



**Steve Webb MP**

**LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR NORTHAVON**

**House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA**

Mrs Hilary Severn  
CPRE, The Countryside Room  
Poole Court  
Yate  
South Gloucestershire  
BS37 5PP

17 September 2008

Dear Hilary,

Thank you for your letter dated 14 August regarding the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft RSS for the South West. I strongly share your concerns and I believe that over-development on this scale will have a hugely damaging impact on the quality of life of local people.

Whilst I believe that there is a need for some more housing in our area, particularly affordable housing for local families and young people, I am very concerned about the threat of what will be development on a massive scale. As you know, when councillors and others initially looked at our area they thought that local need and local capacity pointed to a figure of around 23,000 houses over the next twenty years - itself a very large figure to accommodate in an area that has already seen a lot of development. My concern is that the Government want a further 10,000 houses on top and that these are mainly about housing people from other parts of Britain who would move here, rather than being to meet the needs of local people.

Over recent months and years I have undertaken a large number of surveys of local residents, particularly a general survey we delivered earlier this year to over 30,000 households and to which we have so far received over 8,000 replies. One of the questions dealt with house building and there was overwhelming support for the view that what was needed was housing for local need, but not the sort of massive expansion that is now envisaged.

Like you, I am particularly concerned about the proposed loss of Green Belt. In my view the key importance of the Green Belt is that it prevents the city of Bristol from being an ever-expanding urban mass, eating up the countryside. One of the reasons why many people value living in South Gloucestershire rather than in urban Bristol is because of the greater openness and greenery. Once we lose that my concern is that the character of the entire area will change in a way that would reduce the quality of life of hundreds of thousands of people.

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I am also concerned that the consultation is specifically about the Secretary of State's "proposed changes" to the Regional Spatial Strategy and I believe that the whole strategy is fundamentally flawed. I will say so in Parliament on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October when I will be leading a 90 minute debate on the subject at Westminster. I have a petition on my website (<http://www.stevewebb.org.uk/housingpetition.html>) and when I speak in Parliament on 7<sup>th</sup> October I hope to be able to cite thousands of signatories to this petition in support of my argument.

However, before then I am holding two further public meetings to try to help residents in some of the most affected areas to respond effectively. These are at Pucklechurch Village Hall on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at 7.30pm and at King Edmund Community School, Yate on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, also at 7.30pm. You would, of course, be welcome to attend either or both of these meetings to hear the views of local residents.

I hope this reply is helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact me again if you feel I can be of assistance.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S Webb', written over a faint, illegible typed name.

Steve Webb MP