

PRESS RELEASE – 16 January 2014

HANDS OFF OUR GREEN BELT SAYS CPRE LONDON

“Green belts around cities should go”, the Economist declared last week. “London’s mostly protects scrubby agricultural fields and pony paddocks”. In fact the vast majority of the 2000 hectares of London’s Green Belt is arable land, woodland, and grassland. And it still serves the purpose for which it was created in 1938 – as land that seeks to stop urban sprawl.

We have been subjected to a relentless drip, drip, drip, from newspapers and politicians on both sides of the political divide about this issue. As if building over the Green Belt was some kind of cheap magic wand to transform the current housing crisis in London.

Green Belts, like National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts are there to provide town and city dwellers with a bit of peace and quiet away from the hurly-burly of urban life. Most people value them, but at the same time people want houses to live in – and affordable ones at that.

The answer doesn’t lie in building on these green spaces, which once gone will be lost for ever, but in building decent, well-designed homes near to jobs, community facilities, shops, good transport links, etc.; where people don’t have to spend thousands on ever more costly season tickets into London or jump into their cars to go shopping or to the cinema.

So why aren’t more houses being built in London? One answer is that developers and the big building firms are sitting on a vast hoard of developable land waiting to make an even bigger profit as house prices continue to soar in the capital. A recent GLA (Greater London Assembly) report said there were hundreds of acres of land with planning permission on which over 200,000 homes could be built. And that does not include developer land banks where planning permission has not yet been sought.

The other reason is the Government is preventing local authorities – the traditional builders of social housing – from building new homes. London and its boroughs need more financial freedoms to open up the market, to build homes themselves and to focus on delivering more affordable, good quality housing.

John Croxen, chairman of CPRE London commented

“This Government seems to care little for the countryside and the planning system that has served us well until now. They seem to want quick fixes and to please the major developers. There are solutions to London’s housing problems. They may be difficult, but building on Green Belts and the countryside is simply madness.”

Notes to Press

1. CPRE London is a branch of the national body and a region. It campaigns to protect and improve the London Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Spaces, and other green spaces within London.

2. It also campaigns to create a more liveable capital city which will promote wellbeing, reduce urban sprawl and protect the countryside.

Once you take into account the London Green Belt land that is actually viable (i.e. not flood plain or providing key functions) and available for new homes it only accounts for less than 1 km². See ‘London sprawl - why it makes no sense’.

3. John Croxson is the recently elected chairman of the branch. He was the Planning Solicitor for Devon County Council for many years.

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