

Press release

# Councils must protect our precious green belt land

From:

[Department for Communities and Local Government](#), [Brandon Lewis MP](#) and [The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP](#)

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Part of:

[Improving the energy efficiency of buildings and using planning to protect the environment](#), [Climate change](#), [Environment](#) and [Planning and building](#)

Ministers have underlined the government's commitment to protect the green belt from development.



Communities Secretary Eric Pickles and Housing and Planning Minister Brandon Lewis said that thousands of brownfield sites are available for development, and should be prioritised.

[New guidance](#), published on Monday 6 October, reaffirms how councils should use their [Local Plan](#), drawing on protections in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), to safeguard their local area against urban sprawl, and protect the green lungs around towns and cities.

The guidance explains that, once established, green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional cases, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.

It also states that housing need – including for traveller sites – does not justify the harm done to the green belt by inappropriate development.

Today's (4 October 2014) measures will reinforce the action taken by the government since 2010 to protect the green belt. This includes:

- abolishing the previous administration's top-down regional strategies

- selling surplus brownfield land for redevelopment
- introducing more flexible planning rights so empty and underused buildings can be brought back into productive use

Local Plans are now at the heart of the reformed, democratic planning system, so councils can decide where development should and shouldn't go in consultation with local people.

Eric Pickles said:

This government has been very clear that when planning for new buildings, protecting our precious green belt must be paramount. Local people don't want to lose their countryside to urban sprawl, or see the vital green lungs around their towns and cities to unnecessary development.

Today's guidance will ensure councils can meet their housing needs by prioritising brownfield sites, and fortify the green belt in their area.

Brandon Lewis said:

We have put Local Plans at the heart of the reformed, planning system, so councils and local people can now decide where development should and shouldn't go.

Support for new housing is growing, because communities welcome development if it is built in the right place and does not ignore their needs. That's why 230,000 planning permissions were granted by councils in the last year alone, while the most recent official statistics show that green belt development is at its lowest rate since modern records began in 1989.

Councils should consider how they will protect and preserve important sites in their area, especially green belt sites. Other considerations include:

- sites of special scientific interest
- areas of outstanding natural beauty
- heritage coastline
- national parks and the Broads

## Further information

The [guidance](#) published on Monday 6 October includes the following questions:

### **Do housing and economic needs override constraints on the use of land, such as green belt?**

The National Planning Policy Framework should be read as a whole: need alone is not the only factor to be considered when drawing up a Local Plan.

The Framework is clear that local planning authorities should, through their Local Plans, meet objectively assessed needs unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be

restricted. Such policies include those relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives, and/or designated as sites of special scientific interest; land designated as green belt, local green space, an area of outstanding natural beauty, heritage coast or within a national park or the Broads; designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion.

The Framework makes clear that, once established, green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.

### **Do local planning authorities have to meet in full housing needs identified in needs assessments?**

Local authorities should prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment to assess their full housing needs.

However, assessing need is just the first stage in developing a Local Plan. Once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a strategic housing land availability assessment to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period, and in so doing take account of any constraints such as green belt, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need.

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Added link to new guidance published on 6 October 2014.

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