

OXFORD GREEN BELT NETWORK

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2006

We hope that all the Parish Councils, Parish Meetings and amenity groups who have subscribed to Oxford Green Belt Network this year will accept our grateful thanks. It is important when we defend the Green Belt at public inquiries and elsewhere that we are able to say that we have strong backing from the parishes that make up the Oxford Green Belt. If your Council has not sent us a £15 subscription for 2006 we would still be glad to receive one (our Hon. Treasurer is Mr Michael Tyce).

South East Plan

Information about the South East Plan was given in our last Newsletter in May 2006. The response of the Oxford Green Belt Network to this Plan was submitted in June together with a request that we be allowed to appear at the Examination in Public (EIP) into this Plan which is due to begin in November. We are delighted to say that our request has been accepted and that we shall be able to give further written evidence to the inspectors conducting the EIP and also to appear before the panel of inspectors to give evidence and engage in the discussion.

According to the provisional timetable we shall be appearing on 28th February 2007 when the discussion will centre on Housing and the Green Belt in Central Oxfordshire, the key section of the Plan so far as Oxford's Green Belt is concerned. A lot of the other participants that day will be firms of consultants representing developers who wish to build in the Green Belt, so it is good that we can be there too in order to defend the Green Belt. If you have any points you would like us to take account of as we prepare our evidence for the EIP, please let us know via the address at the top of this Newsletter.

Threats from above

You will be aware from the national and local press that there is a lot of pressure to override the recommendations of the South East Plan and build houses in the Green Belt. We have noted the following developments since June when we submitted our comments on the South East Plan:

- (i) A report by Roger Tym and Partners for the government which singled out the Oxford area for growth and set out 5 options for increasing the number of houses to be built in Central Oxfordshire over the period of the South East Plan (2006-2026). The largest of these would see the annual total of new housing units increased from the South East Plan figure of 1,700 to as much as 2,914.
- (ii) Oxford City Council's bid for New Growth Points Status. The City is seeking £1 million and allocates £30,000 of this for a "Green Belt Review Study" and £100,000 for a "Concept Plan for Urban Extensions". It is known that the City would like one, possibly two, urban extensions for 14,000 dwellings, the favoured areas being south of Grenoble Road in Sandford Parish and in the Kidlington/Yarnton/Begbroke area.
- (iii) The Barker report on the planning system which singles out the Oxford area for growth, arguing that the Green Belt inhibits economic progress, especially in high tech employment. (The Oxford Green Belt Network is

- not opposed to economic expansion but believes the benefits can be spread throughout the County, not concentrated in Oxford and the Green Belt).
- (iv) A map produced by the South East England Development Agency which singles out the Oxford area as a “Diamond for Growth”.

All of the above, together with constant pressure from the Treasury to build houses, are indicative of the pressure the Oxford area is under, and the Green Belt in particular (since this is where most of the extra housing would be built). You will have heard the calls from some local politicians for a review of the Green Belt, presumably because they are prepared to see parts of it lost to development, though they are not always honest enough to say that this is the reason. The County Structure Plan (which goes up to 2016) and the South East Plan (which goes up to 2026) both say that the housing needs can be met without taking land out of the Green Belt. So when you hear people saying there must be a review of the Green Belt, please challenge them, as we shall be seeking to challenge the developers and others at the forthcoming EIP.

Day to day pressures

We do not allow the above concerns to divert our attention from the everyday threats to the Oxford Green Belt and we continue to write letters, speak at meetings and generally do our best to set out the arguments for opposing what we consider to be inappropriate developments. Guidance for doing this is to be found in the government’s planning guidance notes on Green Belts (PPG.2) and in the reports of planning inspectors who conduct inquiries when developers appeal against refusal of planning permission. If you are opposing a development it is often useful to stress the fact that it would reduce the openness of the Green Belt and/or that it would reduce the visual amenity of the Green Belt.

Subjects that we have been concerned with recently include: sites for waste recycling, rogue advertising on roadsides, unauthorised accommodation for seasonal farm workers, telecom masts and wind turbines, the consequences of division of farm holdings, over ambitious sports grounds that invite car boot sales etc, sand and gravel working, badly sited stabling, overdevelopment of sites in Green Belt villages. Looking forwards we are concerned about plans for Shipton Quarry, for the rebuilding of the A.34 flyover, for the future of Abingdon airfield. We have long regretted that enforcement action by District Councils against unauthorised development in the Green Belt appears weak and ineffective. Perhaps the long overdue setting up of a National Association of Planning Enforcement (NAPE) will help a little. We shall see.

Annual General Meeting of the Oxford Green Belt Network

Accompanying this Newsletter you will find an invitation to the AGM of the Oxford Green Belt Network. We should be glad to see a representative of your parish or group at this meeting when we elect a Steering Committee for the next year and review our work over the past year and our plans for the future.