



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

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GREEN BELT LOSS A DAILY REALITY DESPITE GOVERNMENT PLEDGES

There has been significant loss of Green Belt land since 1997 and more is planned, despite the stated commitment of the Prime Minister to robustly protect it [1].

This is the key message from a Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) [2] investigation of the Government's record on Green Belt since 1997.

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NOTE FOR EDITORS

CPRE's briefing *Green Belts – Robustly Protected or Under Threat?* and a map of threatened Green Belt locations is attached.

Patron
Her Majesty The Queen

President
Bill Bryson

Chief Executive
Shaun Spiers

CPRE's investigation has found that:

- over 1,100 hectares of Green Belt have been lost each year since 1997 and at least 45,240 homes

The Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

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- equivalent to a city the size of Bath [3] - have been built on Green Belt land since 1997;
- London Green Belt's boundaries are being reviewed in 18 separate locations with a view to accommodating new housing development [4];
- Government Planning Inspectors are undermining the Government's claim to be upholding Green Belt policy in almost every English region, with statements suggesting that Green Belts should not be treated as permanent, and that demand for housing and air travel should justify major changes to Green Belt boundaries [5];
- in Nottingham, Government Inspectors have recommended wholesale removal of the Green Belt on three out of four sides of the city [6]; and
- two eco-town proposals could lead to further losses of Green Belt land, contradicting the claims of Ministers that none would be built on Green Belt land [7].

In contrast, CPRE welcomes action by the Government on:

- the creation of the New Forest National Park from existing Green Belt land;
- refusing a number of damaging development proposals in the West Midlands; and

- supporting established national Green Belt policy and safeguarding existing Green Belt boundaries in North West England [8].

Paul Miner, CPRE's Senior Planning Campaigner, said:

'I am sure that Ministers genuinely want to safeguard our Green Belt for future generations. But in reality the Green Belt is being seriously eroded. Too much development has already been permitted, and some Government Inspectors appear to be interpreting Green Belt policy in their own way. This is making a mockery of the permanence which Green Belts are supposed to have.

'Now we are faced with a serious downturn in the housing market. There is a real danger that Government will panic and relax Green Belt protection in a rush for development at any price.'

Paul Miner concluded:

'We need a strong commitment by Ministers in practice to uphold existing Green Belt policy. We also want the Government to carry out an urgent review of these current threats to the Green Belt to avoid further losses.'

– END –

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. House of Commons Hansard 11 July 2007, column 1450. The following text is taken from the Prime Minister's Afternoon Press Briefing of 10 July 2007: 'Asked if the Prime Minister could give assurances that greenbelt land would stay as greenbelt land as more housing developments were expected to be announced tomorrow, the PMS [Prime Minister's Spokesman] replied that we could give that assurance. We were not proposing any changes to the very robust protections to greenbelt land.' (accessed at www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page12415.asp on 28 April 2008).

2. CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. President: Bill Bryson. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. www.cpre.org.uk

3. The figures on Green Belt land loss are taken from *Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics*, the most recent edition of which was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on 31 January 2008. The figures on housing development are taken from an answer by Iain Wright MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at CLG, to a Parliamentary Question by Eric Pickles MP on 5 December 2007 (House of Commons Hansard Column 1250). The figures do not include data from 2006 as no robust data was available at the time.

Based on figures provided in Bath & North East Somerset Council's Housing Strategy 2002-2011 (accessed at www.bathnes.gov.uk/BathNES/healthandsocial/Housing+Strategy+2002-2011.htm on 28 April 2008), there are 71,000 dwellings in the District Council area, and 50% of the District's population live in the City of Bath. This allows for the assumption that there are less than 45,000 dwellings, and at least 35,000, in Bath.

4. Robin Thompson Associates and Urban Studio, *Approaches to Growth: Study of Sub-regions, Growth Proposals and Co-ordination in and around London*, Final Report March 2008. Accessed from www.london.gov.uk on 18 April 2008.

5. Examples include the inspectors of the South East Plan Examination in Public Panel stating that 'Green Belts...have been treated as inviolate. This cannot be consistent with Government policy' (paragraph 5.60 of the Panel Report, August 2007) and their counterparts in the South West stating that the demand for housing and increased air travel are to be viewed as 'exceptional circumstances' warranting significant changes to Green Belt boundaries (Panel Report, paragraphs 4.0.32 and 4.1.71, January 2008). See CPRE's briefing *Green Belts – Robustly Protected or Under Threat?* for more details.

6. The inspectors of the South East Plan Examination in Public Panel stated that 'We therefore recommend that... [a review of the Green Belt should take place and] ...the Green Belt should be recast so as to provide a separation between Nottingham and Derby without surrounding the city of Nottingham (Panel Report, paragraph 14.13, November 2007).

7. The Government announced its shortlist of proposed 'eco-towns' in April 2008. Of these, CPRE has found that two are likely to involve significant development in designated Green Belt: Rossington (in South Yorkshire); and Weston Otmoor (near Oxford). In a third case, the Government chose not to shortlist a proposed eco-town in Rushcliffe (Nottinghamshire). Rushcliffe Borough Council has, however, undertaken to search for a suitable site elsewhere within its boundaries, much (though not all) of which is in the Green Belt. CLG's press release (dated 3 April 2008) announcing the shortlist stated: 'Based on an evaluation of the bids, the Government can today announce no new homes would be built on Green Belt land.'

8. For more details see CPRE's briefing *Green Belts – Robustly Protected or Under Threat?* enclosed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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