



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

CPRE Oxfordshire News Release

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OXFORD GREEN BELT – ROBUSTLY PROTECTED OR UNDER THREAT?

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

Over 1,100 hectares of Green Belt have been lost each year since 1997 and at least 45,240 homes – equivalent to a city the size of Bath [2] - have been built on Green Belt land since 1997.

A Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) [3] investigation of the Government's record on Green Belt policy since 1997 has found that in **Oxfordshire**:

- Government Planning Inspectors are undermining the Government's claim to be upholding Green Belt policy, by treating the Oxford Green Belt boundaries as a moveable feast and by seeing housing demand as justifying major building in the Oxford Green Belt; the Panel Report into the draft South East Plan recommends a 'selective' review of the Oxford Green Belt in order to accommodate an urban extension of 4,000 homes on Green Belt land south of **Grenoble Road** [4];
- an eco-town proposal could lead to further losses of Green Belt land in Oxfordshire, contradicting the claims of Ministers that none would be built on Green Belt land [5]; approximately 28% of the 800 hectare site of **Weston Otmoor**, the proposed 15,000 home eco-town, just 3 miles west of Bicester, lies within the Oxford Green Belt [6].

Other threats to the Oxford Green Belt include an extension of the Thornhill Park and Ride in the Green Belt to the east of Oxford, creating a 'Transport Hub', and Oxford City Council's proposal to erect up to 20 wind turbines on four sites at Cuttleslowe, Hinksey, Horspath, and Sandford which will industrialise the Oxford Green Belt, harming its openness, along with the famous views of Oxford City.

Dr Helena Whall, Campaign Manager of CPRE Oxfordshire [7], said: 'A review of the Oxford Green Belt is neither required, nor in the best interests of the City of Oxford and Oxfordshire as a whole. Indeed a recent CPRE poll indicates that 84% of people enthusiastically support the Green Belt [8].

'The Oxford Green Belt, now over fifty years old, plays a critical role in protecting the setting of the historic city of Oxford and creating a higher quality of life for those who live in the city and its surrounding villages. It protects the open character of the countryside on the edge of the city and stops sprawl, thereby encouraging urban regeneration. It is a place where we can get a bit of exercise, explore the countryside and enjoy some much needed peace and quiet.'

Helena Whall continued: 'Those determined to build on the Green Belt argue that developing small areas of the Green Belt is of no consequence - who will notice the loss of a meagre 1%? The reason that 1% of the Green Belt matters is that the purpose of Green Belt policy is to prevent sprawl. If a bit is nibbled off here, and another bit there, each time saying that it is such an insignificant percentage it hardly matters, we simply allow a precedent for the destruction of the Green Belt entirely.'

Helena Whall concluded: 'Oxfordshire's Green Belt is proving tempting for developers, but it is too precious for us to squander. We need continuing strong commitment by Ministers to uphold existing Green Belt policy, and a determination to improve the quality of its greenness'.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. 'We will continue robustly to protect the land designated as Green Belt'. House of Commons Hansard 11 July 2007, column 1540, (accessed at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070711/debtext/70711-0004.htm>).

2. 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).

3. CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. It advocates positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, it has 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. President: Bill Bryson. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. See CPRE's briefing *Green Belts – Robustly Protected or Under Threat?* at: www.cpre.org.uk

4. The inspectors of the South East Plan Examination in Public Panel stated that 'Green Belts...have been treated as inviolate. This cannot be consistent with Government policy' (paragraph 5.60 of the Panel Report, August 2007).

5. 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.'

6. For a copy of the CPRE Oxfordshire press release 'Weston Otmoor is a smokescreen for making house-building appear more palatable', see: www.cpre.org.uk

7. CPRE Oxfordshire promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural Oxfordshire by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: www.cpreoxon.org.uk

8. CPRE Green Belt Omnibus Questions, conducted by MORI between 30 June and 4 July 2005 (accessed at www.cpre.org.uk).

For Further Information

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