

*A family home or accessible countryside?*

*An investigation into housing policy and its  
compatibility with Green Belt Planning  
Policy*

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## *Abstract*

The first Green Belt, around the gates to the City of London, was abolished in 1666 to allow for rebuilding after the Great Fire. This allowed London to expand and become the world city and centre of commerce and industry that we know today. The modern-day Green Belt around the capital was installed in 1935 in order to prevent further urban sprawl.

London experienced unprecedented growth after World War II, and experienced much inward migration. The Green Belt meant that supply was unable to keep up with demand, thus increasing property values to levels less affordable than anywhere else in the UK. Green Belts, however, remain popular, with cities in many other countries imitating London's Green Belt as their method of choice to prevent urban sprawl.

As well as forcing those who live inside the Green Belt to live at high densities, Green Belts are also a cause of 'development leapfrogging' – those who do not wish to live at such high densities, and those who desire a garden, must instead endure a gruelling commute to work, not only adversely affecting their quality of life but also adding to increased carbon emissions.

Green Belts are not particularly successful at increasing accessibility to the countryside. The land contained within them is often intensively farmed, already developed or of substandard quality. Access is restricted and aesthetic values are dubious at best. They are detrimental to affordability of homes. Imaginative solutions to all the aims of the green belt that do not require the green belt to be in place are available, which have a lower social cost and are conducive to effective housing policy.

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# *Introduction*

Within the title of this dissertation there are impliedly posed four distinct, but dependent questions. These are:

1. Whether Green Belt policy, in its present form, effectively provides accessible countryside,
2. Whether current Housing Policy is effective and, if not, whether Green Belt Planning Policy is:
  - i.. the cause,
  - ii. a cause, or
  - iii. not a cause of this
3. Whether Accessible Countryside and Effective Housing Policy must necessarily be mutually exclusive, and,
4. Whether in their present form both policies are compatible and, as such, indefinitely sustainable.

This research investigates each of these questions in turn, applying an appropriate form of analysis to each and reaching conclusions based on statistical analysis, opinions of eminent figures in the field and direct comparison of policy.

Green Belts restrict development around towns and cities by specifying the types of development that are appropriate and implying a general presumption *against* all types of development deemed 'inappropriate'. Housing developments are inappropriate development. This dissertation aims to explore whether Housing Policy is compatible with Green Belt Policy, given the restrictions placed on the availability of land for housebuilding.

## *Thesis Statement*

This dissertation is written around the hypothesis that, by constraining the land available for development, Green Belt Planning Policy is detrimental to the effectiveness of housing policy, no matter how well formulated, by artificially restricting supply despite rising demand for housing in those areas in which it is most needed, thus forcing house prices to increase to an unsustainably high level.

In investigating this hypothesis, it aims not only to prove or disprove it, but in doing so highlight particular areas of policy that are sub-optimal or incompatible, and provide suggestions for their improvement.

# Methodology

Each of the four questions posed by the title requires a different form of analysis in order to determine its answer. It is very important to ensure that the correct methodological procedure is used to determine each 'leg' of the analysis in order to allow correct conclusions to be reached.

Each question subordinate to the title is discussed in turn below, in order to determine the most appropriate form of analysis required to approach the question.

The availability of reliable and consistent statistics is of utmost importance and, as a result, it is imperative that a consistent geographical unit is used. In order to facilitate this, the English regions (North East, North West, Yorkshire & the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, London, South East and South West) have been chosen as this unit of geography is widely accepted and used by many agencies that report statistics. This allows for compatibility of use of statistics that come from different sources and as such allows more accurate analysis of the data.

## Whether Green Belt policy, in its present form, effectively provides accessible countryside

In order to address this question statistically, an indicator of access to the countryside is required. "Accessible Natural Greenspace", as defined by Natural England<sup>1</sup>, is roughly synonymous with this. However, currently the only region that has been surveyed for this indicator is the South East<sup>2</sup>, and as such comparison between the regions is on this basis is not possible, making it more difficult to assess whether Green Belt policy is a significant factor in providing access to the countryside. It is therefore necessary to find another variable indicative of countryside access.

The most appropriate statistic currently available comes out of the *Survey of Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and to the Environment*, carried out in 2001 (published 2002) by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in which people were asked whether they were able to easily access the countryside or green spaces without the use of a car or other transport<sup>3</sup>.

In order to ascertain whether the Green Belt is a factor contributory to ease of access to the countryside, a Green Belt Index Rating will be calculated for each region. This comprises of the total area of Green Belt land for each region expressed as a percentage of the total area of land in each region.

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England is the name for the agency formed by the merger of English Nature, the Rural Development Service and much of the Countryside Agency.

<sup>2</sup> Natural England, South East is first region to map greenspace for people (Press Release), 2007, Cambridge: Natural England, available at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/southeast/press-releases/190307.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Survey of Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and to the Environment, 2002, London: DEFRA, Table 18: Ease of access and frequency of visits to local green space or countryside, without using a car or other transport, by Government Office Region: 2001

Using Regression Analysis, the correlation coefficient will be obtained in order to determine whether the amount of Green Belt land in a region is a significant factor in determining accessibility to the countryside.

Whether current Housing Policy is effective and, if not, whether Green Belt Planning Policy is:

- i.. the cause,
- ii. a cause, or
- iii. not a cause of this

Given the government's key housing goal of *everyone [having] the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community which they want to live*<sup>4</sup>, affordability is the most appropriate measure of the effectiveness of current Housing Policy, as affordability is also the main determinant of choice of location<sup>5</sup>. A measure of affordability can be obtained by expressing the average income for an area as a percentage of the average house price. Reputable statistics for these two variables may be obtained from the Office for National Statistics and the Halifax House Price Index respectively.

In order to ascertain whether the Green Belt is a factor contributory to affordability of housing, the Green Belt Index Rating described above will be used.

These two index figures can then be regressed to ascertain the correlation between affordability of housing and the percentage of land forming Green Belt in order to reach a conclusion on the effect of Green Belt policy on Affordability of Housing.

Whether Accessible Countryside and Effective Housing Policy must necessarily be mutually exclusive

This question is difficult to assess statistically, as empirical, historic evidence would be inadequately equipped to provide an answer to whether accessible countryside and effective housing policy *could ever* coexist. For example, if the evidence showed that in the past it has not been possible for the two policies to harmoniously coexist, that would not necessarily mean that they must, in every case, be mutually exclusive. Given this limitation of the nature of the data available, the analysis will take the form of a review of the opinions of eminent figures in this field.

Whether in their present form both policies are compatible and, as such, indefinitely sustainable.

For the two policies to be compatible it is necessary for them to be capable of coexisting indefinitely. This is because, per Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2), the fundamental quality of the Green Belts is their permanence and their protection must be maintained for the foreseeable future<sup>6</sup>. For the two policies to be compatible

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, Planning Policy Statement Number 3, 2006, London: HMSO, p.6

<sup>5</sup> Alain Bertaud, The Spatial Structure of Cities: Practical Decisions facing Urban Planners, available at [www.alain-bertaud.com](http://www.alain-bertaud.com)

<sup>6</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Planning Policy Guidance Note 2, 2001, London: HMSO, p.5

for any length of time shorter than the foreseeable future would render them incompatible.

Again, this is an area in which statistics would be an ineffective method of analysis, and so in investigating this question the dissertation will discuss the issues of compatibility of the policies as they presently stand, in the form of a direct comparison between the two policy documents, *Planning Policy Guidance 2* and *Planning Policy Statement 3*.

