to patients, inviting them to participate in the engagement.
- A letter outlining details of the engagement sent to patients in the cohort described above if we were unable to text or email.
- Online questionnaire for completion
- Hard copy questionnaire forms available from a box outside Pathfinder Village surgery
- Engagement with the practice's Patient Participation Group
- Details of the engagement on our social media

All other interested parties were invited to respond. Devon CCG Communications Team provided a further list of statutory bodies and other stakeholders to include, with whom we communicated directly. These included:

- NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group
- Pathfinder Parish Council
- Surrounding Parish Councils
- Local Pharmacies
- MP Mel Stride.
- Community Nursing Services.
- Avondale Park Homes
- Pathfinder Residents' association

Response rate for the patient questionnaires was 42% (140/337). Results are outlined below.

5. Effects on patients of the temporary closure of Pathfinder surgery

In the pages below we have grouped into themes and summarised the additional comments made, please note all individual comments have been provided to the CCG.

We sought to ascertain how the temporary closure of Pathfinder surgery has affected the patients in a positive, negative, or neutral way. The responses are listed below :

Positive effect	23.9%
Negative effect	60.2%
Neutral	15.9%
Undecided	0%

The main negative impact theme was about access to local health facilities. Patients felt that the removal of health facilities on site would be inconvenient to them. They mentioned the irregularity of public transport services to the other main health centres, and the challenges of parking at these sites.

Comments as below :

'The branch surgery is convenient, can be accessed on foot and negates a journey to St Thomas Health Centre or Exwick Health Centre.'

'The bus service is too irregular.'

'Parking at St Thomas Health Centre can be difficult.'

6. Effects on patients of the permanent closure of Pathfinder surgery

Following on from determining the effect of the temporary closure we sought to obtain feedback on whether patients felt there would be any adverse effects if Pathfinder Village Surgery were to close permanently. A total of 80.9% said they would be adversely affected.

Yes, adversely affect me	80.9%
No, not adversely affect me	9.6%
Neither positive nor negative effect	7.8%
Undecided	1.7%

Those that commented repeated the above concerns but also stated the following: -

They would want to keep their existing doctor

They would find it difficult to travel to St Thomas Surgery or Exwick Health Centre

Buses were unreliable and too irregular

Bus timetables do not match up with appointment times

'Don't like going to St Thomas as a place'

Taxis were expensive

They felt that the Doctors should keep a surgery at Pathfinder due to this being a retirement village and a population over 55

The reason they moved to Pathfinder Village

In this section of the questionnaire there were also positive comments as detailed below: -

'I need to travel to St Thomas to get my prescriptions so I might as well go to the Doctors too'

'I need to travel to the R.D & E for hospital appointments so I can make the journey to St Thomas, even though this is more inconvenient for me'

7. Other feedback received

We reviewed a Facebook petition which was organised by Mel Stride MP, Cllr Terry Tume and Cllr Stephen Pursue, and arranged a follow up meeting in person to this petition (over Zoom due to COVID19) on Friday the 11th of March 2022. We all acknowledged the patient responses highlighting access issues within the Petition and discussed these against our challenges outlined above. They have recognised the issues and have urged us to try and seek a level of continuing service for Pathfinder patients.

We also considered the findings from a petition organised by the Pathfinder Residents Association and email correspondence from the Tedburn St Mary Parish Council opposing the closure of Pathfinder Village on the basis of access and urging us to keep the surgery open. These reflect many of the comments already received from patients. We have considered these in the context of the current situation. These documents have already been submitted.

We reviewed data provided by the Southwest Academic Health Science Network which detailed all the demographics and chronic conditions of the whole of the St Thomas patient population. This data demonstrated that the population of Pathfinder Village had similar comorbidities and demographics to the rest of our population.

We reviewed the report provided by the Pathfinder Residents Association dated November 2011, detailing the healthcare needs of their population. This set out many of the same themes and comments, demonstrating that the current challenges have been a long term issue. We provided this to the CCG as part of the decision-making process.

Avondale Park homes have not commented on the proposal despite being asked for their input.

