

WHEN THE PRICE IS TOO HIGH

Calls to safeguard dementia hospital

By Patsy Duffy

AN ONLINE petition has now been launched to help safeguard the future of a hospital in Twickenham which specialises in the care of older people with dementia.

The petition to save St John's Hospital in Stafford Road has been launched by Twickenham's Tory hopeful Deborah Thomas and backed by incumbent Lib Dem MP Vince Cable.

Dr Cable, who won support on Tuesday from health minister Ivan Lewis during a Commons debate, said closure would be an 'act of vandalism'.

The purpose-built centre faces closure as Richmond and Twickenham Primary Care Trust (PCT) looks to cut costs.

It is no longer willing to pay the £1,736 per week for each patient demanded by South-West London and St George's Mental Health Trust, which runs the facility.

St George's is planning to decommission the service and move it elsewhere.

If it closes, residents will be cared for at an independent provider, but carers and families fear that the service may

not be equipped to handle people with dementia or challenging behaviour.

Key to the campaign is Paul Lamplugh, OBE, father of missing estate agent Suzy, whose wife Diana is one of 14 residents in a unit within the hospital.

Mrs Lamplugh founded the Suzy Lamplugh Trust with her husband Paul in 1996 following the disappearance of their 25-year-old daughter.

She has received care at St John's for the last four years for Alzheimer's Disease.

At a meeting at the hospital on Monday, Mr Lamplugh introduced Diana to shadow health minister Anne Milton MP, who is backing campaigners.

Mrs Milton said: "Uncertainty over a hospital causes all sorts of concerns and problems with staff morale. Unfortunately mental health never gets the recognition it deserves."

Richmond Park Parliamentary candidate Zac Goldsmith said the move was incredibly short-sighted when there was such a clear need for the service.



Meanwhile, Ms Thomas added: "If this closes there will be no proper facilities in the borough for elderly people with challenging behaviour."

But a PCT spokeswoman insisted elderly mentally ill patients would not be adversely affected as a result of the current tender process or its outcome.

St George's Mental Health Trust chief Peter Houghton said there were no plans to sell or redevelop the site and the care beds contract had been put out to tender.

Around 500 signatures opposing the move have been collected so far.

To support the campaign visit: www.deborah4twickenham.com and go to the petitions link.

SIGN LANGUAGE: prospective Tory MP Deborah Thomas and shadow health minister Anne Milton with the petition to save St John's (above left)