## *Review of the Literature*

The first recorded Green Belt in England began in 1580, and was located around the gates to the City of London. Following the Great Fire of 1666, in order to facilitate the rebuilding and expansion of the city, the Green Belt was abolished<sup>7</sup>. The Green Belts of England in their present form were first put into place in 1935. Inspired by Ebenezer Howard's plans, they were incorporated into an official plan by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee<sup>8</sup>. The Green Belt policy for England is now contained within Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2).

Research by the Adam Smith Institute implies that Green Belts were a 'sledgehammer solution' to solving the 'problem' of ugly inter-war urban sprawl at a time when no comprehensive planning controls existed<sup>9</sup>.

After World War II between 1945 and 1964 the South East gained a higher share of employment than had been anticipated, with more jobs being created in Central London than anywhere else, resulting in a large increase in population<sup>10</sup>. However, growth has not been constrained to the South East, for example, during the 1960s and 1970s, many people from Birmingham moved to what was then the desirable location of nearby Solihull, resulting in the release of Green Belt land around six villages in order to supply sufficient housing for the migrant population<sup>11</sup>.

However, around the same time as this, a new era of environmental politics was being born. More than twenty years into the Town and Country Planning system, the environment was becoming more and more important politically, which is evidenced by the foundation of Friends of the Earth in 1969, the publication of the first Government White Paper on the Environment in 1970 and the creation of both the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Department of the Environment in the same year<sup>12</sup>.

The political importance of Green Belts rose significantly in terms of political importance in 1983, when the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England mounted a national campaign to discourage minor changes to the Green Belt proposed by the then Secretary of State for the Environment Patrick Jenkin, shortly after succeeding Tom King, to increase housing provision<sup>13</sup>. Since this time Green Belts have had a much more significant role to play in planning and are judged to be an important aspect of policy for all political parties<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Alan W. Evans, Building Jerusalem: Can Land Use Planning affect Economic Growth?, 2002, in Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Conference Paper, p.5

<sup>8</sup> Planning Policy Statement 2

<sup>9</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, The Green Quadratic, 1988, London: ASI Research Ltd, p.7

<sup>10</sup> M. J. Wise, The Future of the South East: A Review of the South East Study 1961-1981, in The Geographical Journal, Vol. 130 No. 2 (Jun. 1964) pp. 270-3, p.270

<sup>11</sup> Kim McCartney, Finding Space for New Housing: The Development Plan Process as an arena for discussing Housing Issues, Aug. 1997, Electronic Working Paper No. 27, Newcastle upon Tyne: The University of Newcastle Global Research Unit, p.13

<sup>12</sup> Robin Grove-White, Land Use Law and the Environment, in Journal of Law and Society, Vol 18 No. 1 (Spring 1991) pp.32-47, p.34

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42

The issue of contention over Green Belt Permanence is not, however, one that can be confined to the History Books. Whilst Oxford and Warrington have both indicated that the Green Belt boundaries in their respective districts are both sustainable for a minimum duration of the currency of their current respective local plans<sup>15,16</sup>, these local plans are not indefinite. Additionally, districts in the Nottingham/Derby Green Belt have indicated that their boundaries are only sustainable with regard to housing need during the currency of their local plan should they experience sub-trend growth<sup>17</sup>. Given PPG2's statement that '*the fundamental characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence*'<sup>18</sup>, the long-term compatibility of the two policies appears to be seriously questionable.

Alan W. Evans argues that, had the 1580 Green Belt been maintained after the Great Fire, London would never have had the opportunity to expand and develop, and as a consequence, the Industrial Revolution would never have occurred. Britain, he contends, would have remained a predominantly agricultural nation with significant out-migration of the surplus population and whilst this might have resulted in an increased average income, GDP could never have increased at the rate that it did<sup>19</sup>. The contemporary Green Belt surrounding London is the model by which many other cities control urban sprawl<sup>20</sup>.

Evans' research shows that the Green Belt causes a distortion in the market such that the price system has little effect on the production of new houses. The two variables have, in effect, become disconnected. As a result, when house prices rise they do so faster than they would in a more responsive market, and when they fall, they do so faster than they would had the artificially high rise not occurred. This phenomenon can cause a 'price bubble' in which people feel the need to purchase property before it becomes 'too expensive'<sup>21</sup>. In 1988, the Adam Smith Institute noted the disproportionately high rise in house prices in the South East of England, attributing it to the limits that the Metropolitan Green Belt placed on land availability<sup>22</sup>. The house price crash in the early 1990s was most devastating to those young first time buyers who had bought into the 'price bubble' – the people who could least afford to shoulder the loss<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Warrington Borough Council, The Warrington Unitary Development Plan: Summary of Inspectors' Report, Apr. 2005, Warrington: Warrington Borough Council

<sup>16</sup> Oxford City Council, Topic Paper by Oxford City Council: Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016: Public Inquiry, Mar. 2003, Oxford: Oxford City Council

<sup>17</sup> Lynette Hughes and Steve Buffery, Nottingham-Derby Green Belt Review Assessment of the Purposes and Role of the Green Belt, 2006, Nottingham: Nottinghamshire County Council and Matlock: Derbyshire County Council

<sup>18</sup> PPG2 para 2.1

<sup>19</sup> Evans, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Wendell Cox, Property, Prosperity and Poverty: Trends and Choices in Land Use Policy: Current Controversies Paper No. 12, 20 Nov 2002, Belleville IL: Institute of Economic Affairs

<sup>21</sup> Evans, op. cit. p.9

<sup>22</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit. p.4

<sup>23</sup> Evans, loc. cit.

The South East is currently facing a shortage of affordable housing and much development pressure<sup>24</sup>, which Tony Travers attributes to a chronic mismatch of supply and demand in his 2002 article<sup>25</sup>. Alain Bertaud argues that this is little more than a negative externality, the effects on the market of which planners should try harder to recognise<sup>26</sup>. Martin Woolf recognises the impossible position in which planners and policy makers are placed in his quote, ‘*we cannot have a rising population, spacious housing for each household and an unchanged quantity of undeveloped countryside*’<sup>27</sup>.

The provision of a sufficient flow of land for new housing has, according to Kim McCartney, been a long-standing development plan objective<sup>28</sup>, and it is argued that the perceived effect on Housing Supply of the Green Belts, which cover 13% of England<sup>29</sup>, is often seen as a justification to review Green Belt boundaries or dispose of the Green Belt policy all together<sup>30</sup>. Recent debates about housing provision in the South East have added fuel to the discussion about the implications of Green Belt policy for sustainable patterns of development<sup>31</sup>, and the Adam Smith Institute argue that the Green Belt is an artificial obstacle in the path of migration to the South East, which results in substantial economic and human cost<sup>32</sup>. Ron Tate of the Royal Institute of Town Planners further believes that the obstinate permanence of Green Belts results in what he describes as a ‘time warp’ where, regardless of the wider planning and economic contexts they remain stubbornly, and he criticises their rigidity for this reason<sup>33</sup>.

