

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012

### **Broxtowe Borough Council Core Strategy**

I am writing to every Councillor in advance of the forthcoming debates and decisions about the Borough Council's Core Strategy. I hope you will agree that it is important that you have all the facts about Government policy on planning before you make any decision.

As you know, I have spoken many times in Parliament, and to Ministers, about the Government's policy on planning and specifically about the Green Belt and housing targets. I have consistently received assurances that the previous housing targets are scrapped leaving Councils free to determine their own local need and that Green Belt land remains specially protected.

As I hope you are aware, the Coalition Government has now published the National Planning Policy Framework. I enclose the relevant pages which explain how the special protection afforded to Green Belt land will continue.

I have received a number of emails from constituents about conversations and communications they have had with some Councillors. I do not know the sources of their information and am not suggesting that officers of the Council are in any way involved, based on what I have read I am very concerned that some Councillors are being at worst misled and at best simply misinformed.

One Borough Councillor wrote to a constituent about the NPPF:

*Make no mistake it is a very complicated situation where only prime greenbelt is protected i.e. forrests, sites of Special Scientific Interest and ecological habitats etc. Field Farm is graded poor agricultural land, has very little value in ecology terms but is in an area of high housing demand and is surrounded by established infrastructure. In the terms of the new legislation a Government Inspector would have little choice but to comply, if considering an appeal, with the Government instruction to have " a presumption in favour of the developer. You can confirm this for yourself by searching on Google for National Planning Policy Framework.*

To be clear, as the enclosed confirms, there are no different types of quality of Green Belt. There is no "Government instruction" and most importantly no "presumption in favour of the developer". There remains a profound difference between brownfield and green field land and Green Belt land. In relation to brownfield and green field land there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. But Green Belt land remains specially protected.

As the Minister with responsibility for planning, Greg Clark, said in a letter to me:

***“only in exceptional circumstances should Green Belt boundaries be amended through the development plan process, and only after robust public consultation and independent examination of the draft proposal.”***

When the Coalition presented the NPPF to Parliament, Greg Clark took questions from MPs; in doing so, and yet again, the Government made it clear that Councils are free to set their own housing targets and Green Belt land remains specially protected from development.

***Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):*** *In Broxtowe, a Labour-Lib Dem council is planning to build 4,000 houses on green-belt land. People throughout this country love and value our green-belt land. Will this framework continue to protect our green-belt land? Will it strengthen, weaken or diminish the existing protection that our green-belt land has?*

***Greg Clark:*** *Again, one of the points of abolishing the regional bodies is to take away the threat to the green belt that they introduced. They will be removed, and decisions will be taken locally, with national protection for the green belt.*

In answering many questions Mr Clark made the following comments:

***Greg Clark:*** *That is one of the purposes of the green belt—to prevent sprawl and to prevent communities merging with each other—and it is one reason why it enjoys the robust protection that it does in this framework.*

***Greg Clark:*** *The protections for the green belt in the NPPF make it absolutely clear that development on green belt should be refused other than in very tight circumstances similar to those that exist at the moment.*

***Greg Clark:*** *The encouragement is to reuse brownfield land. Obviously there are national protections for areas such as green belt and sites of special scientific interest, but it is entirely open to authorities where greenfield areas are very important to the well-being of the community not to give priority to housing and development, and that is very likely to happen. Local plans can now specify that without being overridden.*

Yesterday in Parliament, there was a very short debate on the NPPF it included the following exchanges firstly between myself and Labour’s Shadow Housing Minister, Jack Dromey, and then between me and the Lib Dem Minister in the DCLG, Andrew Stunell, who was speaking for the Government:

***Anna Soubry:*** *It is kind and generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way. Does he agree that it is imperative, as well as Labour party policy, to protect our green belt? Will he join me in urging Labour-controlled councils not to allow the development of thousands of homes on our precious green land?*

***Jack Dromey:*** *Labour, as the champion of the countryside and the green belt, strongly believes in a brownfield-first presumption.*

***Anna Soubry:*** *.....does the Minister agree that it is imperative that councils set their housing targets now and do everything they can to avoid building on our green belt, particularly in Broxtowe, where, unfortunately, Lib Dem councillors seem to think that it is a good idea?*

*Andrew Stunell: I thank the hon. Lady for her helpful contribution. It is one of a large number of well informed and important points that have been made during this debate, not least of course by my right hon. Friend the Minister when he said that the local plan is the keystone to our reform process. The local plan of the planning authority will be the guideline for development decisions in an area, with the neighbourhood plan of course forming an important statutory part in those areas that have plans in place.*

The Government has also made clear there are transitional arrangements and has set them out in paragraphs 214 and 215 of the NPPF.

“For 12 months from the day of publication, decision-takers may continue to give full weight to relevant policies adopted since 2004 even if there is a limited degree of conflict with this Framework.”

My understanding is that Broxtowe can accordingly rely on its existing policies and Local Plan for what is now eleven months; in short there is no need to rush into accepting the Core Strategy.

I urge you to reject the Core Strategy and the housing targets and protect our Green Belt land from development. We have enough brownfield sites for over two thousand homes in Broxtowe and encouraging development on those sites should be the priority.

Broxtowe has the time and the ability to determine its own housing needs and in so doing to reflect the desire of the people of the Borough to ensure our Green Belt land is enjoyed for many generations to come.

**Anna Soubry MP**

*Anna Soubry, Member of Parliament for Broxtowe*

Constituency Office: Barton House, 61 High Road, Chilwell, Nottingham, NG9 4AJ  
Tel: 0115 943 6507 E-mail: [anna.soubry.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:anna.soubry.mp@parliament.uk) Website: [www.annasoubry.org.uk](http://www.annasoubry.org.uk)