



Department for
Communities and
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Dear Peter

Thank you for your letter of 8 October to the Prime Minister, enclosing a Daily Mail article about the Green Belt. I am responding as Minister for Housing and Planning.

The London Green Belt Council has long been a vigilant defender of Green Belt, and I am pleased to note that its website provides a link to the annual Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics. The latest verified figures (issued on 1 October at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/464776/Green Belt Statistics England 2014-15.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/464776/Green_Belt_Statistics_England_2014-15.pdf)) show that, in the year to March 2015, the Green Belt remained constant at 13 per cent of England. Nationally, Green Belt is actually larger than in 1997 if we disregard land now protected as national park, and in the run-up to the General Election we promised to maintain its strong policy protections. You will know that it has never been policy for a blanket ban on Green Belt development, but rather the setting of a high bar before development can be approved or Green Belt boundaries redrawn.

I am therefore happy to confirm that maintaining strong protection for Green Belt is national policy and that local authorities are required to observe this. We reinforced this a year ago with additional guidance which reminds local authorities (and planning inspectors) that in planning to meet local housing and other needs a local authority must have regard to national policy on the protection of Green Belt, which indicates that development should be restricted. In the context of planning applications or appeals, the policy is that unmet housing need alone will not amount to the 'very special circumstances' to justify planning permission for inappropriate development on the Green Belt.

Permanence remains an essential characteristic of Green Belt, but the land must serve the purposes of Green Belt as stated in the National Planning Policy Framework. A Green Belt boundary can be altered, though only in exceptional circumstances, using the Local Plan process of public consultations followed by formal examination in public. When checking the soundness of a draft Plan, planning inspectors assess rigorously any claim that exceptional circumstances justify alteration of a Green Belt boundary, and set out their reasoning in published reports.

BRANDON LEWIS MP