In Kate Barker’s *Review of Housing Policy*, she argues for a trade-off between improving market affordability, meeting housing need and environmental considerations<sup>34</sup>. This is in contrast to Chris Riley’s view that in the UK it is generally implicitly assumed that the external cost of Greenfield development is greater than the external cost of urban overcrowding<sup>35</sup>. John P. Dean argues that designing well-planned communities is more overtly political, in that sacrifices need to be made that involve an active *value judgment* with regard to the relative importance of the various factors<sup>36</sup>. Kate Barker tends to agree with this notion, citing that in addition to the absolute number of houses required, their location and size must also be considered<sup>37</sup>,

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<sup>24</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, Urban Fringe: Policy, Regulatory and Literature Research Report 2.3: Green Belts, 19 June 2003 (Revised 19 Mar 2004), London: The Countryside Agency, p.5

<sup>25</sup> Tony Travers, Is it time to think the unthinkable on the Green Belt?, in The London Evening Standard, Jul. 9 2002

<sup>26</sup> Bertaud, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Kate Barker, Review of Housing Policy, March 2004, London: HMSO, p.5 para.11

<sup>28</sup> McCartney, op. cit. p.3

<sup>29</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit. p.4

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3

<sup>31</sup> Surrey County Council, The Surrey Structure Plan: Technical Paper 5: The Green Belt in Surrey, Nov. 2002, Kingston upon Thames: Surrey County Council

<sup>32</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, loc. cit. p.17

<sup>33</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit. p.5

<sup>34</sup> Barker, op. cit. p.6 para.17

<sup>35</sup> Chris Riley, Comments on Mills and Evans, July 2002, London: Department for Transport

<sup>36</sup> John P. Dean, The Orientation of Housing Research: A Commentary on the Program of the Conference on Research in Housing, in Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics, Vol 23 No. 1 (Feb. 1947) pp.76-80, p.77

<sup>37</sup> Barker, op. cit. p.4 para.6

although the RTPI argues that meeting housing needs in optimal locations is inconsistent with a strict prohibition of development on the urban fringe<sup>38</sup>.

Writing in 2002, Alan W. Evans predicted that the Metropolitan Green Belt had only a further thirty years to run before it collapsed in the face of its accumulated economic contradictions. He argues that the disconnection of the use of the land from the market has significant economic costs, regardless of whether they are presently evident or whether they will only become obvious in the very long run<sup>39</sup>.

One effect that the Green Belt has arguably contributed towards is the reduction of Housing Supply and a subsequent rise in house prices<sup>40</sup>. Increased prosperity has led to an increased demand for land in London and it has been argued that the Green Belt and other restrictive planning policies limit the provision of land for new housing and therefore have caused an exponential demand for new units<sup>41</sup>. This increased demand and artificial constraint on the supply of land has decreased the supply of inputs and caused house prices to rise<sup>42</sup>. The prevention of the construction of new housing precludes entry into London for workers from other parts of the country<sup>43</sup> and means that home ownership is not a viable option for many people<sup>44</sup>.

Keith Hoggart argued in 2003 that Green Belts were the most stringent restraints that the land use planning system placed upon new housing<sup>45</sup>, and this argument is supported by Alan W. Evans' evidence that the number of new houses being built has declined every year since 1991<sup>46</sup>, which is attributed to the excessive restrictions of the planning system as a whole<sup>47</sup>.

Villages within the Green Belt suffer from a lack of housing despite often having a higher housing need caused by additional planning constraints and external housing pressure<sup>48</sup>. Concern has been expressed by Tony Lock of the Town & Country Planning Association that communities embedded in the Green Belt may face a shortage of homes and local jobs<sup>49</sup>. In addition, the Country Land and Business Association has expressed an argument that more market and affordable housing in the Green Belt is required to help ensure the continued viability of rural businesses<sup>50</sup>.

Defenders of the Green Belt have argued that high house prices are not a result of a housing shortage but rather are a product of low interest rates<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit. p.12

<sup>39</sup> Evans, op. cit. pp.10,11

<sup>40</sup> Mischa Balen, Land Economy, 2006, London: ASI (Research) Ltd., p.26

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Elliot, Streets Ahead, 1989, London: The Adam Smith Institute

<sup>42</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, loc. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Elliot, loc. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit. p.3

<sup>46</sup> Evans, op. cit. pp.3,4

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit. p.7

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.22

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.23

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.6

A further major argument for the retention of the Green Belt is that it channels investment into the redevelopment of derelict sites within cities before developing purportedly valuable Greenfield land<sup>52</sup>. The report by the Urban Task Force, led by Lord Rogers, stressed the importance of limiting Greenfield land releases and channelling development into Brownfield sites<sup>53</sup>. However, research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that not all Brownfield sites are suitable for residential accommodation<sup>54</sup> and that there are further complications that make the development of Brownfield sites a less attractive option to developers than the development of Greenfield sites, such as a greater risk and degree of contamination<sup>55</sup>.

However, in many cases such redevelopment is possible, for example in Surrey, Britain's most densely populated shire county, 73% of all residential development between 1985 and 1995 took place on previously developed land, compared to the government target of 60%<sup>56</sup>. This example implies that Green Belts *have been* effective in the promotion of urban regeneration in certain circumstances, especially since most of the Brownfield sites that were redeveloped in Surrey came available through market forces rather than local plans<sup>57</sup>.

Developers have, however, expressed concern that high density development, as proposed by Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force, could lead to 'town cramming'<sup>58</sup> and, whilst it is argued that there is a current tendency for developers to orchestrate this by producing very dense developments, an argument exists that suggests that this is merely a product of the artificially contrived scarcity of land for building on<sup>59</sup>.

This Land Use Intensification means that people are forced to live in smaller properties<sup>60</sup> and, whilst it may be argued that land use is more efficient at higher occupier densities, empirical evidence suggests that as people's incomes rise so does their demand for larger homes with gardens<sup>61</sup>. Further, Alice Coleman's study, '*Utopia on Trial*' found that high density housing developments with many storeys, indoor corridors and numerous entrances, which were raised on stilts or garages, were particularly prone to crime whereas developments without these characteristics were remarkably free of crime<sup>62</sup>.

The politically unpopular nature of housing developments means that it is common for Local Planning Authorities to allocate their housing quota at the lowest political cost, resulting in high-density, badly-designed poor-quality housing along railway lines and main roads<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit. p.7

<sup>53</sup> Surrey County Council, op. cit., p.9 para. 2.2.5

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Findings: Obstacles to the release of brownfield sites for redevelopment, May 2001, York: Joseph Rowntree Trust

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Surrey County Council, op. cit., p.13 para. 3.1.1

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.13 para. 1.2

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit. pp.22,23

<sup>60</sup> Evans, op. cit., p.6

<sup>61</sup> Barker, op. cit., p.13

<sup>62</sup> Elliot, loc. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Evans, op. cit. p.10

A further consequence of Green Belts is that of ‘leapfrogging’, a problem envisaged by M. J. Wise in 1964<sup>64</sup> noting that the housing problems of large cities could not be solved using solely already built-up areas but that overspill would inevitably occur. This proposition is supported by Alain Bertaud<sup>65</sup>. The Green Belt has not prevented overspill but rather the overspill has simply jumped over, or ‘leapfrogged’, the Green Belt resulting in longer commutes to work<sup>66</sup>. Between 1931, the time of the last census before the implementation of the Metropolitan Green Belt, and 2002, London lost over one million residents whilst at the same time the Home Counties adjacent to the peripheral edge of the Green Belt gained nearly three million<sup>67</sup>.

