

September 2019

## London Green Belt Council Newsletter

Robert Jenrick, the new housing secretary, has said that he is focused on building more homes, but has also called for continued Green Belt protection. He is maintaining that development should be focused "on the swathes of the rest of the country with fewer inhibitions". The first cabinet minister born in the 1980s, he is planning "at unlocking brownfield land, increasing housing in town centres and reforming the planning system to increase housing delivery." as reported in *The Times* on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

Sports England is advocating the use of Green Belt land for sports facilities, specifically, to address the health benefits of development proposals by promoting physical activity. Councils should support proposals for new and enhanced sport and physical activity provision in the Green Belt. This would involve councils including in planning officer reports an assessment, where relevant, of the benefits and / or detriment of a proposed development in promoting healthy communities, including participation in sport and physical activity.

### The London Metropolitan Green Belt

Government has issued Planning Practice Guidance on Green Belt and the importance of the visual impact that should be considered when assessing how new development may have on "openness". It states that openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume. This is important as developers tend to focus particularly on the footprint of previously developed land in Green Belt and not enough on the visual amenity that may be impaired by development.

Guidance is also provided on "compensatory improvements" to be made when releasing green belt land for development. Where sites are to be released from the Green Belt in the local plan process, councils are now required to take steps to improve the "environmental quality and accessibility" of the remaining Green Belt land.

For further information, go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/green-belt>

Jacob Rees-Mogg is advocating that a million homes could be built around London if rules on 3.9% of the city's green belt were relaxed. He is maintaining that some Green Belt land is derelict or has been previously developed. He completely misunderstands, however, the purposes of Green Belt which include checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and preventing local communities merging into one another. Richard Knox-Johnson has in response had a letter published in the Times (see below).

*Dear Sir,*

*In your article "We must build homes on the green belt, insists Rees-Mogg", he once again appears to state that building on the Green Belt will solve our housing crisis.*

*This perpetuates the myth put forward by politicians and developers alike that the release of Green Belt land will provide housing especially for the younger buyer. However in the development which has so far taken*

*place in the Green Belt, there appears to be no evidence of a single "affordable" home having been built. Developments in the Green Belt are normally four and five bedroomed homes of very low density contrary to government policy.*

*Building on Green Belt also flies in the face of government targets for climate change as the land has an important role to play in carbon sequestration, flooding and absorption of heat.*

*Yours faithfully*

*Richard Knox-Johnston, Chairman, The London Green Belt Council*

Wycombe District Council has adopted its local plan after the inspector supported the release of ten sites from the Green Belt. This would involve the release of Green Belt land to provide 1,139 of the homes representing 9.8% of the total housing allocations.

An outline proposal for 1,000sqm of office floorspace and twenty-two affordable homes on a part brownfield part greenfield site in the Green Belt outside a Buckinghamshire village has been dismissed. The appellant argued that the application was compliant relying on exceptions to allow development in the Green Belt (NPPF 145). However, the inspector concluded that the development did not constitute limited infilling in villages within the Green Belt. Further that the development could not be described as limited. Without any demonstrable need for affordable housing in the village, the site could not be described as exceptional. A further concern was that the spread of development across the site would urbanise its semi-rural character and appearance visibly extending the village towards open countryside.

In Tunbridge Wells, the council has unveiled plans to de-designate 5% of its Green Belt from its draft local plan, whilst at the same time more than doubling the housing target. The plan now proposes the delivery of 678 homes/annum compared with the 300 homes/annum in its 2010 core strategy. There are no plans to allocate new Green belt land elsewhere, although the Green Belt allocations include a garden settlement at Tudeley Village ultimately rising to up to 2,800 homes. There is to be an open meeting in Tunbridge Wells on the 18<sup>th</sup> September at which Richard Knox-Johnston has been asked to speak.

## **Green Belts Generally**

In West Yorkshire, plans have been submitted for a 49,000sqm industrial park on agricultural land in the Green Belt. In support of the application, the developer is arguing that the Wakefield Council emerging local plan published earlier this year would make provision for releasing new land to accommodate the perceived need for employment development for the smaller / local market with 11 industrial units.

In Birmingham, plans have been approved for a 65ha employment park on a former green belt site on the northern edge of the city. The land was released from the Green Belt as part of the Birmingham Development Plan process which called for additional employment space. Approval was granted despite the scheme having a direct, permanent, adverse effect on the landscape.

In the North East, South Tyneside Council has approved proposals for the release of 18 sites from the Green Belt in its new draft local plan. Whilst the council maintains it would prioritise the re-use of brownfield land, it is proposing the release of 18 sites within the existing Green Belt amounting to 113.8ha. This would be to build 2,400 homes (34%) of the target for 7,000 in the draft local plan.