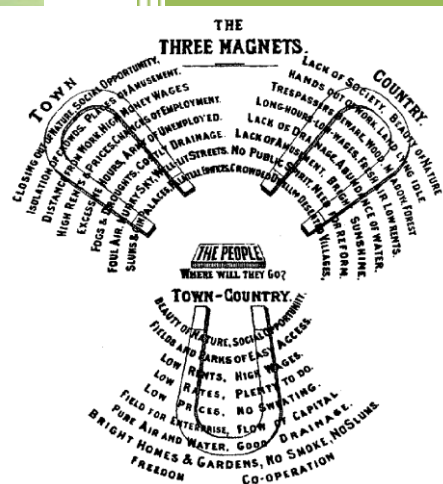
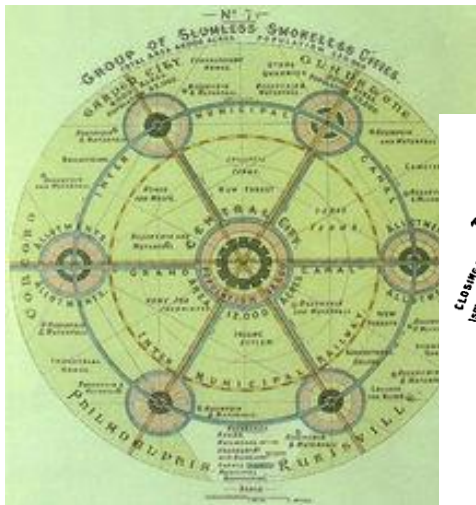


# The Green Belt

## Its Origins, Role in Planning & The LNP

### Report for Dorset Local Nature Partnership



Circle No. 4055

#### MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1

SIR,

3rd August, 1955

#### GREEN BELTS

- Following upon his statement in the House of Commons on April 26th last (copy attached), I am directed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government to draw your attention to the importance of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up areas, and of safeguarding the surrounding countryside against further encroachment.
- He is satisfied that the only really effective way to achieve this object is by the formal designation of clearly defined Green Belts around the areas concerned.
- The Minister accordingly recommends Planning Authorities to consider establishing a Green Belt wherever this is desirable in order:
  - to check the further growth of a large built-up area;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; or
  - to preserve the special character of a town.
- Wherever practicable, a Green Belt should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable rural zone all round the built-up area concerned.



Simon Williams  
March 2015, finalised August 2015

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## Preface

The Dorset Local Nature Partnership is concerned with the natural environment in its widest sense.

Its Strategy

<http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/hres/DORSET%20LNP%20STRATEGY%20final.pdf>

states that:

*The Dorset LNP has a Vision that is working towards a future in which, [amongst other objectives]:*

- ***Dorset's natural environment is richer in quality and diversity and more resilient to change in urban and rural areas and in the marine environment***
- ***Dorset's natural systems are providing a wider and more valuable range of services, more reliably to people and wildlife***
- ***Development & growth in Dorset is planned so that the natural resource on which the development is based, is enhanced and not eroded; thus restricting future development***
- ***The natural environment is not thoughts of as a constraint to be overcome, rather it is the basis upon which growth and development can be sustained and therefore consistently requires both protection and enhancement, to deliver such benefits***

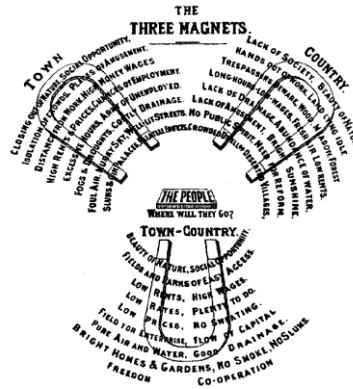
In doing so, the LNP will be led by operating principles that include:

- ***Sustainable development: the LNP will promote the integration of social, economic and environmental goals and will work with partners to develop win-win solutions to achieve this, embedding the concept of natural capital into growth strategies and development projects.***
- ***Early intervention: where possible the LNP will work early on in any policy or planning discussion to seek successful outcomes efficiently, without conflict and cost effectively.***

This paper on the role and purpose of the Green Belt in general, was born out of a discussion at a LNP Board meeting about the role of the green belt around the Bournemouth & Poole conurbation, in the context of increased demands for housing growth and development.



In response to concerns about the the countryside into the towns and concentration of populations in major problems, Howard's proposal was to the countryside.



migration of people from the resulting cities, with ensuing health reintegrate people with

2.3 He represented the attraction and in comparing the ‘town and that neither were suitable attractors for his utopian vision. Instead he believed that *“Human society and the beauty of nature are meant to be enjoyed together”* – his solution *“the two magnets must be made one.” Town & Country.*

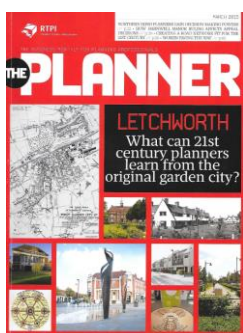
of the city as a magnet, country magnets’ decided

2.4 The ‘Garden City’ came to be understood as an urban planning model to reform the spatial arrangement of social and economic life although Howard’s ideas of social reform was somewhat lost. Howard had emphasised the creation of a sense of community and harbouring relationships between human beings, enhancing them through good planning and design that promoted sociability.

