



An Introduction to **The All-Party Parliamentary Group for London's Green Belt**



The **APPG for London's Green Belt** has been established to advocate Green Belt-friendly planning policies and to contribute to the debate on how best to achieve sustainable development that protects London's Green Belt for the benefit of future generations.



Background

“The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. **The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open**; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Green Belt serves five purposes:

1. to **check** the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
2. to **prevent** neighbouring towns merging into one another
3. to **assist** in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
4. to **preserve** the setting and special character of historic towns
5. to **assist** in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”

(Source: NPPF – The National Planning Policy Framework, issued March 2012 by the Department for Communities)

- First proposed in 1935 and implemented 20 years later, the **London Metropolitan Green Belt (LMGB)** is the largest of England’s 14 Green Belts, with 30% of the total area of all Green Belt land.

- 92% of the LMGB is undeveloped land, but only 58% of the land is registered as being in agricultural use (compared with 71% of all land in England). There is a high prevalence of ‘semi-urban’ uses relying on open land, such as horse training, paddocks, golf courses etc.

- The LMGB contains particularly important resources of Public Rights of Way (9,899km, or 20m per hectare) and woodland (18% of the overall land area).

- **The LMGB is under the most pressure of any of England’s Green Belts from proposals for new development**, both in terms of infrastructure such as airports and transmission lines, as well as new housing.

(Source: ‘Green Belts in England – Key Facts’, from the report *Green Belts: a greener future*, a joint publication of Natural England and the Campaign to Protect Rural England, published 2010)

“The notion of green belts ... is to my mind the most intelligent, far-sighted, thrillingly and self-evidently successful land management policy any nation has ever devised.”

- Bill Bryson

Threats

A major piece of research and mapping by the London Green Belt Council, published in 2016 in the report *Safe Under Us?*, provided **overwhelming evidence that the LMGB was under greater threat than ever before**. Research for both the map and report, together with the updates, drew on local evidence provided by members of the LGBC as well as CPRE branches in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey and London.

A further report was commissioned by the London Green Belt Council one year later. It was published in October 2017 under the title *The Accelerating Loss of London’s Green Belt* and the serious situation set out in the new report provided a major impetus for the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for London’s Green Belt.

New research contained in the 2017 report showed that development pressure on the LMGB had grown at a rapid rate and that consequently the threat to the Green Belt had significantly increased in just one year. Key findings were as follows:

- **The number of Green Belt sites identified as being under threat from development more than doubled between July 2016 and July 2017**, from 203 to 443 (the total number of houses proposed on these LMGB sites increased from 123,528 to 159,304).

This trend is continuing.

- As in 2016, the counties with the greatest number of threats were Hertfordshire (44,974 houses), Surrey (37,590) and Essex (35,674). The three Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) with the greatest number of threats were Central Bedfordshire (17,100), East Hertfordshire (16,950) and Basildon (13,035).

- The majority of the threats were identified in borough and district Local Plans, showing that there were firm plans to release these sites for housing. In the eight LPAs with the largest increases in threats, all had undergone rapid Local Plan progress.

- The evidence suggests that the threat numbers will increase further as more Local Plans are progressed, in particular where housing targets have been increased in Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) but not yet accounted for in Local Plans. [Examples of this are Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks in Kent, Mole Valley and Epsom & Ewell in Surrey, and several local authorities in South East Essex.]

The findings of this report reinforce the conclusions in *Safe Under Us?* about how **theoretically protected LMGB is coming under threat from the Local Plan process, but specifically as a result of pressure from Central Government housing**

and planning policies. This undermines Green Belt protections, ensuring that responsibility lies with local authorities while at the same time giving added financial incentives to those councils that allow development in the LMGB, and sanctions on those that do not.

These threats, through the Local Plan process, have become more numerous and widespread as these plans progress. The combined pressure of the 'duty to cooperate' and inflated housing targets continues to prevent local authorities from citing the Green Belt as a constraint, as set out in the national Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and drives councils to release LMGB land for development with little or no impact on the supply of urgently needed genuinely affordable housing.

(Source: *The Accelerating Loss of London's Green Belt – Who Is To Blame?* published by the London Green Belt Council, October 2017; *Green Belts Under Siege*, published by CPRE, July 2017)

Below: Current threats to London's Green Belt



“Since about 1940, the population of Los Angeles has grown at about the same rate as the population of London. Los Angeles is now so enormous that if you somehow managed to pick it up and plonk it down on England, it would extend from Brighton on the south coast to Cambridge in the north-east. That’s what happens if you don’t have a green belt.”

- Andrew Motion

Urgent action by Central and Local Government and the Planning Inspectorate is needed to preserve the Green Belt’s vital role in encouraging urban regeneration and preventing urban sprawl. This is reiterated in recent national CPRE report *Green Belt Under Siege: 2017* which makes it clear that **focusing development on Green Belt land does little to create the genuinely affordable homes** needed by key workers, young people and families which are urgently needed.

Research & Recommendations

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for London's Green Belt has been established to advocate Green Belt-friendly planning policies and to contribute to the debate on how best to achieve sustainable development that protects London's Green Belt for the benefit of future generations. The Group was formed in Westminster on 31 October 2017.

The APPG for London's Green Belt will be reviewing evidence of Best Practice in the UK and internationally and will make policy recommendations covering a wide range of issues affecting the London Metropolitan Green Belt.

Specific topics to be addressed include:

1. Comparing the status of the LMGB with that of other green belts in England and in other countries including those of major cities such as Toronto, Canada.

2. Examination of opportunities for enhancement of the LMGB, including the case for a Strategic London Green Belt Authority to protect Green Belt land and facilitate its positive use and restoration.
3. A review of local authorities' policies towards the LMGB and an assessment of whether some Green Belt sites are deliberately allowed to become derelict in order to obtain planning permission for development.
4. Consideration of the impact on the LMGB of Government policies such as the National Planning Policy Framework – in particular, the 'Duty to Cooperate', calculation of 'Objectively Assessed Housing Need', the New Homes Bonus, and recent re-definitions of 'exceptional circumstances' and 'very special circumstances' for development in the Green Belt.

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London
Green Belt
Council

All-Party Parliamentary Group for London's Green Belt

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The Secretariat of the APPG for London's Green Belt is provided by the London Green Belt Council (Chairman: Richard Knox-Johnston), www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk, with support from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, www.cpre.org.uk

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