

Government gives green light to 'green belt destruction'

Thousands of homes could be built on green belt land as the Government approves plans to rip up protected countryside to reach housing quotas.

By Louise Gray, Environment Correspondent
Published: 7:00AM BST 07 May 2009

The move is contained in the Government's new South East Plan which will see 32,000 houses built every year between now and 2026.

The controversial document includes a recommendation to review green belt land in Oxfordshire and Surrey in order to build 6,000 more homes there.



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Photo: IAN JONES

Countryside campaigners fear the move will "open the floodgates" to more building on the green belt and the Tories accused the Government of "concreting over" the South East.

However, the Government insisted green belt boundaries should not be "set in stone" when there is so much demand for affordable housing.

Sadiq Khan, the Communities Minister, said an increase in single person households, immigration and the ageing population made it essential to increase housing stock in the area.

"The number of households in the South East is growing rapidly with housing supply lagging behind and housing affordability worsening," he said. "Despite the current difficulties in the market we need to keep up with the rise in demand and provide more homes."

Edward Dawson, of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said the Government was in danger of "opening the flood gates" to development in the countryside by allowing councils to build on green belt land.

"We have some breathing space now because of the recession but in the long run – with housing pressure coming back – that will open the flood gates to green belt releases and we are very concerned about that."

Caroline Spelman, the Tory communities spokeswoman, accused Government of concreting over the region.

"Labour Ministers are today giving the green light to Green Belt destruction across the South East," she said. "This is a shocking betrayal by Gordon Brown who pledged when he became Prime Minister to protect the Green Belt 'robustly'.

"These top-down Whitehall building targets will lead to unsustainable urban sprawl, extra congestion, higher carbon emissions and more flooding, ruining many communities' quality of life. This will only deliver the sink estates of the 21st Century, lacking proper infrastructure or environmental sustainability."

Mrs Spelman also said the plan was a waste of money.

"Given a general election will be held within the next 12 months, councils would be wise to go slow on adopting the controversial provisions in this South East Plan, " she said. "It is not in taxpayers' interests for town halls to spend time and money on implementing Labour policies that could be scrapped within a year."

However the Department for Communities and Local Government insisted only a small area of green belt will be built over in south of Oxford, north east of Guildford and in Chertsey.