

The London Green Belt Council

President: Gareth Thomas MP



11th October 2014

4A Paddock Way
Fenny Stratford
Milton Keynes
MK 2 2NB

Rt Hon Eric Pickles Esq. MP,
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street,
London.

Dear Secretary of State,

We very much welcome the forthright language of your support for the Green Belt in the Press Release issued on 6th October. The idea that “when planning new buildings, protecting our precious green belt must be paramount” expresses precisely the view of the majority of people in London and its surrounding Green Belt.

However, we are concerned that the wording of the Planning Guidance announced by the press release does not fully reflect the firmness of your support for the Green Belt.

There are a number of boroughs and districts around London in which most of the land outside the currently developed areas is designated as Green Belt and there is not sufficient non-Green Belt land to accommodate the “full housing need” determined according to the Guidance. Epping Forest District Council is an example of such a local authority.

In Epping Forest District which is 92.4 % Green Belt, there is only very limited brown field land and the Council have stated that it will be necessary to take land out of the Green Belt to build approx 10,000 new houses to cope with the “full housing need”. However, much of this supposed need is in expectation of immigration of people from neighbouring London Boroughs who want to (they don't NEED to) live in Epping Forest District. Can you confirm, please, that the newly issued guidance will mean that a council in that position will be able to plan for housing provision smaller than would be indicated by housing figures calculated in this way? Will planning inspectors examining such local plans be instructed that this would not be a reason to find the plan unsound?

We are pleased to see, in para 34 of the Guidance, a clear statement that unmet housing need is unlikely to be sufficient to constitute “very special circumstances” when considering a planning application. We know that Ministers have said this on a number of occasions, but it is good to see it set out in the Guidance. Can we be assured that any case referred to you in accordance with paragraph 4 of The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009, will be called in and referred to an inspector if unmet demand is a significant element in the alleged very special circumstances?

Yours sincerely

Cedric Hoptroff
Secretary, London Green Belt Council