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London Green Belt Council E-Newsletter

The London Metropolitan Green Belt

Bracknell Forest Council has unveiled plans in its Revised Growth Strategy for 4,000 homes at Jealott's Hill in East Berkshire. This is in the London Metropolitan Green Belt, it would result in encroachment in the countryside and would be counter to government planning policy. A public meeting took place hosted by CPRE Berkshire at the end of January attended by 160 where the guest speaker was Richard Knox-Johnston. The Council has not put forward any credible exceptional circumstances for development in the Green Belt, the site is unsustainable being miles from rail and road connections and poses a threat in respect of air quality and loss of other social and environment amenities. Paradoxically, the Council does not need these 4,000 homes to meet its Local Housing Need.

The Jockey Club is submitting a proposal for a substantially reduced housing development at Kempton Park. Redrow Homes had eyes on a 3,000 home scheme that would have resulted in the loss of the 230 acre racecourse site, but would also have destroyed vital Green Belt, would have altered the character of Sunbury for the worse, and would have caused lasting traffic chaos throughout the surrounding area. The downgraded development would involve only previously developed land and would retain all racing facilities to continue as now. Spelthorne Council has omitted Kempton Park from its evolving draft local plan as it "strongly meets the purposes of Green Belt land and makes an important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt. Not recommended for development."

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has responded to the report from the Planning Inspectorate by dramatically reducing housing targets in the draft London Plan, but is remaining steadfast on Green Belt protection. The inspector had argued that opposition in all cases to development of Green Belt sites was not consistent with national policy. The mayor also rejected the recommendation that there should be a review of London's Green Belt, proposed by landowners and developer at the examination hearings. Of the 55 recommendations made, the mayor has accepted half in full, 12 in part and rejected 15 of them. The ten-year housing target would be reduced from 650,000 to around 525,000 homes.

A new councillor at Guildford Borough Council has spoken out about the NPPF deliverability test putting pressure on Green Belt sites for development. John Rigg is one 15 new independent councillors following the loss of control by the ruling party in the May 2019 council elections. The council had just before allocated three major Green Belt sites for 5,200 homes in its draft local plan, which had proved to be deeply unpopular with residents. Planning policy states that for housing sites to be considered 'deliverable', they "should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the

site within five years.” Because this test is so stringent, brownfield sites get overlooked, with the default to Green Belt sites.

An appeal against the refusal of redevelopment of an equestrian livery yard with nine houses in the London Green Belt has been dismissed. The inspector ruled that the benefits of housing and sports pitch provision did not outweigh conflict with Green Belt policy. The proposal would entail a suburban form of development that would encroach into the countryside conflicting with the purpose of the Green Belt. The appellant had argued that the houses needed to be in this location to enable the sports facilities, but the inspector decided there was no justification for both to be on the same site and so it did not amount to very special circumstances for development in the Green Belt.

The London Borough of Croydon has conducted a review of its local plan in an Issues and Options consultation at the end of 2019. In one of three options, this could involve the release of Green Belt for 5,350 new homes to accommodate a 40% increase in its annual housing need figure to reduce development pressure in the borough’s suburbs. However, releasing Green Belt for housing development could make other parts of the borough, in particular the town centre, less attractive places to develop, and so increasing pressure to redevelop the suburbs. Another option would be for larger development in the town centre in areas near to train or tram stops. The final option – most complex to deliver – would be to develop 2 miles away in the Purley Way area to accommodate 10,000 homes in high-density schemes, reducing pressure on existing suburbs.

Green Belts Generally

Cherwell District Council has been challenged over its draft local plan because of the proposed Green Belt release for 4,400 homes. This is based on the local housing need in 2018 for Oxford showing an annual need of just over half that identified in the 2014 study. The community group has written to Robert Jenrick, Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, asking him to block the emerging plan as it advocates building these 4,400 homes on Green Belt land based on outdated and ‘discredited’ housing need figures. Modifications to the plan were consulted on at the end of 2019, but the council has yet to formally submit its final draft to the Planning Inspectorate.

A planning inspector has upheld an appeal for 266 homes in the Green Belt at York. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm the openness of the site, currently in agricultural use. The site also is not included in the draft local plan currently at examination. However, very special circumstances to overcome this harm were found to exist including the city council’s lack of a five-year housing land supply. The council could only show a housing land supply of 3.28 years or 3.82 years, depending on whether emerging local plan allocations are counted or not. The provision of 30% affordable housing was also given significant weight. Other lesser benefits identified were economic such as employment and support for local businesses from new residents.