

THE LONDON GREEN BELT COUNCIL

Notes 153

November 2008

The South-East Plan

The inquiry panel has submitted its draft proposals to the Secretary of State, and her proposed alterations to the draft have been circulated for comment. Those relating to green belt are a mish-mash because, though they sanction major reviews in two areas (Guildford and Oxford,) and one other specific site at Chertsey, and stress the importance of green belt, they add 'Smaller scale local reviews are likely to be required in other locations, including around Redhill/Reigate, and these should be pursued through the Local Development Framework process'. She goes on to say 'If as a result of these reviews green belt land is lost... consideration should be given to whether a broader review of green belt is needed with a particular view to determining whether additional land should be designated as green belt.'

Other examples could be quoted, but the combination of acknowledgement of the importance of green belt, and the recognition of very strong public support for it, with weasel words which will greatly undermine it deserved our strong condemnation. The following points need to be made: As we live in the real world we have to accept that the machinery must provide, as it always has done, for reviews of boundaries in exceptional circumstances, but the S/S' proposals here, though starting with reference to exceptional reviews at regional level, go on again and again to hint that many other local reviews should be undertaken at local levels. This is quite unacceptable, and contradicts the Prime Minister's assurance of robust defence of green belts. It is not robust to weaken policy all along the line, as the S/S' proposals do.

The S/S' proposed amendment quoted above also introduces the idea that new land might be designated green belt to compensate for what has been removed. This is also unacceptable because it undermines a prime purpose of green belt, to stop the expansion of towns. Once conceded, this 'compensation' brainwave might be difficult to stop, to the great delight of the development industry.

Formal detailed objections have been lodged on the forms by the Government Office for the south-east.

Green Belt and Japan

On a happier note I would like to bring members up to date on the item reported in the last issue of Notes, which recorded that I had been approached by Japanese television which wanted to make a 2-hour film on aspects of English countryside, including green belt. The producer and her English agent discussed various aspects with me in May when we visited several sites and discussed various matters. She asked the agent to locate a farmer, preferably near my home so that we could be interviewed together, who had farmed the same land since before the green belt was invented. The Hertfordshire branch of the NFU suggested one whose family had farmed land between Potters Bar and Barnet for over 100 years.

The director and camera crew filmed us on the farm on 10th June, the process lasting about an hour. They then went off to the Lake District to do other filming, particularly sites associated with the lakeland poets and Beatrix Potter. The programme was transmitted in Japan in late