The disproportionately rising incomes and growing population have resulted in high property prices, placing extreme development pressure on the Metropolitan Green Belt<sup>68</sup>, which displays a marked conflict of interest between urban growth and the state of the environment<sup>69</sup>. Professor Jules Lubbock of the University of Essex estimated that the planning system as a whole adds £40,000 to the price of the average house in Essex<sup>70</sup>, and the constraints of the planning system mean that increases in house prices have a seriously delayed effect on the amount of housebuilding that can occur<sup>71</sup>. It has been observed that the potential impact on the overall housing stock in the short term of the release of land for development is very small<sup>72</sup>, however high house prices in Surrey have been blamed on the shortage of available development land, thus resulting in calls for the release of Green Belt land for development<sup>73</sup>. The Adam Smith Institute argues that the low barriers to entry that exist in the housebuilding sector mean that if many parcels of land were released for development, including small plots, competition would allow for a considerable fall in house prices<sup>74</sup>. It has further been argued that the release of Green Belt Land around urban conurbations will facilitate the development of “growth corridors”, which will provide urban green space without damaging the purposes of the Green Belt<sup>75</sup>.

This is not, however, a problem limited to the capital. Capacity Issues have arisen in Broxtowe and Erewash in the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt Area<sup>76</sup>, there has been public opposition to the development of Greenfield land in Lancaster and Chorley, just outside the North West Green Belt Areas<sup>77</sup> and there is evidence of ‘leapfrogging’ into the Shire areas surrounding Birmingham<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Wise, op. cit., pp.270,271

<sup>65</sup> Bertaud, op. cit., p.5

<sup>66</sup> Surrey County Council, op. cit., pp.17,18, para 4.2.2

<sup>67</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, p.5

<sup>69</sup> Elliot, loc. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Evans, op. cit., p.9

<sup>72</sup> Riley, op. cit., p.7

<sup>73</sup> Surrey County Council, op. cit., p. 13, para 3.2.1

<sup>74</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.18

<sup>75</sup> McCartney, op. cit. p.21

<sup>76</sup> Lynette Hughes and Steve Buffery, Nottingham-Derby Green Belt Review: The Green Belt Implications of preferred areas for growth in the three cities sub-regional strategy, 2006, Nottingham: Nottinghamshire County Council and Matlock: Derbyshire County Council

<sup>77</sup> McCartney, op. cit. p.16

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.13

There is a consensus among planners that the coalescence of nearby settlements is undesirable<sup>79,80</sup>, however, as Greg Easterbrook of the *New Republic* said, ‘[urban] sprawl is cause[d] by affluence and population growth – and which of those, exactly, do we propose to prohibit?’<sup>81</sup>. It must be remembered that reducing urban densities requires the displacement of a part of the population, who will have to live somewhere<sup>82</sup>.

Leedale argues that the main outcome of the Green Belt is not the stimulation of Brownfield redevelopment but rather the pushing of development outside the outer boundary with the implication of increased car travel due to the placing of housing developments away from adequate transport infrastructure<sup>83</sup>. This demonstrates but one example of the direct incompatibility with the Housing Policy Guidance contained within Paragraph 38 of Planning Policy Statement 3, which is that housing policy should seek to reduce carbon emissions, for example, by having good transport links. Barker, Cox, Evans and David Lock of the Town & Country Planning Association have all noted the effect of the Green Belt on longer commuting times<sup>84,85,86,87</sup>, noting the increased car use<sup>88</sup> and fuel consumption<sup>89</sup>.

Developers have found that ‘Green Cities’ are an attractive area for the location of offices, and can, therefore, increase the price obtainable for office developments<sup>90</sup>. This has been seen around the Surrey Docks area of London’s Docklands, where office developments surrounded by canals and wildlife areas command a higher rent than those than those rents achieved by similar developments with no such surroundings<sup>91</sup>. This implies that it is not inconceivable for the market to provide green open land in relation to housing, provided that demand exists for it and that sufficient land for development is available. Indeed, it has been argued that the Green Belt itself may not be the cause of town cramming and development issues, but rather is a convenient political scapegoat for weak regional policy and bad planning<sup>92</sup>.

It has been proposed that problems of affordability of housing are a necessary price to be paid for the protection of the countryside and for the prevention of urban decline<sup>93</sup>, however, the Adam Smith Institute suggests that a more pragmatic approach is required. Given the amount of Green Belt land that is damaged, the institute suggests the release of land for housing on the condition that the developer restores an appropriate amount of land to a higher quality<sup>94</sup>. In order to maintain the objective of

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<sup>79</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.20

<sup>80</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Bertaud, op. cit., p.2

<sup>83</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, p.6

<sup>84</sup> Barker, op. cit., p.14 para. 1.11

<sup>85</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>86</sup> Evans, op. cit., p.20

<sup>87</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit., p.15

<sup>88</sup> Cox, loc. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Evans, loc. cit.

<sup>90</sup> Elliot, loc. cit.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit., p.24

<sup>93</sup> Barker, op. cit., p. 15, para 1.13

<sup>94</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.9

openness, it is suggested that a minimum ratio of restoration to development is imposed; the institute maintains that such a ratio of 9:1 would suffice<sup>95</sup>.

Given the argument that, by placing development constraints on the urban fringe, Green Belts produce unacceptable externalities, such as lower economic growth, development leapfrogging and sub-optimal transport corridors<sup>96</sup>, and that it is not practical to disband from commuting by creating neighbourhoods where people both live and work (i.e. by matching the location of jobs to the location of skills)<sup>97</sup>, it is argued that it is necessary to create some mechanism by which affordability is increased, without government subsidy, as this would serve only to further increase demand without increasing supply<sup>98</sup>.

The 1998 vision of Stephen Inwood of the future of London with static Green Belt boundaries is pungent, *'[C]hildren playing on London's increasingly busy streets [...] could console themselves with the thought that ten or fifteen miles away there was a belt of agricultural land that they would never be allowed to spoil'*<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Bartlett School of Planning for the Countryside Agency, op. cit., p.8

<sup>97</sup> Bertaud, op. cit., p.6

<sup>98</sup> Barker, op. cit., p.15, para.1.14

<sup>99</sup> Evans, loc. cit.

# Analysis

## Whether Green Belt policy, in its present form, effectively provides accessible countryside

One of the criticisms of Green Belt policy is that it is not effective in providing accessible high quality countryside: whilst development within the belts is restricted, there are few safeguards to ensure that a high standard countryside is maintained<sup>100</sup>. In addition to this, whilst a stated advantage of the Green Belt system is that it provides opportunities for the urban population to access the open countryside<sup>101</sup>, much of the land contained within Green Belts is privately owned, raising serious questions of accessibility<sup>102</sup>.

Regression Analysis (Appendix D) comparing the percentage of people within the regions with easy access to countryside and open space with the percentage of green belt land in terms of the geographical size of the region yields a correlation coefficient of -0.46. This implies an inverse relationship between access to the countryside and the provision of Green Belt land. However, PPG2 specifically cites providing opportunities for access to the open countryside for the *urban* population<sup>103</sup> as one of its objectives, rather than for the community as a whole. Given the limitations of the data in DEFRA's *Attitudes* survey<sup>104</sup>, data for access to the countryside for city and town dwellers are not available, however, by taking the percentage of residents of each region who *do* have access to the countryside or green open spaces and *don't* live in the countryside, on the assumption that by not living in the countryside the only other option is an urban environment, it is possible to perform regression analysis and gain a correlation coefficient. Remarkably, given that areas with more Green Belt are *less likely* to have accessible countryside (according to the analysis contained in Appendix D), the proportion of respondents answering "Yes; I don't live in the countryside" to the question "Are there any green spaces or countryside around which you can get to easily without using a car or other transport?" has a positive correlation with the amount of Green Belt within the region (Appendix E).

