



NEWS RELEASE

26 January 2017

‘Colleges’ greed puts Green Belt and City at risk’ says CPRE

The Oxford Green Belt is under attack all around the City - more than 17,000 [1] houses on seventeen separate sites are being put forward by landowners and developers, including Oxford City Council, Oxford University and several Colleges, to be built on the Green Belt in the next fourteen years, encircling the historic City, destroying residents’ access to open countryside and damaging our rural villages and market towns.

This is happening despite declared-cross-party support for the protection of the Green Belt and against the wishes of the clear majority of local residents, 76% of whom wish the Green Belt to remain undeveloped, and the majority of whom see housing as the greatest threat [2].

Many of the largest housing developments proposed on the Oxford Green Belt [3] are on land owned by Oxford University and the Colleges, including:

- 3,500 houses at Grenoble Road to the south east of the city on land owned by Magdalen College and Oxford City Council;[4]
- 2,200 houses between Oxford and Kidlington on land owned by Christ Church, Exeter College, Merton College and Oxford University Press;
- 2,200 houses at Wick Farm, north west of Barton, near the village of Elsfield on land owned partly by Christ Church [5];
- 1,650 houses on land at Begbroke on land owned by Oxford University and Magdalen College; and
- 2,000 houses to the south east of Oxford, next to Garsington on land owned by Brasenose College.

This is just the tip of iceberg: the first tranche of sites being put forward by landowners and developers not wanting to miss out on the financial bonanza which planning permissions would provide. The Oxfordshire Growth Board is already talking about another ten sites in the Green Belt which could accommodate another 11,879 houses in the not too distant future [6], while Cherwell alone has about 30 Green Belt sites proposed by developers [7].

CPRE is calling on Oxford Colleges to re-think their plans before they risk damaging not only the Green Belt, but also our historic City.

Helen Marshall, Director of CPRE Oxfordshire said: “We need to stop this gravy train before it leaves the station. These attacks on the Oxford Green Belt are unprecedented in the history of our Green Belt, which is designed specifically to protect our historic City from urban sprawl of this kind.

“It shows the flaws in the argument of allowing small parts of the Green Belt to be opened up to development - it is clear that the merest whiff of an opportunity gets all the vultures circling.

“The Colleges will claim altruism, but we don’t believe this will make any difference at all to those in housing need - the houses proposed are very unlikely to be genuinely affordable. In fact it is

basic property speculation and will deprive existing local communities of access to the countryside and impact on their quality of life in other ways. Trying to accommodate 30,000 or more new people moving in and out of the City on a daily basis is likely to lead to gridlock and increased air pollution.

“There are other positive solutions to explore. We should instead be prioritising brownfield sites in the City such as Osney Mead, looking at much better use of land through higher density developments and considering more creative solutions to affordable housing need, such as community-led housing projects.

“Most importantly, we need to think about how much growth Oxford and Oxfordshire can accommodate sustainably, and how much it is right to impose on our rural County with already full employment, and whether development should actually be targeted elsewhere in the country, where housing is cheaper and jobs are scarce.

“Our Oxford Green Belt is there for the benefit of all of us, and helps to make Oxford and Oxfordshire a wonderful place to live. We mustn’t let already wealthy landowners like Magdalen and the other Colleges take over the Green Belt at the expense of local people, the countryside and the future prosperity of Oxford.”

CPRE calls on the Oxford Colleges and all other landowners seeking to profit from inflicting damage on the environment, Green Belt and the historic City to think again.

We urge the public to write to the University and Oxford Colleges demanding that they put the protection of the Green Belt and the City before their own profit.

Support CPRE’s Campaign to Save the Oxford Green Belt and Protect the Historic City of Oxford:
<http://bit.ly/29l5U9N>

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. A total of 17,440 houses are proposed for the Oxford Green Belt over the next 14 years. This figure is derived from the ‘Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme - Final Report’, Oxfordshire Growth Board, 26 September 2016, Appendix 5, ‘Detailed Assessment of Areas of Search’, pp.43 - 49 (see Note 3), which identifies land in the Green Belt as suitable for 11,880 houses (see note 4 below); plus an additional 1,300 houses on the Grenoble Road site (in Savills’ ‘South Oxford Garden Neighbourhood EIA Scoping Report, March 2016, the site is being promoted to accommodate 3,500 houses - *not* 2,200 as identified in the Oxford Spatial Options Assessment); plus 2,000 houses on land owned by Brasenose College, to the south east of Oxford next to Garsington; 1,510 houses proposed at North Abingdon, North West Abingdon, North West Radley and South Kennington in the Vale’s Local Plan, plus 750 houses proposed on the Oxford Brookes University Campus at Wheatley, totaling 17,440.

2. The 2015 Manifesto on which the current government was elected states three times “We will protect the Green Belt”, while over three quarters of Oxfordshire’s residents, and overwhelming majorities of City and town people too, believe that even though the need for housing may be great the Green Belt should not be sacrificed to meet it. CPRE Oxfordshire Green Belt Survey, March 2015: <http://bit.ly/29rsQGq>

3. The ‘Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme - Final Report’, Oxfordshire Growth Board, 26 September 2016, Appendix 5, ‘Detailed Assessment of Areas of Search’, pp.43 - 49, identifies the following sites in the Green Belt as suitable for housing:

Cherwell:

Land north of Oxford, 2,200

Land at Begbroke, 1,650

South East of Kidlington, 550

Sub-total: 4,400

Oxford:

St Frideswide Farm, 150

Redbridge P&R, 180

Sub-total: 330

South Oxon:

Land south east of Grenoble Road, 2,200

Land at Wick Farm, 2,200

Land adjacent to Thornhill P&R, 550

Sub-total: 4,950

Vale:

Land at north Abingdon, 1,100

Land at Botley, 550

Land at Cumnor, 550

Sub-total: 2,200

TOTAL: 11,880

Source: 'Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme - Final Report', Oxfordshire Growth Board, 26 September 2016:

http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s34709/OGB_SEP2616R03%20Appendix%20One%20Post%20SHMA%20Strategic%20Work%20Programme%20Final%20Report.pdf

4. Consultation on the proposed 'South Oxford Science Park' by Caritas Communications Ltd, on behalf of the consortium of landowners promoting the land south of Grenoble Road for development, puts the number of houses at 3,000: <http://www.oxfordsciencevillage.com/> But in Savills' 'South Oxford Garden Neighbourhood EIA Scoping Report, March 2016, the site is being promoted to accommodate 3,500 houses.

5. Christ Church is proposing to build up to 1,500 houses on land it owns, including the parcel of land that it owns within the development boundary of the Wick Farm proposal for 2,200 houses.

6. See: Table 5.5, p.76, and Figure 5.10, Chapter Five, 'Findings' in 'Oxford Spatial Options Assessment Final Report', LUC September 2016:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/communityandliving/partnerships/GrowthBoard/OxfordSpatialOptionsFinalReport.pdf>

7. Cherwell District Council is currently consulting on locations for 4,400 additional houses in its Local Plan Review, to accommodate Oxford's unmet need. It is clear that it intends that most, if not all, of these additional houses would be located in the Green Belt between Oxford and Kidlington and around Kidlington.

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England fights for the Oxfordshire countryside: to protect it from the threats it faces, and to positively shape its future – join us today and stand up for your countryside!

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