

Greenbelt land not 'absolutely brilliant' should be used for development, says minister

Parts of the green belt that are not "absolutely brilliant land" should be used for housing developments, a minister has said.



Protected: green belt spaces used for forestry, agriculture and leisure are not usually given over to housing and other developments Photo: Alamy

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In comments that will concern home owners living in the countryside, Baroness Hanham, a communities minister, described the green belt as only “virtually sacrosanct”.

Lady Hanham said that the Government believes that affordable homes will now have to be built on green belt land.

She said that some of the land is not “absolutely brilliant” and should be used for developments in order to avoid having to build in “real open space”.

The Telegraph led an eight month campaign called the Hands Off Our Land campaign last year urging the Government not to weaken protections for green field and green belt land.

“We have made it clear, in the National Planning Policy Framework, that the green belt is virtually sacrosanct, but we recognise that occasionally green belt land needs to be used for affordable

housing, although that will need to be replaced,” Lady Hanham told the House of Lords.

“Some green belt land... is not absolutely brilliant land, so where you can use that rather than going into real open space, it should be used. However, we need affordable housing, and we recognise that.”

David Cameron in December backed plans to build on hundreds of square miles of open countryside.

The Prime Minister backed Nick Boles, the planning minister, after he came under fire for suggesting that the nine per cent of England built on so far should be increased to 12 per cent to meet demand.

This would see 1,500 square miles of open countryside - over twice the area covered by greater London – covered with new housing.

Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, has complained that the country had been “under-building for decades”.

Lady Hanham said that between April 2010 to September 2012, 7,519 affordable homes were built in rural communities of fewer than 3,000 people through the Homes and Communities Agency’s Affordable Homes Programme.

She added that the Government “expect rural delivery in the next two years to account for nearly 10 per cent of anticipated completions of the programme outside London”.

His comments came as Labour accused Eric Pickles, the Communities and Local Government Secretary, of giving a "misleading impression" over the state of the country's house building programme.

Jack Dromey, the shadow communities and local government minister, said that housing completions had dropped in the last two financial years and accused the Government of presiding over the "biggest housing crisis in a generation".

Mr Dromey said that housing starts have fallen to 98,000, rather than 132,000 as claimed by Mr Pickles in a recent interview.

Mark Prisk, the housing minister, told the Commons that “the net addition to the housing stock is up 11 per cent on the last full figures that we have”.