

Planning Changes Put Greenbelt 'At Risk'

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Green campaigners claim thousands of hectares of previously protected English countryside will be wrecked by new planning laws.



Video: Campaigners Warn Greenbelt At Risk

By Adele Robinson, Midlands Correspondent

Green campaigners have claimed thousands of hectares of previously protected English countryside will be wrecked when planning laws are relaxed.

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** came into full force this week after a 12-month transition period for local councils.

There are concerns that a very low percentage of councils have so far managed to prove that they have enough land to meet a five-year housing plan.

Campaigners are concerned it will mean planning applications may be forced through on greenfield and potentially even greenbelt land.

Sir Andrew Motion, president of the **Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)**, says the policy is proving groundbreaking in all the wrong ways.

He said: "This is a charter for builders and truly irreversible damage is already underway. It is urgent that something is done about it.

"Developing greenfield sites is unnecessary and with inadequate local consultation is entirely the wrong way to make sure that we get the new homes the country so badly needs."

The Government wants to build more affordable housing and encourage economic growth. It has defended the new planning laws.

A spokesperson for the **Department of Communities and Local Government** said the NPPF safeguards greenbelt land.

It added: "The National Planning Policy Framework has placed local plans in pole position and has introduced new local protections for valuable green spaces."

They also said that red tape had been cut and nearly nine in 10 planning applications are now approved - a 10-year high.

Residents and the local council in Tetbury in Gloucestershire is applying for a judicial review after Communities Secretary Eric Pickles overturned a decision to refuse applications to develop greenfield land in the town.

The land is on the doorstep of Prince Charles' Highgrove House and could be turned into a housing estate.

Campaigner Neil Cook said it was a test case that needed to send the right message to the government.

He said: "These sites are precious. We are in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of that beauty is these greenfield sites.

"If you build on them you'll never unbuild them. So if you're going to have areas of outstanding natural beauty you have to keep them ... and build on the brownfield sites".

From: <http://news.sky.com/story/1074932/planning-changes-put-greenbelt-at-risk>