Helen Maguire MP
Member of Parliament for Epsom & Ewell
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Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP,
Secretary of State for the Department of Health and Social Care,
Department of Health and Social Care,
39 Victoria Street,
London,
SW1H 0EU

14th October 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

The rural penalty in the 10-Year Health Plan

We are writing with great concern about recent analysis by Policy Exchange which suggests that the government's framework for "neighbourhood health" risks leaving rural and coastal communities with fewer services, longer journeys and less choice. We are particularly alarmed at the prospect that rural and village GP surgeries may be shut under these plans.

As Liberal Democrats, we share the ambition of treating people closer to home. But the report shows that the 10-Year Health Plan assumes a country of urban towns and cities, where "local" means a short bus ride. In much of rural and coastal England, where many of our constituencies lie, 'local' can mean dozens of miles.

Organising primary care around populations of 50,000, as the plan describes, entails truly vast distances, collecting up towns and villages far apart and poorly connected from each other. We share the concerns of the report's authors that this has not been adequately addressed or thought through.

Several of the report's findings should concern the Government:

- Coastal communities have 14.6% fewer postgraduate medical trainees, 15% fewer consultants, and 7.4% fewer nurses per patient than the national average, despite older and less healthy populations.
- Funding formulas do not fully reflect the extra complexity and cost of rural and coastal general practice.
- High-Cost Area Supplements reward staff for working in expensive cities, but nothing extra is offered to work in remote or coastal areas.

Our constituents, whether they live in a village or a town centre, should not receive a lower standard of care because of a postcode lottery. Rural surgeries are closing even as their populations grow, and a framework built around populations of 50,000 to 250,000 risks becoming centralisation by another name.

We therefore ask you to:

- Pledge that rural services will not be defunded or closed under your proposals.
- Publish a rural and coastal impact assessment of the 10-Year Health Plan and the neighbourhood health model. Review the NHS funding formulas, including the outdated Carr-Hill formula, so they properly reflect rurality as well as deprivation, and general need.

Rural and coastal communities are entitled to the same quality of care as anyone else. Recognising their circumstances is not special treatment; it's just fairness.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Maguire
Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell
Primary Care and Cancer Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

Helen Morgan
Member of Parliament for North Shropshire
Health and Social Care Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

Clive Jones
Member of Parliament for Wokingham
Care and Carers Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

Danny Chambers
Member of Parliament for Winchester
Mental Health Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

Sarah Dyke
Member of Parliament for Glastonbury and Somerton
Rural Affairs Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

Tim Farron
Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats

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