*Prima facie* this demonstrates that the Green Belt is successful in increasing access to the open countryside to the urban population. However, it must be remembered that the question posed included the accessibility of *green spaces*, not only *open countryside*. What constitutes a *green space* is, of course, highly subjective and may vary by region. For example, for a Londoner to say that he or she has easy access to Green Space may mean that he or she lives close to a reasonably sized park, whereas somebody living in Birmingham City Centre, despite living close to an identically sized park to the Londoner, may think that the nearest "true" green space to him or her is a drive or bus ride away.

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<sup>100</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.6

<sup>101</sup> PPS2 p.3

<sup>102</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, loc. cit.

<sup>103</sup> PPS2, loc. cit.

<sup>104</sup> Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Survey of Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and to the environment, 2002, available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/pubatt/index.htm>

A further limitation of the format of the questionnaire is that, whilst the two “Yes” options differentiated between respondents who lived in the countryside and didn’t live in the countryside, only one “No” option was presented, which didn’t mention whether the respondent lived in the countryside or not. This means that, for the purpose of this analysis, it has been presumed that *all* people who live in the countryside have access to it, and *all* the people who did not have access to the countryside reside in urban areas. Whilst this presumption makes logical sense, it is by no means a given that all people who live in the countryside have access to it: they may, for example, be surrounded by private land to which they have no rights of access, or may suffer from a disability which means that they are unable to access the countryside without any form of transport.

Regardless of whether Countryside Accessibility is increased for the *urban* population by the inclusion of Green Belt land in a region, accessibility for the population of the region as a whole is nevertheless negatively correlated with the amount of Green Belt land. It would seem perverse to have the objective of increasing accessibility for only a part of the population and so it would appear that this particular aspect of Green Belt policy is in desperate need of review.

Whether current Housing Policy is effective and, if not, whether Green Belt Planning Policy is:

- i. the cause,
- ii. a cause, or
- iii. not a cause of this

As mentioned in the Methodology, housing affordability can be used as an indicative measure of housing policy effectiveness. House prices alone will not give this measure, as affordability is defined as *ability to afford*<sup>105</sup> and, as such the income of people within the region is as important a factor of affordability as is the absolute price of houses. So, for example, if houses in London cost twice as much as houses in Birmingham, houses in London may still be *more affordable* than those in Birmingham if incomes in London are twice or more those in Birmingham. Affordability has been defined for the purposes of this dissertation as income expressed as a percentage of house prices.

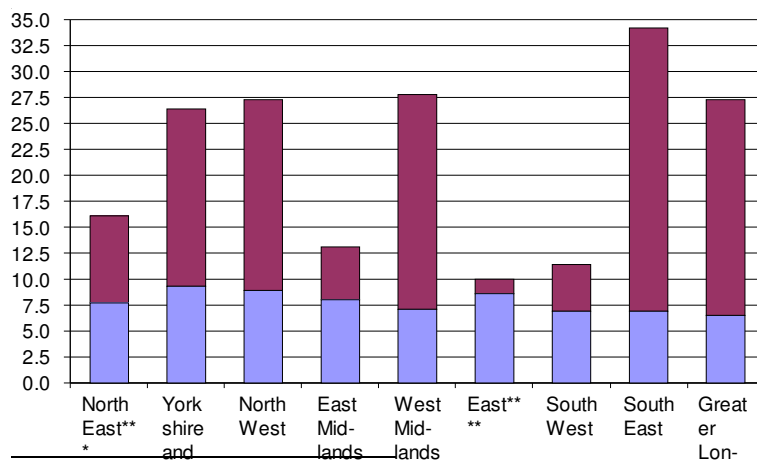


Figure 1: Affordability and Green Belt Index depicted graphically by region

The most affordable region, according to this analysis, is Yorkshire and the Humber, with an affordability index figure of 9.22%. The least affordable regions, in order, are London, the

<sup>105</sup> Della Thompson (Ed.), Oxford Compact English Dictionary, 1996, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.17

South East and the South West, with affordability index figures of 6.42, 6.86 and 6.91 respectively (Appendix A). This is not to say, however, that Yorkshire and the Humber is particularly affordable. Given that most mortgage lenders will lend between 3 times and 3.5 times a potential mortgagor's income<sup>106</sup>, somebody earning the region's *average* income of £11,336 is going to struggle to buy an *averagely priced* house costing £122,917, to the tune of nearly £90,000 (Appendix A). Even if two people bought together, based on an earnings multiple of 3.5 times the first person's and 1 times the second person's income<sup>107</sup>, there would be a shortfall of over £77,500, and based on a multiple of 2.5 times the joint income<sup>108</sup>, there would still be a shortfall of over £66,000 – well above the average first time buyers' deposit of £37,632<sup>109</sup> and, for some, simply unaffordable.

Performing a Regression Analysis, with affordability as the dependent variable against the Green Belt Index (calculated as described in the methodology) yields an inverse relationship between the two with a correlation coefficient of -0.28. This infers that the regions with more green belt land contained within them tend to be less affordable than those regions with less green belt land. The correlation of -0.28 may initially seem quite weak, however, given that the housing market is very complicated with varying factors affecting it in numerous ways, for almost 30% of the differential of house prices to be attributable to the single factor of the amount of green belt land is quite remarkable.

#### Whether Accessible Countryside and Effective Housing Policy must necessarily be mutually exclusive

Observations by the Adam Smith Institute have noted that large areas of the Green Belt consist of infertile wasteland, transport embankments and poorly maintained, low quality farmland<sup>110</sup>, and that up to forty per cent of it is damaged or derelict<sup>111</sup>. Given that commercial fields of intensively farmed crops are anyway mainly privately owned, and in any case are arguably aesthetically negligible<sup>112,113</sup>, large tracts of the countryside are likely to be inaccessible and/or unlikely to attract visitors, as well as providing little or no provision for habitats for wildlife to thrive<sup>114</sup>.

The Adam Smith Institute's suggestion of obliging developers to restore part of the countryside in return for development rights suggests that a balance can be struck between allowing development within the Green Belt and providing accessible countryside. Its suggestion of a ratio of at least 9:1 (i.e. for every acre of green belt developed, nine acres of Green Belt land must be restored to 'pleasant greenery')

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<sup>106</sup> Andrew Montlake, Money Talk: How much money should you borrow?, 1 November 2006, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4418882.stm>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Source: Moneyextra. <http://firstrung.co.uk/articles.asp?pageid=NEWS&articlekey=4480&cat=44-0-0>

<sup>110</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, loc. cit.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>113</sup> Balen, op. cit., p.18

<sup>114</sup> Roger Highfield and David Derbyshire, Building more houses 'could benefit wildlife', in Craig Donnellan (Ed.), Issues Vol. 85: The Housing Crisis, April 2004, Cambridge: Independence Educational Publishers, p.33

would actually *increase* the amount of ‘green’ within the Green Belt<sup>115</sup>, given that much of the land currently within the belts is previously developed and not, as may be assumed, greenfield<sup>116,117</sup>, as well as simultaneously allowing for an increased housing provision<sup>118</sup>. Additionally, each acre of land that was developed need not be ‘under concrete’. Typically, a house and drive would occupy only one third of a plot the size of one twelfth of an acre<sup>119</sup>, the rest being occupied by the garden to the property.