2.5 Howard initiated the concept of what were then new ideas about hierarchy of services within the city, the essential components of community being planned with clear zoning principles in a more holistic manner. The idea of the agricultural belt, the ‘bounded’ city, is directly responsible for later policies of ‘Green Belt’ in the UK (and indeed in other parts of the world) that has since evolved and changed but essentially remains about constricting and controlling urban growth.



2.6 Interestingly, having written this report for the Local Nature Partnership Board, the March edition of The Planner (RTPI Publication) contains an article on Letchworth and the relevance of Garden Cities to today’s housing problems. This focuses on the design approach as well as importantly, the governance and financial arrangements.



The article is entitled: “Letchworth: *“What can 21<sup>st</sup> Century Planners learn from the original garden city?”* and is reproduced as Appendix 4.

It concludes by suggesting that given the amount of housing currently required, garden cities, (which may have a somewhat quaint attraction to politicians and the

some of the public), can only be part of a package of measures along with other approaches such as urban extensions and urban renewal and also emphasises the need to take a long term view in financial terms if such schemes are to be successful.

### **3 So what is Green Belt within the current planning system?**

3.1 As indicated above, there is much confusion about the term as although it's original purpose was to ...provide a girdle of open space... around major conurbations, it has become, in some people's minds, as being synonymous with general greenfield land or the open countryside.

3.2 Green Belt is defined by a boundary; a line drawn on an Ordnance Survey map, on one side of which is the urban area where generally development is permitted, whilst on the other side it is strictly controlled and there is a presumption against new development unless special circumstances prevail. Beyond outer boundary of the belt, planning policies revert to policies for towns, villages and the general open countryside.

3.3 However one common misconception is that green belt is designated because of its landscape or other intrinsic value, but in reality it is a planning designation that has little bearing on the actual quality of land that is being protected from development. In practice Green Belt land can include some existing developed land and uses, the somewhat tatty uses, often found in areas of 'urban fringe' such as 'horsiculture' and in some cases, landscape which is of marginal or poor quality. The term 'Green Belt' therefore is, or has the potential to be one of the most misunderstood of planning designations.

3.4 The Metropolitan Green Belt around London was first proposed by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee in 1935. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 then allowed local authorities to include green belt proposals in their development plans. This Act and the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949, still form the essential basis of today's planning system and in 1955, the then Minister of Housing, Duncan Sandys encouraged local authorities around the country to consider protecting land around their towns and cities by the formal designation of clearly defined 'Green Belts'.

3.5 The concept of the 'Green Belt' became embodied in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's 1955 Circular 42/55, which subsequently became known as the 'Sandys Circular'. This is included in full within **Appendix 1**.

Its purpose was to provide a ring of green space around major conurbations and was a response to the somewhat sporadic and ribbon developments that had developed apace in previous decades.

3.6 The key messages in Circular 42/55 were as follows:

*“The importance of checking unrestricted sprawl of the built up areas and the safeguarding of the surrounding countryside against further encroachment”.*

The only way of achieving this was seen to be by ... *“the formal designation of clearly defined Green Belts around the areas concerned”.*

The Minister therefore recommended that Planning Authorities consider establishing

a.....*“Green belt wherever this was desirable in order to:*

*(a) Check the further growth of a large built up area*

*(b) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another, or*

*(c) To preserve the special character of a town”*

3.7 It is clear for these statement at the time, that maintaining the separation of settlements and therefore their individual identity was seen as a strong policy. As noted above, It was also a reaction to the extensive ribbon development that had taken place in the pre-wars years and which was often referred to a urban or suburban ‘sprawl’!

3.8 Although not stated explicitly here, it is also a fact that in the post war period, given the shortage of food during the war years, the need to be more self-sufficient in food production was given high importance by government. The planning system and the control of development in the countryside was therefore a powerful tool in retaining farming units and therefore keeping agricultural land in food production, especially that which was Grade 1-3A in quality.

3.9 Circular 42/55 also stated that:

*“Green belts should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable rural zone all around the built up area concerned”.*

Green belts were designated by Local Planning Authorities through (previously) County Development and Metropolitan Plans and subsequently Structure and Local Plans, with the latter now also the current mechanism for defining and/or amending boundaries.

3.10 A new government circular, 11/05 was introduced in 20015, entitled, The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005, but this has now been superceded by the National Planning Policy Framework 2012; [NPPF]..



