

11th October 2007

**SOAMES SPEAKS IN ADJOURNMENT DEBATE IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS ON *SMALLER GENERAL HOSPITALS*
WEDNESDAY 10TH OCTOBER 2007**

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex) (Con): I am pleased to support my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) in this debate, which is central to the interests of all our constituents. He covered an enormous amount of ground at great speed—indeed, if he were a horse, I would breed from him.

The Prime Minister speaks about rebuilding trust in politics and reconnecting people with the political process, but what can those words mean when Ministers have given me and other hon. Members assurances on the Floor of the House in the recent past about the future of A and E facilities at the Princess Royal hospital in Haywards Heath and elsewhere—an issue that could hardly be of more importance and concern to our people—and then reneged on those promises within two years? The Government should be truly ashamed of treating people in that way.

The proposals for the future of the Princess Royal hospital in my constituency include downgrading the A and E and the loss of all elective surgery and of our wonderful maternity services. The proposals across West Sussex more widely, which cover the Princess Royal hospital, the Worthing hospitals and St. Richard's hospital in Chichester, are wholly unacceptable and unsuitable and would undermine the safety and accessibility of acute services in West Sussex. I take great heart from what the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said. I have indeed read the paper that he mentioned and I very much hope that the Government will pay close attention to what it says.

Tens of thousands of people have made their views on this matter known in the only way they know how. More than 300,000 people have signed petitions and 25,000 have marched. This weekend, in Haywards Heath, the support the Princess Royal campaign will have a march, which 10,000 people will, I hope, attend. People

feel, rightly, that they have paid their taxes and that they are entitled to high-quality local and accessible services.

I know that the Minister is an excellent person, and I hope that she will not be got to, because I trust her judgment. However, I hope that she understands that this is the fourth time in seven years that the Princess Royal hospital has come up for review. That is no way to run a health service or to look after patients. Above all, it is no way to treat the staff. The staff at the Princess Royal know perfectly well that there is no clinical evidence in support of the changes, although they must of course be cautious about saying so.

On the face of it, the proposals are absurd. The Princess Royal is 15 miles south of one of the biggest international airports in the world, 5 miles from a very busy motorway, and at the centre of one of the fastest-growing places in the United Kingdom, which has an increasing, and increasingly young, population. It sits in West Sussex, which, I do not have to remind the Minister, covers more than 770 square miles, and has a population of more than 750,000 people, a struggling transport infrastructure and a growing and ageing population.

As the hon. Gentleman said in a speech in the House of Commons just before the House rose for the summer recess, to which I paid particular attention, infrastructure is about more than roads, railways, sewers and health and social services. It underpins national and local well-being, and people in my constituency, and elsewhere, know that and will make a powerful case to the Minister. Most importantly, the people in Mid-Sussex, and across the county of West Sussex, who have been through an awful lot with the health services in the past seven years, want an assurance from the Minister, if the so-called consultation is to be seen to be real—I hope that she intends it to be real—that the powerful, detailed and knowledgeable views expressed locally will be listened to, and that attention will be paid to them when it comes to the shake-up at the end of the process.

I speak this afternoon on behalf of my hon. Friends the Members for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley), for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), for Wealden (Charles Hendry) and for Chichester (Mr.

Tyrie) and the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker). All the campaigns in West Sussex to save our hospitals are emphatically all-party, and they embrace all shades and none of political and social opinion. They are not to be despised by a slippery and thoroughly unreliable Government.

Finally, I should like the Government to know that Dr. Herry Ashby, a magnificent and inspirational GP in Newick in East Sussex, has 180 letters from GPs in the Mid-Sussex and Lewes area, representing 300,000 patients, saying that they believe that the proposals relating to the Princess Royal, and other wider changes, are untenable and clinically unsafe, and that they will not support them. Across Worthing and Chichester, opinion is just the same. We look to the Government to resolve those matters in a way that is serviceable and reliable to our constituents; perhaps the hon. Member for Wyre Forest has given the Government a good signpost.

Notes

The full debate can be downloaded via the link below:-

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm071010/halltext/71010h0005.htm#07101030000003>

Hansard Volume 464, No 139
Columns – 115 – 116

Support the Princess Royal Hospital Campaign

<http://www.supportprh.com/>