

London Green Belt Campaigners relieved that Green Belt protection is retained in the Housing White Paper but fear that unrealistic housing targets will undermine this protection in practice

The London Green Belt Council [1] welcomes the Government's commitment in the White Paper, Fixing our Broken Housing Market, to the continuing protection for the Green Belt. It also appreciates the statement from the Secretary of State that the Green Belt is to "keep all its existing protections". Also reassuring is the instruction that local planning authorities will be required to consider "all alternative options" before giving planning permission for development in the Green Belt.

However, Richard Knox-Johnston, Chair of the London Green Council said:

"I am concerned that this protection of the Green Belt may not be robust enough to stop planning decisions using Green Belt land. There is also the problem of recently adopted planning decisions in the Green Belt which, if the DCLG is serious about protection, should, now be called-in for urgent review.

Approved planning decisions for Green Belt have trebled over the last three years and urgent action needs to be taken to reverse this trend. Indeed, our own research has identified over 250 London Green Belt sites under threat from proposals to build in the region of 130,000 houses [2].

The action suggested in the White Paper to deal with land-banking is noted. One of the major threats to the Green Belt is land-banking which because of the deliberate delays caused in building on land with planning permission, puts further pressure on local authorities to consider green-field and Green Belt land. It is a positive step to acknowledge that this practice is not only delaying homes for families but especially those for first time buyers and those wishing to rent. For too long these land-bankers have held the Government and the country to ransom.

However, we are concerned that the powers suggested in the White Paper, will not be adequate or robust enough to rebut the inevitable legal challenges that these land-bankers with their considerable funds, will take.

The Green Belt has an important role in encouraging inner town and inner city development and we welcome the Government's acknowledgement of the requirement for higher densities as a positive move which will encourage innovative ideas.

The housing targets, as set out by Government, have been responsible for Green Belt land being considered for development. We fear that in order to achieve so called "realistic" targets this pressure will be continued. We trust that these new targets will be "realistic" in that they will take into account the situation where some planning authorities have a high percentage of Green Belt which should not be developed.

This is an interesting white paper with some innovative ideas. We shall see if it results in greater protection to the Green Belt and we call on all MPs with Green Belt in their constituencies to work with us to ensure government policy translates into action at the local planning level."