8. Other thoughts for consideration

As a final question we sought feedback from patients with regards to whether they felt there were any other factors we need to consider. 91.1% of patients offered further thoughts. The themes are outlined below:

a. Developing the existing premises

As already mentioned in the body of the report, there are significant costs which carry financial risks if the existing Pathfinder Village Surgery was developed in line with COVID and CQC regulations. New flooring, new windows, an intercom, and a screened secure reception area. We believe this investment would be better spent on investing in our larger health centres. The footprint is too small to meet the needs of Primary Care as a fully functioning surgery. The investment in our larger sites has been necessary to ensure their compliance with modern pandemic infection control guidelines.

b. Access for the elderly and patients with poor mobility

We have changed our service in line with national changes and the response to the pandemic to provide greater access to digital services such as online and video consultations. There is now more choice for access to primary care services due to remote consultations, online consultations, and availability of appointment times over weekends and later opening times during the week.

Like many other patients, those invited to attend a face-to-face appointment have been able to drive, use public transport, taxis, rely on family and friends, or use one of the many community transport schemes. During the pandemic we witnessed armies of neighbourhood support networks providing a wide range of help and services to the patients. We have been successful in bidding for money for the voluntary sector to support neighbourhood scheme building in Pathfinder. It is envisaged that these networks will continue to support those who need transport.

We have dedicated car parks at each site and have extra spaces available for patients to use due to the recent relocation of the District Nursing team. We stagger face-to-face appointment times, so it is easier for patients to park. We have had no patient comments relating to parking in the past 6 months.

To make the transition smoother we could consider Pathfinder Resident specific surgeries to correspond with bus times. We could liaise with Wellbeing Exeter social prescribing initiative to review the possibility of community transport or outreach options.

c. Increase the number of Doctors, Nurses and provide additional roles and services at Pathfinder

There is a recruitment crisis in the NHS today, with falling numbers of GPs and practice nurses. In this context, the staff recruited will be placed across the Group for the greatest efficiency of services. Staff are not willing to work extra sessions. Our multidisciplinary team are based at our larger premises where facilities are better and they gain support from colleagues.

d. A dedicated phone line for Pathfinder residents

We are unable to implement this option as it would provide a two-tier system for patients. The demographic as stated above we have circa six thousand patients of the same demographic as the residents of Pathfinder, so it would not be deemed fair or equitable if patients of a specific postcode had priority access for appointments.

e. Modernisation of the phone system

We have already modernised the phone system which went live in June 2022. We have had no patient complaints about the phone system since its inception demonstrating the transformative positive effect on patient experience. While fully staffed, this has been a success.

f. Would Cheriton Bishop Surgery take over Pathfinder Village Surgery?

We have approached Cheriton Bishop several times and kept them informed of the consultation and they have confirmed they not in a position to take over the Pathfinder Village Surgery site.

9. Next Steps

We will submit our findings to Devon CCG with an application to close the Pathfinder Village branch surgery.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in this engagement.

The Partners of [St Thomas Medical Group](#)

10. Appendix 1 Engagement Letter



St Thomas Medical Group
St Thomas
Exwick
Pathfinder
Exeter University Student Health Centre

September 2021

Dear Patient,

Seeking your feedback on Pathfinder Village Surgery, Brookside, Exeter, EX6 6BT

We are keen to hear your feedback and experience following the temporary closure of the Pathfinder Village Surgery, from the end of October 2020 to date.

As a result of pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, services at the branch surgery have been suspended and general practice services are available to you at our main site, St Thomas Health Centre, Cowick Street, Exeter, EX4 1HJ and our Exwick branch site, New Valley Road, Exeter, EX4 2AD.

The limited service at Pathfinder Village surgery has been under review for a number of years, and following the temporary closure, we want to understand the impact that this has had on our patients residing in the village and surrounding areas, if any.

Previously we have only been able to provide a limited GP service at Pathfinder two days a week and the porta cabin building we were using isn't in line with modern healthcare facilities. Therefore, we want to hear from the residents in Pathfinder and the surrounding areas who have used the branch surgery. We also want to hear from patients about the effect on a possible option to permanently close the branch surgery and continue to access health care at our St Thomas and Exwick Health Centres.

With this in mind, we have attached an engagement document detailing our current position as well as a questionnaire to provide you with an opportunity to share any thoughts or feedback you might have as a recent user of the surgery.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions relating to the documents Enclosed. The best way to do so is to email the practice at stthomas@nhs.net.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Stoppard, Practice Manager on behalf of **St Thomas Medical Group**.