The housing charity, Shelter, argues that much green belt agricultural land, particularly in the South East of England, is of dubious environmental value, producing acre upon acre of the same crop, farmed with high levels of pesticides and fertiliser, which can destroy habitats and biodiversity<sup>120</sup>. Nick Townsend, former chair of Bovis Homes, argues that biodiversity would be increased if building houses with gardens on Green Belt land was allowed, as the range of plants in a garden would provide for better habitats than the single crop usually grown in a commercial field<sup>121</sup>. This view is supported by Dr Keith Porter, former environmental information manager for English Nature (now known as Natural England), who claims that low-density housing with large gardens and public open spaces would help increase biodiversity by providing better habitats for animals than the current intensively farmed and heavily fertilised fields of cereals or oil-seed, as well as providing a more pleasant environment for residents of and visitors to the countryside<sup>122,123</sup>.

It seems evident, therefore, that provided that well-planned, low-density housing developments are given planning permission, on the condition that areas of derelict previously-developed land and poor-quality countryside are restored to a high standard of open countryside or woodland, then there is no reason why, in theory, accessible countryside and an effective housing policy need be mutually exclusive. What is not clear is whether the Green Belt is the correct mechanism to ensure that the countryside remains accessible, especially given its presumption against *all* development, regardless of any positive externalities that development may bring.

#### Whether in their present form both policies are compatible and, as such, indefinitely sustainable

Whether the Green Belt helps to fulfil its six land usage objectives<sup>124</sup> is irrelevant in the decision whether to include land within the Green Belt<sup>125</sup>. Inappropriate development, which is defined as any development which does not fall within four

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<sup>115</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.9

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>117</sup> Shelter, op. cit., p.7

<sup>118</sup> Townsend, loc. cit.

<sup>119</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.24

<sup>120</sup> Shelter, Housing versus the Environment: Can there only be one winner? A Discussion Paper, 2006, London: Shelter, p.10

<sup>121</sup> Nick Townsend, former chair, Bovis Homes, speaking at a debate held at the Guild Hall, Cambridge, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>122</sup> Highfield and Derbyshire, loc. cit.

<sup>123</sup> Balen, op. cit., pp.20, 21

<sup>124</sup> see PPG2, pp.4,5

<sup>125</sup> PPG2, p.5

very specific categories<sup>126</sup>, will not be accepted within a Green Belt unless it demonstrates very special circumstances whose harm to the belt is outweighed by the benefits it brings. In determining these situations, the secretary of state is required to attach a 'substantial' weight to the importance of the green belt in determining whether those considerations justify the harm caused<sup>127</sup>.

The government's key housing goal '*to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live*'<sup>128</sup> is partially addressed in PPG2 as, in determining Green Belt boundaries, authorities are encouraged to 'safeguard' land for future development, in order to relieve pressure on the Green Belt boundaries in order to increase their longevity<sup>129</sup>. However, this seems an unusually temporary solution to the maintenance of the boundaries of the Green Belt whose fundamental quality is its permanence<sup>130</sup>. Clearly the amount of land that is 'safeguarded' cannot be infinite, so the question needs to be asked, once that land is exhausted, where is next?

In terms of planning for housing development, the Government suggests that a national indicative *minimum* target for local authorities would be thirty dwellings per hectare<sup>131</sup>, roughly the same as the *average* density in 1918<sup>132</sup>. However, it seems clear that, in order to maintain the Green Belt boundaries for as long as possible, building at much higher densities would be required in order to satisfy the demand for housing using only 'safeguarded' areas.

A number of outcomes which the planning system should deliver, according to the objectives set out in PPS3, are also hindered by the existence of the Green Belt.

According to PPS3, the planning system should deliver *a sufficient quantity of housing, taking into account need and demand and seeking to improve choice*<sup>133</sup>. However, given the aim contained with PPG2 that 60 per cent of development should be built on previously-developed land<sup>134</sup>, housebuilders are being forced into building only high-density developments within cities<sup>135</sup> which, if anything, constrains choice. Additionally, the constraint on the supply of building land provided by the Green Belt makes it more difficult for Local Planning Authorities to respond to need and demand, as they have fewer options as to where to locate development.

The desired outcome of *Housing developments in suitable locations, which offer a good range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure*<sup>136</sup> is similarly hindered by the existence of the Green Belt. Green Belts surround some of the most important employment centres in the UK and, by restricting development around them, make access to those jobs and associated

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> PPS3, p.6

<sup>129</sup> PPG2 (Annex B), p.14

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>131</sup> PPS3, p.17

<sup>132</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, p.23

<sup>133</sup> PPS3., p.6

<sup>134</sup> PPG2

<sup>135</sup> Townsend, loc. cit.

<sup>136</sup> PPS3, loc. cit.

services located within the cities more difficult. Additionally, by forcing development to leapfrog the Green Belt<sup>137</sup>, the government's aim to cut carbon emissions<sup>138</sup> is undermined as people travel further to work.

Finally, the outcome of *a flexible, responsive supply of land, managed in a way that makes efficient and effective use of land, including previously developed land, where appropriate*<sup>139</sup> is compromised by the existence of the Green Belt. Whilst the Green Belt may focus more investment into brownfield sites in inner-city areas, it seems ludicrous to suggest that a flexible and responsive supply of land can be provided given the artificial restraint on supply afforded by the Green Belt in all its permanence.

It is evident, therefore, that Green Belt Planning Policy and effective Housing Policy are not indefinitely compatible in their present forms. Housing Policy demands more from the land, in order to fulfil all of its objectives, than Green Belt policy will currently allow. Reform of one or both of the policies is therefore required in order to ensure that both can operate effectively.

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<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Wise, op. cit., p. 271

<sup>138</sup> PPS3, p.14

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.6

## Discussion

The Analysis has shown that, in their present forms, Green Belt Planning Policy and Housing Policy are not compatible. That is not to say that accessible countryside and effective housing policy are mutually exclusive, rather that Green Belt policy is not the tool for delivering a more cohesive 'joined-up' policy.

Accessible Countryside can be delivered in other, more efficient ways than what is effectively a blanket ban on development with the Green Belt, such as the Adam Smith Institute's suggestion that, in return for planning permission for new houses, developers must restore a portion of the Green Belt to a high standard<sup>140</sup>. Not only would this increase the *amount* of countryside accessible to the general public, but also increase the *quality* of the countryside accessible to them.

Clearly, accessibility to the countryside is not the only aim of the Green Belt<sup>141</sup>, and the implication is not that the purposes of the Green Belt would necessarily have to be infringed, but rather that the purposes can be protected using other types of policy.

For instance, unrestricted urban sprawl could be checked by allowing only sympathetic, low density development in the countryside, and by not allowing estates of more than *x* number of houses in any one single development. By ensuring that developers of such housing restore part of the countryside to pleasant greenery, or plant woodland, the integrity and quality of the countryside will be improved, safeguarding the countryside from improvement. The historic character of towns would be maintained, as high density development would not be squeezed into them, and provided that development was sensitive enough, and enough countryside restoration was provided, the setting would too be preserved. Urban regeneration would still be an attractive option for many developers, as city centre living increases in popularity, but if the recycling of derelict urban land *did* come to a standstill, tax incentives could be offered to developers in order to encourage this activity, without the social cost that a blanket Green Belt policy incurs.

