

Why the GREEN BELT must be saved...

.....and how YOU can help save it.

- 1. The Green Belt plays a vital role in preserving the character of the City of Oxford, which would be destroyed if the City grew too large.**
- 2. It preserves the identities of the surrounding villages which would be lost if Oxford was allowed to sprawl towards and over them.**
- 3. It protects the whole of Oxfordshire from becoming entirely "Oxford-centric" and allows the other towns within the County to maintain their own characters and economies.**
- 4. The City Council, which is determined to expand the City, is set on breaching the Green Belt by building South of the City at Grenoble Road – but there are many other threats waiting in the wings, from Kidlington in the North to Sunningwell in the South**
- 5. No part of the Green Belt is safe**
- 6. Once there is a major breach of this kind in the Green Belt it will be followed by others, and a Green Belt in tatters will no longer be able to serve its purpose in protecting us all from urban sprawl**
- 7. Once gone, it can never be replaced**
- 8. This is not a campaign AGAINST development or housing. This is a campaign FOR the Green Belt. The value of the Green Belt to us all is so great that we allow it to be breached at our peril.**

You can help us prevent this now by writing to the Prime Minister. It would help our campaign if you would email a copy of your letter to webmaster@oxfordgreenbelt.net.

Act now and help save the Green Belt – you'll be so glad you did!

Now see pages 2 to 6 to read :

" The need to Save the Green Belt, and what you can do to save it."

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The need to Save the Green Belt, and what you can do to save it.

The Green Belt is a vital part of the character of the whole County and must be preserved from attack. We can all help in keeping it safe for future generations.

1. The permanence of the Oxford Green Belt is essential to all who live or love Oxfordshire.

This is what the Green Belt does:

- It protects the Historic City itself from the harm that reckless expansion would cause and keeps it a containable size. This is to the benefit of every citizen of Oxford, and everyone who loves or visits it.
- It protects the unique villages that surround Oxford from being swallowed up in urban sprawl as happened to villages around other cities. This is to the benefit of all who live in these villages, and all who visit them.
- It protects the towns and villages beyond the Green Belt from being swallowed up by the City, or having their economies drained by the City's expansion making them simply dormitories for 'Greater Oxford'.
- It maintains open space within easy reach of all who live in Oxford, the countryside on our doorsteps.
- It maintains an attractive place to live, to attract the entrepreneurs who nourish Oxford's economy, and it attracts high value businesses to Oxfordshire which could as easily go elsewhere.

The Green Belt's primary purpose is to act as a "wall" to contain Oxford. It does not have to be pretty – though much of it is very beautiful indeed – but it does have to be permanent. If a wall is taken down brick by brick there will soon be no wall at all.

2. Seeing how harmful urban sprawl could be was the motivation for the creation of Green Belts

During the 1930s there was uncontrolled ribbon development of major cities along main roads and out into the countryside. This soon became "filled in" with the expanding city engulfing the once individual communities surrounding it. Those who lived in the City found open countryside becoming increasingly out of reach.

The uncontrolled sprawl of cities harmed the setting of the cities themselves and worsened the living standards of everyone – in the City, around the City and beyond the City.

The urgent need to stop this where it was happening – particularly in the West Midlands and London - and to prevent it occurring where it had hardly begun – especially around unique cities like Oxford - was addressed with the creation of Green Belts.

They were "Green" because they were countryside – a countryside which contained the villages it was also intended to protect.

More importantly it was a "Belt". Its main purpose was to prevent expansion.

A number of cities up and down the country took up the new concept, seeing the obvious advantages for the well-being of their citizens and – in keeping cities attractive places – the high quality businesses they would attract and retain.

Additionally, in some cases – York, Chester, Cambridge and – overwhelmingly – Oxford, the Green Belt served an additional purpose, of securing the setting and character of a unique historic city, which would be destroyed if it was allowed to outgrow itself.

The Oxford Green Belt was set up in 1958 and for fifty years has served its purpose

It has preserved the City's setting; prevented a City whose layout makes it "congestion prone" from growing to a point where movement becomes impossible; safeguarded the individual characters of villages like Horspath and Garsington, Stanton St John and Forest Hill, Yarnton and Begbroke, which might otherwise have been overwhelmed by Oxford; and provided a "green lung" for City dwellers right on the doorstep.

3. Why it ain't working if it ain't hurting

The Green Belt was set up around Oxford to keep it a user-friendly size. It is obvious that a Green Belt set up to contain the City is most needed as the City expands out to its inner boundary. Like a corset, if you cannot feel it, it is probably not tight enough!

The Green Belt is only working when the City is contained; but the City Council is determined that Oxford shall expand relentlessly. The lessons of the years before the war, when cities sprawled out willy-nilly are ignored.

The City's determination to expand is the reason that, instead of just using available land within the City to build houses (and the City Council acknowledge there is more than enough), they use it to create new employment too – offices and shops – which means more people coming to work in the City, creating more traffic and congestion, and aggravating rather than satisfying housing need.