11. Appendix 2 Questionnaire

Which of the following best describes you?	
A patient who used the GP and Nurse service at Pathfinder Village Surgery prior to March 2020.	
A patient registered with St Thomas Medical Group who hasn't visited Pathfinder Village Surgery.	
A parent, relative, friend or carer of a patient registered with St Thomas Medical Group.	
I am interested in these services	
Other (please specify)	
What effect, if any, has the temporary closure of Pathfinder Village surgery since March 2020 had on you?	
A positive effect (please provide details below)	
A negative effect (please provide details below)	
Neither a positive nor negative effect	
Undecided	
If Pathfinder Village surgery did not reopen and you had to access medical care at our St Thomas and Exwick sites, would you be affected by this, and if so, how?	
No, it would not adversely affect me (please provide details below)	
Yes, it would adversely affect me (please provide details below)	
Neither a positive nor negative effect	
Undecided	
Is there anything else you think we should take into consideration when contemplating the future of Pathfinder Village surgery?	
Yes (please provide details below)	
No (please provide details below)	
Undecided	

Please return completed questionnaire to the surgery via email stthomas@nhs.net or post.

Thank you
St Thomas Medical Group

12. Appendix 3 Survey results

A total of 140 surveys were returned.

Some households had answered the same question more than once for each member of the household and some households omitted to answer all the questions.

Which of the following best describes you? Out of 140 responses

72.9%	A patient who used the GP and Nurse service at Pathfinder
7.9%	Patient who has not used the Pathfinder branch site
4.3%	A parent, relative, friend or carer
14.3%	Interested in these services
0.6%	Other

What effect has the temp closure had on you? Out of 113 responses

23.9%	Positive effect
60.2%	Negative effect
15.9%	Neither positive nor negative effect
0%	Undecided

If Pathfinder Village Surgery did not reopen and you had to access medical care at our St Thomas or Exwick sites, would you be affected by this and if so, how? Out of 115 responses

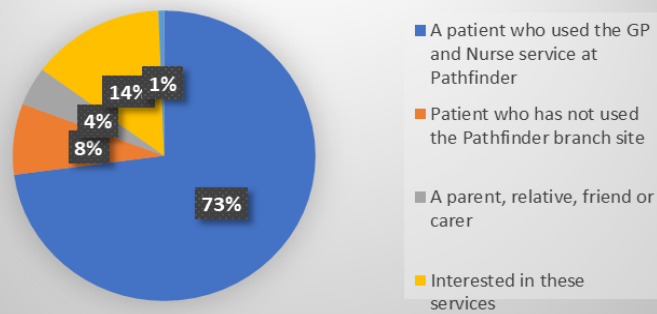
80.9%	Yes, adversely affect me
9.6%	No, not adversely affect me
7.8%	Neither positive nor negative effect
1.7%	Undecided

Is there anything else you think we should take into consideration when contemplating the future of Pathfinder Village branch surgery? Out of 112 responses

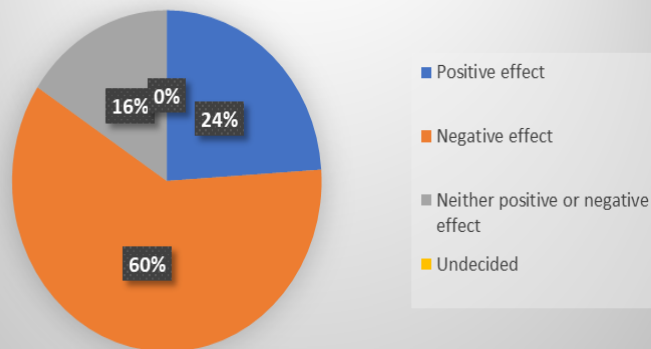
91.1%	Yes
7.1 %	No
7.8%	Neither positive nor negative effect
1.7%	Undecided

Graphical Survey Results

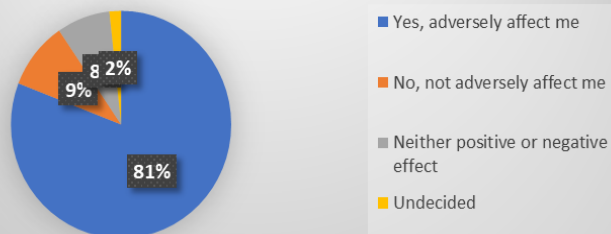
Which of the following best describes you?



What effect has the temp closure had on you?



If Pathfinder Village Surgery did not reopen and you had to access medical care at our St Thomas or Exwick sites, would you be affected by this and if so how?



Is there anything else you think we should take into consideration when contemplating the future of Pathfinder Village branch surgery?