A cynic could argue that the government's four strategic housing policy objectives<sup>142</sup> are deliberately unquantifiable. It is questionable whether each is actually being met, and it is therefore not possible to say to what extent any shortfall, if any, in their achievements is attributable to the Green Belt. The four policy objectives are discussed below.

'To achieve a wide choice of high quality homes, both affordable and market housing, to address the requirements of the community'

This policy objective implies that the homes available should be in response to the types of homes that consumers demand. A MORI poll for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment found that more than fifty per cent of respondents would, had they the choice, prefer to live in a detached house, whilst fewer than three per cent would choose to live in a flat. However, in 2004, almost half

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<sup>140</sup> The Adam Smith Institute, op. cit., p.9

<sup>141</sup> PPG2, p.3

<sup>142</sup> PPS3

of new homes built were flats<sup>143</sup>. This implies that the homes available *do not* address the requirements of the community, as they are not the types of homes in which they would choose to live.

It has been noted by several authors that an effect of the Green Belt is to cause an increase in living density inside them<sup>144,145,146</sup>, as well as development leapfrogging<sup>147</sup>. This would suggest that Green Belt Policy is at least partly to blame for this Housing Policy failure.

‘To widen opportunities for home ownership and ensure high quality housing for those who cannot afford market housing, in particular those who are vulnerable or in need.’

The data in Appendix A show that houses in all regions of England are hideously unaffordable. Assuming that it is possible for a potential first-time buyer to raise the average deposit of £37,632<sup>148</sup>, for a person on the *average* income to buy an averagely-priced house in the most affordable region, Yorkshire and the Humber, a mortgage of over 7.5 times that person’s income would need to be raised. In Greater London, a mortgage of over 13 times income would need to be raised.

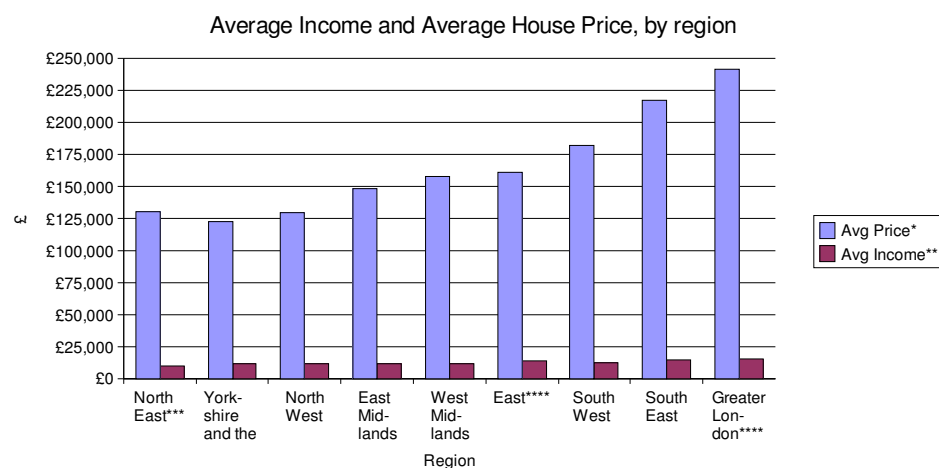


Figure 2: Average Income and Average House Price, by region

As demonstrated by the Analysis, affordability of housing is negatively correlated with the Green Belt Index (Appendix A). This raises serious questions about the comparative importance of both policies, and suggests that reform is urgently required.

‘To improve affordability in the housing market, by increasing the supply of housing’

<sup>143</sup> Balen, op. cit., p.28

<sup>144</sup> Evans, loc. cit.

<sup>145</sup> Elliott, loc. cit.

<sup>146</sup> Friends of the Earth, *Urban Land in Britain*, in Craig Donnellan (Ed.), *Issues Vol. 85: The Housing Crisis*, April 2004, Cambridge: Independence Educational Publishers, p.25

<sup>147</sup> Wise, loc. cit.

<sup>148</sup> Source: Moneyextra. <http://firstrung.co.uk/articles.asp?pageid=NEWS&articlekey=4480&cat=44-0-0>

In order to facilitate an increase in the supply of housing, either more land is required for development, or development needs to occur at higher densities. Given the government's aim of a wide choice of housing, building more dwellings at high densities will serve only to constrain choice, so it seems inevitable that the supply of land will need to be increased. The Green Belts serve to constrain this supply and, unless policy or their boundaries are changed, it is not going to be possible to improve affordability by increasing supply and improve the choice of homes available.

'To create sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities in all areas, both urban and rural'

High house prices, as demonstrated above, will, if left to their own devices, polarise communities rather than help to create inclusive, mixed communities. However, given the government's commitment to including affordable housing within most new housing developments<sup>149</sup>, provided that this is done sympathetically and applied consistently, there is no reason why policy cannot help to create inclusive, mixed communities in this way. The Green Belt would appear to be an irrelevant consideration in creating mixed communities, provided that enough provision for affordable housing is available.

However, in terms of providing sustainable communities, whether increasingly dense developments are sustainable is certainly highly questionable, especially given the higher propensity to attract crime that these developments have been shown to possess.

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<sup>149</sup> PPS3, pp. 9,10

<sup>150</sup> Elliott, loc. cit.

## Conclusions

Green Belt Policy, as it exists today, is a very poor method of making countryside accessible. Indeed, the policy itself imposes no obligations on landowners to make their land accessible to the public, but merely prohibits them from building almost anything on it. The result being hectare upon hectare of intensive production of the same crop, heavily treated with fertilisers and pesticides, inaccessible to the public and free of wildlife, due to the destruction of their habitats. Indeed, the number of residents able to access the countryside easily is *inversely proportionate* to the amount of Green Belt land contained within the region.

Housing Policy is similarly performing very poorly at present. People earning average incomes are unable to afford averagely priced homes. In even the most affordable region, the average house price is over ten times the average income. Based on a lender willing to offer a mortgage of 2.5 times the joint income, an average couple would need to find a deposit of £66,237 before being able to buy a home.

Effective Housing policy and Accessible Countryside need not be mutually exclusive. However, a simple presumption against development in the countryside surrounding our cities is not the mechanism to facilitate housing becoming more affordable and high quality countryside becoming accessible. The quality of the countryside can be improved and the housing stock increased simultaneously by allowing development within the green belts on the condition that the developer restores areas of countryside. Existing Planning Controls can anyway stop urban sprawl if that is considered undesirable by the local planning authority

In its present form, Green Belt Planning Policy is incompatible with Housing Policy. The number of homes cannot be increased where they are most needed whilst green belts prohibit development around our most densely populated and expensive cities. A review of the boundaries of the Green Belt is needed in the short term, in order to ensure that development pressure does not induce 'panic buying' and foster a housing crash like that of the 1990s. In the long-term, a review of policy is needed and a more appropriate way to achieve the aims of the Green Belt is required.

Removing the Green Belt need not result in burying our countryside in concrete. Carefully planned policies and incentives can be just as effective at achieving the aims of the Green Belt whilst applying more sensible restrictions against development, increasing housing availability and affordability, and improving the quality and accessibility of the countryside.

