‘NOBODY WANTS THESE CHANGES’

A CAMPAIGNER who joined a mass demonstration against proposals to downgrade Lewisham Hospital has said the march should serve as a wake-up call for the Health Secretary.

More than 25,000 protesters brought Lewisham town centre to a standstill as people from across the capital joined forces to fight plans to strip the hospital of its A&E, children’s A&E and high-risk maternity units.

Queuing drivers sounded their car horns in support as people marched from Loampit Vale roundabout in Lewisham to a rally in Mountsfield Park, Catford.

Campaign organiser and mum of three Vicky Penner said: “This should be a wake-up call to Mr Hunt to listen to the overwhelming support for the retention of services at Lewisham Hospital.

“No one wants this and the many tens of thousands who marched showed this.

Dangerous

“To go against all the views of doctors, nurses, MPs and ordinary people who have consistently been against these dangerous proposals would be madness.”

Speakers at the rally included local doctors, MPs Heidi Alexander and Dame Joan Ruddock and LBC presenter Nick Ferrari.

The proposals were tabled by government-appointed administrator Matthew Kershaw, who was brought in to sort out a financial crisis in a neighbouring hospitals trust.

The South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT) was declared bankrupt in July after racking up debts of £150 million.

Mr Hunt is due to make his decision on the proposals by this Friday.

By KATE GOULD

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SATURDAY’S march against the downgrading of Lewisham Hospital united residents and businesses from all walks of life with doctors, health staff and politicians.

Home-made banners showed people’s anger about the fact a solvent and successful hospital faces losing services as part of an administrator’s plans to save the bankrupt neighbouring South London Health Care Trust (SLHT).

Bands played and car horns hooted their support along the marchers’ route from Lewisham town centre and Mountsfield Park in Catford. Feeder marches began in Blackheath and Goldsmiths University in New Cross and joined up with protesters from the main march for a rally in the park.

Organiser Vicky Penner said: “The Prime Minister said the NHS was safe in his hands - but these proposals show it’s not.

“If Jeremy Hunt accepts the proposals we will fight on and mount a legal challenge. We will go on fighting until we win because we won’t stand by and let the hospital be destroyed.”

Dr Helen Tattersfield, local GP and chairwoman of Lewisham’s Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “If the Government can close down Lewisham Hospital, then no successful hospital in the country is safe.”

A banner carried by one youngster summed up the sentiment of many with the line “A five-year-old could tell you it does not add up.”

Speakers at the rally included a representative from Millwall Football Club, who passed on support from Charlton Athletic Football Club.

Lewisham East MP Heidi Alexander described the proposals as “insane”.

She said the proposal to close services at a “successful, solvent and high performing hospital” is “sheer madness”.

She said: “It is driven by an accountant’s bottom line.

“This will rip the heart out of the NHS in Lewisham.”

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: “We appreciate the recommendations for the future of SLHT concern many people from the local community.

“The NHS is rightly one of our most treasured institutions.

“However, where trusts face long-standing problems we have been clear that doing nothing is not an option.

“There isn’t an easy solution to the problems at SLHT.

“The Secretary of State has received the recommendations from the trust special administrator which he will carefully consider and will announce his final decision by early February 2013.”