

12th November 2007

Dear Editor,

As the *Fit for the Future* consultation period closes it is a good time to take stock.

Firstly, the Support the Princess Royal Hospital Campaign has been a fantastic success and the local community has really come out in force to let its views be known about the range of hospital services we need in Mid Sussex.

However, the battle is not over yet and we look to the Primary Care Trust to listen with care to the views expressed by local people.

I welcome the recent decision by the Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust Board to promote a local acute hospital model for the Princess Royal Hospital (PRH) in Haywards Heath, and to recognise that the hospital is a key deliverer of acute medical services for central Sussex. I am relieved that the Trust wants to maintain the A&E but, at the end of the day, the decision on acute service reconfiguration lies with the Primary Care Trusts.

I remain concerned, however, about two significant aspects. The future at the PRH for maternity services and intensive care (ITU) is far from clear.

The people of central Sussex need a consultant-led maternity unit at the PRH. Clinical opinion is that expectant mothers should not have to travel long distances to give birth, especially when what starts as a straightforward delivery suddenly becomes complicated. The safety of mother and baby is put at risk. The Hospital campaign believes that other hospitals will simply not have the capacity to cope. It would be wrong to alter the service today on the back of a promise to “respond positively” if birthing numbers later increase (which they almost certainly will).

Equally worrying is the future for intensive care (ITU) services which cater for a broad spectrum of eventualities. Lives depend upon their being close at hand and properly resourced. Consultant physicians at the PRH believe that patient care for an unselected medical intake would be compromised if level 3 ITU were not immediately available on-site. The health bodies need to give this issue their most serious consideration.

The bottom line is that the PRH (as a district general hospital) must be given the tools and resources it needs to be able to continue to provide safe and sustainable acute services for the 300,000-plus people who live within its catchment area. Nothing less will do.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Soames MP (Mid Sussex)