

**July 2020**

## **London Green Belt Council E-Newsletter**

### **Breaking News**

The Government announced last week that it will launch a planning policy paper setting out plans to introduce a new approach to planning. There is speculation that it will introduce ideas about a zonal planning system with more powers for development corporations to accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure spending as part of a plan to stimulate the economy. Such a zonal planning system would involve key decisions being taken away from local councils and handed to development corporations. This forthcoming policy paper will be published later this month, according to the Treasury, and the long-delayed National Infrastructure Strategy will now be published in the autumn.

Sir John Armit, a Government infrastructure adviser and someone who spent a career in construction, has this week advised the Government that to “Build, Build, Build” and hit its target of 300,000 homes a year, a huge expansion of council housing, including using the Green Belt, will be needed. Delving back into history, he said the last time this volume of housing was achieved was when it was split evenly between the private sector and local authorities. Of course, the 300,000 figure is flawed as it relies on housing projections from 2014 and earlier. What is apparent is that the 2018 figures recently produced are substantially lower and so it is important to persuade Government that it should be using current estimates as the baseline.

### **The London Metropolitan Green Belt**

Runnymede Borough Council has been supported by the Inspector examining its local plan who has stated that its Green Belt review had been comprehensive and had applied a robust methodology that reflected local circumstances and the unique characteristics. Runnymede is among the top 6% of English local authorities with the greatest constraints affecting its land area, including nearly 80% of which is Green Belt. When originally projecting to 2035, the Council had found it could not find enough land to meet housing needs covering that timescale without substantial release of Green Belt. A compromise has been found whereby the local plan will extend to 2030 and the Council has agreed to conduct a review in 2021, leading to an updated plan in 2025. The local plan will provide for the development of a garden village in the Green Belt at Longcross, comprising 1,700 homes

and a business park. This site was one of 21 garden towns and villages that Government has identified for a share of £6m to support work on design and environmental assessments.

An Inspector has dismissed plans by a parish council for a community centre in the Green Belt in a Buckinghamshire village. The site was occupied by a smaller building and the applicant claimed that the proposal constituted appropriate development in the Green Belt. However, the Inspector disputed that the entire site was brownfield land as it also included an area of ancient woodland. The existing building was single storey whereas the proposed building would be two storeys high and its footprint and volume would be more than twice the size. This would be a materially larger structure, coupled with a larger car park attracting a greater intensity of use, which would have a greater impact on openness and contribute to urban sprawl, and so was inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

An Inspector has dismissed plans for housing on a scrap yard site in Essex as the redevelopment would harm the Green Belt. It was accepted that the site was previously developed land, but much of the clutter was not permanent as it comprised stacks of vehicles and piles of containers. Even though of a similar height to the proposal for 20 dwellings, the volume and coverage of housing would be greater resulting in a permanent, urbanising effect. This would compromise the openness and would undermine the character and appearance of the area.

The Sevenoaks Borough Council local plan saga continues with it being granted permission to bring a judicial review against a planning inspector's decision to reject its emerging plan. This was because some seven months after submission, the Inspector belatedly advised the Council that it had concerns about a failure to meet the duty to cooperate with neighbouring councils and other parties. The Council is challenging this and has asked the Secretary of State to call this decision in for determination.

An Inspector has dismissed an appeal about a detached two-storey dwelling in the Green Belt within the settlement boundary of Woodside, a village near Ascot. The site was at the end of a row of houses next to the main Ascot to Windsor road. The Inspector needed to assess whether the proposal constituted infilling within the boundaries of a recognised settlement. The Inspector found however that such a building at this location would erode the spacious and open character of the area and would not represent the closing of an existing gap within a built-up frontage. In addition, it would also erode the open character of the area both visually and spatially and would harm the openness of the Green Belt. Crucially, the benefit of one extra home in an area of shortfall would make little meaningful difference to the housing supply situation and this consideration was insufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

## **Green Belts Generally**

Lancaster City Council has had its local plan found to be sound despite the Inspector recommending that a 500-home allocation in Green Belt be removed. At examination, the inspector concluded that the Council had rigorously assessed all opportunities to boost housing supply and satisfy demand for homes, whilst confronted with constraints such as Green Belt, flood risk and protecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In exercising its Duty to Cooperate with adjacent council, it was found that it was not possible for the Council to meet its unmet need for housing. The Inspector decided that the site in the Green Belt served a key purpose in preventing urban sprawl. The local plan which now goes to full Council for approval for adoption, includes a 3,500-home garden village.

The High Court has concluded that in the examination of the Leeds City Council local plan, there had been inadequate justification provided for Green Belt land removal. A local group has challenged the adoption of the plan, claiming that the need for 66,000 dwellings was too high, saying that the Government estimate was only 42,000 units. The inference was that the need to release substantial amounts of Green Belt land was not justified. The judge determined that the Inspectors examining the plan had in error based their assessment on an out-of-date housing requirement derived from an adopted core strategy dating from 2014. Their failure to give adequate reasons for agreeing that exceptional circumstances justified the release of Green Belt was flawed.

**Patrick Griffin, Vice-Chair LGBC**

[www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk](http://www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk)

**Follow us on Twitter @LondonGreenBelt**