AIMS For a better birth...

Help us to save our Birthing Units!

By Tina Bolton

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Tina Bolton calls for action in an ongoing campaign to save two Petersfield sites.

July 4th - The day Petersfield witnessed an uprising by around 300 men, women and babies protesting against the closure of the Grange Ward in Petersfield and Blackbrook in Fareham, where a large number of the local mums have either given birth or experienced the postnatal care available there.

A number of heavily pregnant mums took matters into their own hands by staging a 'bed block' and literally sat on a brand new birthing bed, and were successful in delaying its removal. Members of the public signed a petition and signalled their support, and the BBC as well as local press interviewed not only our pregnant women but also the last patient to leave the Grange Ward less than 48 hours after giving birth. She struggled to walk, but did so with a mixture of grim determination and pride as she spoke of her disappointment at the closure to local radio and TV stations.

The protesters also staged a Pram Push in Petersfield town square, and as a finale to the morning many joined the pregnant mums at the hospital where Donna Ockenden of Portsmouth NHS Trust midwifery services gave several press interviews and also came out to talk to the numbers outside the hospital.

When asked when the birth units would be reopened she said that a review in 6 month's time was all she could promise but would not give any assurance that they would reopen. She also said that they were 'assertively' following up on two applications for contract midwives to cover some of the 'unprecedented numbers' of midwives (11 out of around 180) on maternity leave, which caused the closures in the first place. Those mums due to give birth shortly would be offered either a home birth or the option to go to St Mary's unit in Portsmouth, but she could offer no explanation as to how they could cope with more home births as opposed to keeping the Birthing units open.

These facilities have now been closed for 6 months, less than 2 years after they closed for 6 weeks, and with the promises of no more closures again still ringing in our ears. This time we were given less than two weeks notice, which was a devastating blow to the many mums who had hoped to give birth or to recuperate there. A rapidly organised meeting by the local NCT branch last week was attended by more than 200 people.

The campaign has had a tremendous boost with lots of press coverage which we hope to capitalise on over the coming weeks. But we need even more support to keep us going and also assistance in where to

go.

Anyone wishing to contact Tina Bolton, please contact AIMS.