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## Appendix A

### Affordability and Green Belt Indices for the English Regions

Region	Avg Price*	Avg Income**	Affordability*****	Area*****	Green Belt Area*****	Green Belt Index*****
North East***	£130,572	£10,036	7.69	8,573	719	8.39
Yorkshire and the Humber	£122,917	£11,336	9.22	15,408	2,649	17.19
North West	£129,400	£11,492	8.88	14,106	2,603	18.45
East Midlands	£148,126	£11,856	8.00	15,607	789	5.06
West Midlands	£158,240	£11,180	7.07	12,998	2,693	20.72
East****	£160,812	£13,780	8.57	19,110	263	1.38
South West	£182,010	£12,584	6.91	23,837	1,063	4.46
South East	£217,562	£14,924	6.86	19,069	5,211	27.33
Greater London*****	£241,376	£15,496	6.42	1,572	328	20.88

\*Quarter 1 2005 Std Price. Source: HBOS plc, Halifax House Price Index (Historic Data) March 2007 All Houses (All Buyers) Seasonally Adjusted – Quarterly Data  
 \*\*Average Gross Annual Income per person, excluding Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Calculated as Average Gross Weekly Income per person multiplied by 52. Source: Office for National Statistics, Regional Trends 39, Table 8.2: Distribution of Household Income 2002/3-2004/5  
 \*\*\*North East is the name given to this region by the Office for National Statistics. HBOS plc refers to this region as North  
 \*\*\*\*East is the name given to this region by the Office for National Statistics. HBOS plc refers to this region as East Anglia  
 \*\*\*\*\*Greater London is the name given to this region by HBOS plc. The Office for National Statistics refers to this region simply as London  
 \*\*\*\*\*A measure of affordability calculated as Average Income divided by Average House Price  
 \*\*\*\*\*Total Area (in Square Kilometres) of the region as calculated by the Office for National Statistics in its *Region in Figures* series for each region, Winter 2004/5, Table 2.10 in each publication  
 \*\*\*\*\*Total Area (in Square Kilometres) of Green Belt Land in the region (calculated as area in hectares divided by 100 to produce total area in sq.km). Source: DCLG, Area of Designated Green Belt Land by Region and Local Planning Authority, 2006. For these purposes "Greater London" is defined as the sum of Green Belt Land in those districts categorised as "London and the wider South East" that are one of the thirty-two London boroughs; "South East" being defined as the remainder of the districts within "London and the wider South East"  
 \*\*\*\*\*Calculated as a percentage of the area within the region designated as Green Belt Land

## Appendix B

### Regression Analysis: Green Belt Index vs. Affordability

x	y	xy	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>
8.39	7.69	64.47	70.36	59.08
17.19	9.22	158.57	295.64	85.05
18.45	8.88	163.89	340.54	78.87
5.06	8	40.46	25.56	64.06
20.72	7.07	146.36	429.12	49.92
1.38	8.57	11.79	1.89	73.43
4.46	6.91	30.84	19.9	47.8
27.33	6.86	187.44	746.68	47.05
20.88	6.42	134.02	435.78	41.21

Σx	Σy	Σ(xy)	Σ(x <sup>2</sup> )	Σ(y <sup>2</sup> )
123.84	69.62	937.85	2365.48	546.48

n	(Σx) <sup>2</sup>	(Σy) <sup>2</sup>
9	15337.49	4847.13

Slope, m=	-181.57
Y-int, b=	2506.28
r=	-0.28

Notes:  
 x (independent variable) = Green Belt Index  
 y (dependent variable) = Affordability  
 Values, definitions and order as Appendix A

## Appendix C

### Accessibility of Countryside and Green Spaces and Green Belt Index

Region	Accessible (LinC)*	Accessible (LnotinC)*	Accessible* Not Accessible*	Total*	Area**	Green Belt Area***	Green Belt Index****	
North East	26	54	80	20	100	8,573	719	8.39
Yorkshire and the Humber	44	41	85	15	100	15,408	2,649	17.19
North West	16	67	83	17	100	14,106	2,603	18.45
East Midlands	49	36	85	15	100	15,607	789	5.06
West Midlands	30	53	83	17	100	12,998	2,693	20.72
East	44	44	88	12	100	19,110	263	1.38
South West	46	42	88	12	100	23,837	1,063	4.46
South East	39	46	85	15	100	19,069	5,211	27.33
Greater London	3	75	78	22	100	1,572	328	20.88

\*Source: DEFRA, *Survey of Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and to the Environment*, 2002, available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/pubatt/index.htm>. Results of a survey carried out by DEFRA, posing the question, "Are there any green spaces or countryside around which you can get to easily without using a car or other transport?"; the choice of answers being: (a) "Yes, I live in the Countryside" (denoted as "Accessible (LinC)"); (b) "Yes, I don't live in the countryside but can easily access green space" (denoted as "Accessible (LnotinC)"); or (c) "No". Responses expressed as percentage of respondents  
 \*\*Total Area (in Square Kilometres) of the region as calculated by the Office for National Statistics in its *Region in Figures* series for each region, Winter 2004/5, Table 2.10 in each publication  
 \*\*\*Total Area (in Square Kilometres) of Green Belt Land in the region (calculated as area in hectares divided by 100 to produce total area in sq.km). Source: DCLG, *Area of Designated Green Belt Land by Region and Local Planning Authority*, 2006. For these purposes "Greater London" is defined as the sum of Green Belt Land in those districts categorised as "London and the wider South East" that are one of the thirty-two London boroughs; "South East" being defined as the remainder of the districts within "London and the wider South East"  
 \*\*\*\*Calculated as a percentage of the area within the region designated as Green Belt Land

## Appendix D

### Regression Analysis: Total number of people living within a region who can easily access the countryside or a green space without the use of a car or other transport vs. Green Belt Index

x	y	xy	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>
8.39	80	671.04	70.36	6400
17.19	85	1461.52	295.64	7225
18.45	83	1531.67	340.54	6889
5.06	85	429.71	25.56	7225
20.72	83	1719.36	429.12	6889
1.38	88	121.12	1.89	7744
4.46	88	392.54	19.9	7744
27.33	85	2322.67	746.68	7225
20.88	78	1628.27	435.78	6084

$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma(xy)$	$\Sigma(x^2)$	$\Sigma(y^2)$
123.84	755	10277.9	2365.48	63425

n	$(\Sigma x)^2$	$(\Sigma y)^2$
9	15337.49	570025

Slope, m=	-1001.6
y-int, b=	13866.41
r=	-0.46

Notes:  
 x (independent variable) = Green Belt Index  
 y (dependent variable) = Accessibility  
 Values, definitions and order as Appendix A

## Appendix E

**Regression Analysis: Number of people living within a region who can easily access the countryside or a green space without the use of a car or other transport who do not live in the countryside vs. Green Belt Index**

x	y	xy	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>
8.39	54	452.95	70.36	2916
17.19	41	704.97	295.64	1681
18.45	67	1236.41	340.54	4489
5.06	36	182	25.56	1296
20.72	53	1097.9	429.12	2809
1.38	44	60.56	1.89	1936
4.46	42	187.35	19.9	1764
27.33	46	1256.97	746.68	2116
20.88	75	1565.65	435.78	5625

$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma(xy)$	$\Sigma(x^2)$	$\Sigma(y^2)$
123.84	458	6744.76	2365.48	24632

n	$(\Sigma x)^2$	$(\Sigma y)^2$
9	15337.49	209764

<b>Slope, m=</b>	<b>3981.97</b>
<b>y-int, b=</b>	<b>-54743.06</b>
<b>r=</b>	<b>0.47</b>

Notes:  
x (independent variable) = Green Belt Index  
y (dependent variable) = Accessibility to the countryside/green space, not living in the countryside  
Values, definitions and order as Appendix A