This week it was the health department’s turn to answer oral questions and Tim Farron the Lib Dem MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale asked the secretary of state about a practice due to lose its NHS goodwills.

He started by informing the secretary of state, Alan Johnson, that the practice in Ambleside in his constituency served 5,000 NHS dental patients across a geographical area of more than 90 square miles. The PCT in Cumbria is planning to close down the Ambleside practice in March next year, when the current dentist retires.

‘Given that already 50 per cent of my constituents do not have access to an NHS dentist’, he continued, ‘does the Secretary of State agree that the PCT in Cumbria should ensure that the NHS dental practice in Ambleside remains open?’

Unusually Alan Johnson himself replied saying that PCTs had an obligation to ensure that there is proper dental provision in their areas. ‘Under the new procedure and contract, the PCT is obliged to ensure that proper NHS dental provision is available,’ he said and pledged that if the MP would like to write to him about the issue he would look into it.

Whether this promise has any effect remains to be seen, but the PCT seems to be digging its feet in. It was reported in local media that a South Lakes dental practice has stepped in to try to prevent the practice closure, but had had its offer to treat NHS patients turned down.

Grange Dental announced that it was taking over the premises of NHS dentist Mike Hynes when he retires in spring next year. But the plans to provide cover for his 3,000 patients has been rejected by the Cumbria PCT.

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