

**Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS**

12 June 2006

Dear Secretary of State

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West

The South West Regional Assembly has recently published the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which has been submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government and is now open for public consultation. The Assembly is a partnership of Councillors from all local authorities in the region and representatives of various sectors with a role in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and as such has worked with a wide range of partners and stakeholders including all local authorities in the region over the last 2 years to prepare the Draft RSS.

Many of the factors affecting the health of the population are outside the scope of the NHS. Given that health outcomes can be profoundly affected by the housing, environment and community within which people live, the Draft RSS has the potential to have a significant influence on key determinants of health.

The planning system can help address health issues by planning developments which make it easier for people to lead healthy lives and make lifestyle choices which lead to a beneficial impact on health. Some of the most important elements of the draft RSS relevant to health include improving:

- high quality housing with high standards of ventilation and fuel efficiency;**
- access to open spaces and sports facilities to encourage people to exercise and which do not require a car for access;**
- access to high quality public transport to reduce car use and increase walking and cycling;**
- access to shops where healthy food, such as fruit and vegetables, can be easily bought, even by those who do not drive a car;**
- access to food produced locally, to reduce food and goods miles and improve the quality of the environment;**
- access to employment within a short walk, or public transport journey;**

- communal facilities, such as a village hall, to enable community groups to meet regularly (there is good quality, scientific, evidence to show that those who are members of such groups are healthier, and recover more quickly from illnesses such as heart attack);
- access to medical facilities (conforming to *'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say'* standards) for those without access to a car.

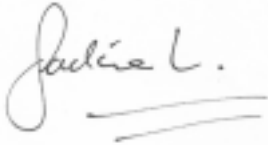
Through the draft RSS, Local Development Documents will seek to achieve this and will take into account Health Impact Assessments and advice on public health in order to maximise the opportunities for tackling the root causes of ill health through well planned development. In those wards of the South West performing least well in relation to measures of health inequality, Local Authorities will have particular regard to ensuring positive health outcomes from development.

Planning for future healthcare provision must consider the longer term population and demographic implications of the scale of change the draft RSS is addressing. An extra 750,000 people or more will be resident in the South West over the next 20 years, many of them elderly people with complex healthcare needs. The total population aged 60 and over is projected to increase by more than half a million by 2026 and more than a quarter of a million of this growth will be amongst those aged 75 years and over. Local Authorities should work closely with healthcare providers (Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts and NHS Trusts) to ensure that plans for the growth and reorganisation of healthcare within their area and that of adjacent authorities are fully complementary with plans for development and change in the long term. Early dialogue between healthcare providers and Local Authorities in the planning of healthcare is essential.

There is a need for greater connection between Health Service Planning and long term development plans such as the RSS. In developing the draft RSS we have had useful discussions and inputs from the Strategic Health Authorities in the South West and the public health team in the Government Office. We plan to continue these dialogues and would encourage greater emphasis in Health Service Planning on the long term. Hopefully, the joining of Regional Public Health Groups and the new regional Strategic Health Authority under the new joint Regional Director of Public Health post will allow many of these aims to be taken forward – and government needs to make the most of this opportunity to influence strategic planning at regional and local level. Our estimates suggest about three quarters of a million more people in the South West over the next 20 years, with particular demographics and a distribution reflecting the RSS, which need to be taken full account of in investment decisions.

We hope that you and your colleagues recognise the great progress which has been made in the South West in the last two years in developing challenging strategies which are well integrated and are positive about the future and about growth, and in addressing regional priorities through the Way Ahead and the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) process. Health and wellbeing remain crucial to the success of the people of the region and we would be glad to meet you and your colleagues to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely



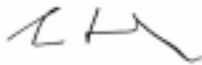
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