

The London Green Belt Council

President: Gareth Thomas MP



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London Green Belt Council Newsletter

The London Metropolitan Green Belt

The examination of the London Plan is taking place currently. In a Government submission, concerns have been raised about the level of cooperation that may have taken place with neighbouring local authorities in the south east of England. This is in part because of the potential impact of the Mayor's Green Belt policy, where most of the development would be accommodated within its boundaries without compromising the Green Belt or metropolitan open land (MOL). The Hearings continue and the sessions on Green Infrastructure and Green Belt / MOL are taking place on 26th March at City Hall.

The number of skyscrapers in the capital is set to double in the next ten years according to New London Architecture. The study found that for planning applications submitted last year, the primary use for such tall buildings (over 20 storeys) was substantially residential (91%) with the remainder coming from hotels, commercial and student accommodation. Over 100,000 new homes could be provided with these planning applications in the pipeline. Reporting on the story in *The Times*, 6th March:

"If you can't build out because of the green belt, it's no surprise you have to build up."

Green Belts Generally

In examining local plans, it is not uncommon for inspectors to suggest additional allocations of land, often in the Green Belt. So, it is encouraging to hear that in the examination of the Leeds Local Plan, the case has been made to remove two Green Belt sites from the Plan for it to be found sound. This would have represented nearly 2,000 homes.

Across the Pennines in Greater Manchester, the amount of Green Belt now being proposed is half of what was previously envisaged in an earlier draft of its Local Plan. This has been as a result of exploiting brownfield sites and focusing on town centres. When appointed as Mayor in 2017, Andy Burnham came out strongly in favour of protecting the Green Belt saying that the loss of green space could diminish quality of life in some communities and restrict people's access to good air and green space. He added that the plan should instead focus more on the region's existing town centres rather than building in the Green Belt.

Sir David Attenborough is campaigning to save a nature reserve amid fears about the effect of a 500-home housing estate proposed on countryside in protected Green Belt. The site, near York, is a designated site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), where rare flora and fauna

are to be found. A report has found that the housing development could drain the boggy land which is necessary to protect the local habitat. The nature reserve is already bounded on three sides by a road, railway line and golf course and housing would further reduce its links to open countryside.

A Derbyshire council plans to release 14 sites from the Green Belt in its emerging local plan to accommodate an extra 2,000 homes. This would be to maintain its five-year housing land supply. At the stage 1 hearings of the Amber Valley local plan, the inspector had suggested additional land would be required for development to ensure a sufficient level of supply. This will now result in a significant pause in the local plan examination, as the additional sites will need to be consulted on with residents and interested parties.

In South Oxfordshire District Council, a revised local plan has been out to consultation including three Green Belt housing sites totalling 4,600 homes. These had not been included in an earlier version of the plan which had been refused by councillors. However, the latest plan with 6,000 more homes was approved by councillors, resulting in six Councillors being suspended from the ruling group as they could not vote for the new proposals.

Planning Matters

A Cambridge council has refused to adopt its local plan because the changes suggested by the inspector would make the plan unrecognisable from what had been submitted for examination. The modifications being recommended were to make the plan sound, but East Cambridgeshire Council maintained that the plan was effectively being rewritten and so it has been withdrawn. However, that is not the end of the story because the council has now written to the Planning Inspectorate stating that further payment of fees would be withheld and a refund was being requested on payments already made.

An outline application submitted by Bristol City Council for 1,500 homes has been refused by its own councillors because the plans did not comply with a recently approved neighbourhood plan. This would have been for the largest regeneration scheme in the city and would have resulted in a mixed-use development including 1,500 homes on a 120-acre site. However, planning officers drew to the attention of Councillors to inconsistencies with the local neighbourhood plan which had been voted in at referendum just two weeks before.

A study by consultants has found that less than half of housebuilders think that the target of 300,000 homes set by government can be attained. Predictably, land availability was given as a reason, along with the time taken and effort required to secure planning permission. Interestingly, the availability of skilled labour – e.g. bricklayers, carpenters – was also identified as a key constraint to achieving the aspired level of housing development.