They accuse the Green Belt of increasing commuting by forcing workers to "leapfrog" across it – but it is Oxford's relentless growth of business instead of housing which creates commuting. In any case there is almost as much commuting out of Oxford by people who live in the City as there is commuting into Oxford across the Green Belt.

It may be that the City Council and its supporters are simply indifferent to the Green Belt, despite polls which show it to have massive 84% public support (CPRE News at <http://www.cpre.org.uk/news/view/80>), in their determination to create a 'Greater Oxford' in our green and pleasant land; or,

perhaps, it is simply that the woefully bad management of the City's economy leaves them no way out other than to seek windfall development gains and create more Council Tax payers regardless of the damage to the environment.

4. **Death by Degrees**

The Green Belt's enemies know of course that the Green Belt is far too popular to be attacked head on. They therefore seek to chip it away bit by bit.

A year or two ago the fashionable "Hub and Spoke" approach was to propose that whilst keeping the Green Belt untouched in principle, it should be chopped into pieces by development out along major roads. In other words to revert to the very ribbon development which had created the problem that Green Belts were set up to solve.

Now, more subtly, the approach is to identify less attractive bits and say they wouldn't be missed.

But the Green Belt was never set up as a country park. Its purpose was not to be attractive in itself – although much of it is – but to preserve the setting and character of the City and the villages and countryside which surrounds it.

If you chop off the less attractive bits and massively increase their value by allowing development on them, it will not be long before landowners get the message that the more you degrade your land, the more likely you are to make a killing from it. Then it becomes another less attractive bit to be developed.

This would be death by degrees. There would soon be no Green Belt left.

The Death by Degrees approach has another attraction for those who seek to erode the Green Belt.

It is that those Green Belt communities which are not directly under threat at any one time may lie low to avoid drawing attention to themselves, or, even, actively support an attack elsewhere, feeling they will then be safe. That is why a "selective" review of the Green Belt is now proposed by its enemies.

But a threat to one community increases, not decreases, the threat to all the others. All history shows that if you allow one of your neighbours be picked off it hastens, rather than puts off, the day when it will be your turn to be the victim – and this time there will be no neighbour to turn to for help.

As the poet said, "every man's death diminishes me". This is the case with the Green Belt. Every Green Belt community should see an attack on any other as an attack on itself, and rally round to put out the fire. Green Belt communities, of course, include Oxford itself, for which the Green Belt was created and which would lose most from its weakening and demise.

5. **Who stands to gain from the demise of the Green Belt?**

It is a legal principle that if you can find the person who benefits from the crime, you have probably found the guilty party.

The City Council would make a windfall gain of £300 million, and benefit from greater tax revenues, if it can get its land in the Green Belt "released" – the planning word for "destroyed by development".

Builders will of course benefit from the work that concreting over once open countryside will create, and they will make higher profits from building over green fields than on more sustainable brownfield sites because the cost of preparing the land will be less.

The big gainers however would be the Oxford colleges. A large part of the land around Oxford, and therefore of the Green Belt, has been given in the past to Oxford Colleges so that the income from farming the land could support their teaching work – and of course their dons' life-styles.

Any of this land which is taken out of the Green Belt and given planning permission for development will see its value increase from £3000 an acre to £1,400,000, a gain of 47,000%. This amounts to hundreds of millions of pounds. For nothing. It is easy to see the temptation.

Magdalen College is working with Thames Water to get their land south of Oxford out of the Green Belt. Between them they stand to make a £300 million windfall. Next door is a large piece of land owned by Brasenose College where gains on a similar scale would be made. Merton owns land at Begbroke, Christ Church owns land at Elsfield.

Everywhere you look around the Green Belt, colleges are in for huge windfall gains if they can get their land taken out of the Green Belt.

If all the college land went for development, the Green Belt would be shredded and would, to all intents and purposes, cease to exist.

It is hard to imagine that the dons and the students of these colleges want to be the agents of the Green Belt's destruction. If they don't, it is time for their voice to be heard above the business managers acting in their name.

6. **What can you do and to whom should you do it?.**

At this stage, although many of the threats are public knowledge, and have had extensive press coverage, there is as yet no detailed plan to object to.

The Secretary of State is preparing consultation papers which are expected to express her support for a Green Belt review (that is, major development) south of Oxford, as part of her proposed modifications to the draft South East Plan.

This is despite the fact that the Prime Minister said as recently as July that "the land designated as Green Belt would be robustly protected".

Now is the time to write to the Prime Minister asking him to do just that.

Later, when the specific threat becomes clearer, there will be further news, information and advice on this website.

The intellectual argument in favour of the Green Belt was won fifty years ago and is even more valid now than it was then.

The attack on it is led by populist politicians, expansionist Councils, and greedy landowners. These are however well-funded groups with easy access to the media.

If they are to be thwarted it will be because public opinion is clearly against them. They know that the public support the Green Belt idea, but believe they will not "come out on the streets". Let's see what we can do to change their minds.

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