



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

CPRE Oxfordshire Press Release

Date

17.07.08

Government target for new homes in Oxfordshire goes up to 55,200, including 4,000 in the Green Belt

1. According to the Government's proposed changes to the South East Plan published today (Thursday), Oxfordshire is to get a substantial share of increased rates of housing development across the board for the South East region.

2. Overall the new targets mean the County will get a minimum of 55,200 net additional dwellings by 2026 (up from 47,200 allocated in the draft South East Plan); an annual average of 2,760 dwellings each year. But the increase will be concentrated on Central Oxfordshire with its share going up by almost 20% - from 34,000 to 40,860. A "selective review" of Oxford's Green Belt will see an urban extension south of Grenoble Road of at least 4,000 houses.

3. Such high levels of housing development are not sustainable. The consequent pressures on the land, including the risk of losing large areas of valued countryside and Green Belt, would be intolerable. This is the view of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Oxfordshire [2]

4. CPRE Oxfordshire recognises the need for new housing, and supports housing of the right kind in the right place. The alternative to an ever expanding Oxford is to share the growth with the other towns of Oxfordshire, such as Bicester and Didcot, as the County Council has sought to do. This would provide new housing (including affordable homes), and sustain the local economy, while protecting Oxfordshire's countryside and Green Belt. CPRE Oxfordshire strongly opposes the recently floated Weston Otmoor eco-town for these reasons.

5. CPRE Oxfordshire believes 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. [3] A recent CPRE poll indicates that 84% of people enthusiastically support the Green Belt. [4].

6. CPRE Oxfordshire Campaign Manager, Dr Helena Whall said: '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. The Green Belt protects village communities from absorption into the city (this proposed extension threatens not only Sandford, but the Baldons, Garsington and even Horspath). It is a place where we can exercise, explore the countryside and enjoy much needed peace and quiet.'

7. Helena Whall added: 'Those determined to build on the Green Belt argue that developing small areas of the Green Belt is of no consequence – they say who will notice the loss of a meagre 1%? But the cumulative effects would be devastating to the purpose of Green Belt policy.'

We note with some alarm that if the "selective review" of the Green Belt proposed to provide an urban extension south of Grenoble Road cannot deliver a suitable solution, then the Government envisages that a "wider review" will be required. The Government changes also require authorities to take account of the eco-town initiatives. For Oxford's Green Belt this could simply open up a Pandora's box and lead to wholesale destruction of the Green Belt.'

8. 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'.

Note to Editors

1. The South East Plan is a replacement of Regional Planning Guidance 9 (RPG9 - the current Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East) to cover the period to 2026. It covers Kent, East and West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

The future of the South East will be re-opened by the Proposed Changes, which are subject to 12-weeks of public consultation. The initial draft Plan was subject to consultation by the Regional Assembly in 2005 and then submitted to be examined by an independent Panel. The Plan remains a draft and contains all the main elements, including housing numbers distributed to all districts to 2026. The final Plan is expected to be approved in spring 2009. The suite of documents can be viewed on the Regional Assembly website at www.southeast-ra.gov.uk.

2. 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 founded in 1926. For more information see: www.cpreoxon.org.uk

3. In 1956, Oxford councillors had the foresight to suggest they designate the fields surrounding their city as Green Belt, following a campaign by CPRE and the Oxford Preservation Trust. Designation was completed by 1958.

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

For further information:

Helena Whall (Campaign Manager, CPRE Oxfordshire)
01865 858679 (home) / 07766 624990 (mobile)