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## **Car Parking at NHS Hospitals in Kent**

The following report has been received from Peta Groom, LINK Participant, who urges the Kent LINK to consider her report and to carry out a survey of NHS hospital car park provision as a LINK project.

“This item is part of the Patient Environment Action Team Assessment 2009 under the heading ‘Access and External Areas’ on page 11.

Hospitals are being constrained in the provision of car parking by local planning authorities. Government policy to discourage reliance on car usage is being cited as the reason for any lack of sufficient car parking.

Central government allows local planning authorities to interpret as they wish the central policy on car parking provision. However, local authorities appear intimidated that central government may apply sanctions by withdrawing funding if the central government policy is ignored or interpreted too liberally. It appears that hospitals are seen as easy targets at the planning stage for a restriction on car parking.

Rural areas have a particular difficulty because many people have to rely on cars for their travel and, in particular, if required to travel outside of their immediate area. They feel that central government is city orientated and does not appreciate the needs of rural communities. Modern sophisticated medicine requires many patients to travel long distances outside their own immediate area. Often this is for day surgery, specialist diagnostic and day treatments, all of which usually require an accompanying carer and reliance on car travel.

Patient groups have tried to have NHS hospitals make ‘special cases for exemption’ from stringent planning rules. They have pointed out that people go to hospital to work or for medical treatment. They do not go for leisure or pleasure. The very nature of patients is that they are sick or about to give birth. Most are either elderly or very young and it is inhumane to penalise them.

This application of stringent planning rules was highlighted by the inadequate car park provision allowed at the new private finance initiative (PFI) hospital serving a rural community being built by Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust near Pembury village in Kent. Strong representation by the Trust’s Chief Executive and support by patient representatives was ignored. Government policy allows patients to choose where they can be treated. Ease of travel and car parking is a major consideration affecting their choice hospital.

Please recommend that central government departments work together to overcome this problem.

Report written by Peta Groom  
11 February 2009”