



## NEIL PARISH

*Member of Parliament for Tiverton & Honiton*

Mr John Dowell  
Chief Operating Officer, Eastern Locality  
New Devon Clinical Commission Group  
Newcourt House  
Old Rydon Lane  
Exeter  
Devon EX2 7JU

16<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Dear Mr Dowell,

**Re: Axminster Hospital**

Further to our meeting last Friday regarding your CCG proposals for community hospitals in East Devon and your proposals to close the patient beds at Axminster, I would like to raise the following points with you.

The residents of Axminster want to see a proper consultation regarding the future of Axminster Hospital. What they do not want is to be presented with a fait accompli.

At our meeting on Friday we discussed the fact that the North Devon Health Trust has one year left with their contract to run Axminster Hospital and that Hugo Swire MP and myself believe that the beds in our community hospitals should remain until the contract expires next October when a community interest company could be set up to bring the assets of the community hospitals together so that we can deliver a patient service throughout East Devon using the community hospitals to their full capacities. Any decisions made before this time would be premature and wrong.

We also discussed the issue of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital which is an excellent hospital and facility for Devon, and especially East Devon. However, we also discussed the fact that there is a real role for community hospitals to convalesce the patients from the RD&E after their operations and before they can go back to either their homes or into a nursing home. We have a growing elderly population in East Devon; around Axminster and in the surrounding villages. One of the problems under the present system is that the cost of carrying out the operation is awarded to the RD&E and none of this money follows the patients back to the community hospital in Axminster so as to help with the cost of running patient beds.

On 4<sup>th</sup> October a public meeting was held at the Guildhall in Axminster, chaired by Mr Stephen Holt, Treasurer of Axminster Hospital League of Friends. This meeting was attended by 450 people with another 300 people waiting outside who could not gain entry to the Guildhall because it was over full capacity. It is difficult to express the amount of concern and attachment that the people of Axminster have for their hospital. The meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October was very positive where everyone expressed their admiration for the staff, the doctors and the hospital, and there are huge concerns about your proposals to close the hospital beds.



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The issues raised at the meeting were that the population growth in Axminster is estimated to rise by nearly 4000 people in the next few years because of planning permissions at Cloakham Lawns and others in the surrounding district. The population of Axminster is aging and it is at a level equivalent of what the national population will be in 2035, there is therefore a need for greater services within the Axminster area. Axminster Hospital serves many villages in the outlying areas and is very much a focal point for local villages. The care and attention that patients receive from both the nursing staff and the doctors at Axminster Hospital is second to none. The local residents naturally find it such a wonderful experience to be able to have their loved ones back at Axminster Hospital so that they are then able to visit them easily. The patients also feel that they are moving back much closer to home which reduces their stress levels and I am certain that they recover faster from their illnesses given that they feel so much at home at the hospital.

The RD&E has been on red alert on many occasions over the summer and there is need to have extra beds in the community hospitals in order to keep the RD&E running efficiently. It would be very short sighted to close the beds at Axminster and I would suggest that we increase the beds from ten to over twenty beds so that the economics of running the hospital beds is much more efficient. If the RD&E is at full capacity over the summer then what is going to happen if we have a winter with severe weather and all the injuries that come from frozen roads and pavements.

The hospital in Axminster has been supported hugely by the League of Friends and the people of Axminster have dipped deeply into their pockets to provide support. The League of Friends has offered you financial support to help run the hospital and keep the clinical beds, and I would ask you to look very sympathetically at what the League of Friends is offering so that we can work together to carry on providing clinical beds at Axminster Hospital, which will not only be good for the local population but it will also relieve the load on the RD&E in Exeter.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Parish MP