3.11 The NPPF contains some detailed information and policy statements about Green Belts in Section 9 and in summary this now states that there are five purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as follows:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Once an area of land has been defined as Green Belt, local authorities are encouraged to capitalise upon the designation by:

- Providing opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population
- Providing opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas
- The retention of attractive landscapes and the enhancement of landscapes, near to where people live
- Improvement of damaged and derelict land around towns
- Securing benefits for biodiversity and nature conservation interests
- Retaining land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Inappropriate development, is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in 'very special circumstances'.

3.12 The NPPF therefore represents the latest and most up to date government policy for Green Belts and the full extract of Section 9 of the NPPF is included in **Appendix 2**.

3.13 Although therefore, land within green belts *can* have the following attributes, they are not in the first instance, designated for:

- Their intrinsic landscape quality
- Their recreational potential
- The quality of agricultural land
- Their nature conservation interest or value

This is not to say that some areas of green belt do not also exhibit these characteristics, but this is not the primary reason for designation.

3.14 It should also be noted that whilst the NPPF confirms that ‘very special circumstances’ should apply before new development is allowed in the Green Belt, a number of exceptions are highlighted where development and new construction may be permitted and these can include the following, in recognition of the importance of business in the rural economy being allowed to develop and flourish, to support local jobs and investment:

- Buildings for agriculture and forestry
- Appropriate recreational and leisure facilities
- Extensions or alterations to existing buildings if not disproportionate or replacements of existing buildings, if for the same use
- Small scale infill development in villages and affordable housing
- Redevelopment of brownfield sites
- Mineral extraction
- Engineering operations, local transport infrastructure & some other essential developments
- The re-use of existing buildings, if they are of a permanent and substantial construction

## **4 Some Facts & Figures**

4.1 A recent article in ‘Planning’ magazine highlighted the following:

- Designated green belt comprises 1.6 million hectares or 3.95 million acres
- This equates to approximately 13% of the land area of England
- 10.6% of land within the green belt is defined as urban
- Developable brownfield sites make up 1.9% of the green belt
- 2% of the green belt could if deemed appropriate, accommodate 2.5 m homes over the next 10 years.

4.2 Over the years Green belts have been formally designated around some of the country’s major cities and conurbations including: Greater London, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South & West Yorkshire, West Midlands; Bournemouth & Poole; Bristol & Bath; Tyne & wear & Durham; Nottingham & Derby; Stoke on Trent; Oxford; Cambridge; Gloucester & Cheltenham; & Burton on Trent.

4.3 Interestingly if the Green Belt had not been in place around London, the construction of the M25 Motorway would have been significantly more difficult and indeed would almost certainly have had to have been relocated further out from the London’s boundaries.

## 5 National Defenders of the Green Belt

5.1 The CPRE, Council for the Protection of Rural England is probably the most well-known ‘defender’ of the Green Belt and its countryside protection policies. They published a commemorative document entitled; *‘Green Belt 50 Years On’* in 2005.

They argue that the permanence of the Green Belt and its boundaries is crucial. They are strong advocates of urban regeneration, the use of ‘brownfield’ [previously developed] land within urban areas and point to Green Belts as having focussed development on urban centres and the value of the Green belt for landscape/countryside, recreation and leisure, health & well-being and wildlife.

Of all planning policies, Green Belt is probably the best known, best loved and best understood by the general public. From early stirrings in the 1920s and 1930s, the national potential of Green Belts was formally recognised by Government in 1955.<sup>1</sup> It is the envy of other countries and remains one of the sharpest tools in the planning toolkit, maintaining the openness of the countryside around the English towns and cities it embraces.

Yet Green Belt policy has become the target of sniping by developers and others who misrepresent the policy and press for changes which would seriously undermine it and permanently blunt its effectiveness. From Bath to Newcastle and from Chester through Stevenage to the Thames Gateway, Green Belt is threatened as never before. As development pressures increase, genuine commitment to Green Belt policy is more crucial than ever.

## 6 Some Recent Issues and Controversial Decisions & Opinions

6.1 Generally, proposals for major development should come forward through the Local Plan process as proposals for ad-hoc development. Incursions into Green Belts inevitably cause controversy. A number of recent case studies illustrate some of the pressures and tensions, with the Secretary of State intervening on a number of occasions to make the decisions, overriding the decision-making powers of the Local Planning Authority and/or Planning Inspectorate. However the Courts have also recently had their input as well, on the matter. See Case Studies examples below.

6.2 An important factor is that the NPPF states that if a 5 year housing land supply cannot be identified for a Local Planning Authority area, then there is presumption in favour of sustainable development. This has been relied in numerous planning appeals being allowed on greenfield sites, including some within Green Belt locations. This highlights the importance of local plans being up-to-date with sufficient housing allocations and for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed as part of this process, where relevant.

6.3 The recent **House of Commons Communities Select Committee** who considered this issue have concluded as follows:

*“All councils must move much more quickly to get an adopted plan in place: this will give communities increased protection against the threat of undesirable development. A statutory requirement should be made for councils to get local plans adopted within three years of legislation being enacted.*

*The complex issue of land supply must be addressed. Provisions in the NPPF relating to the viability of housing land are leading to inappropriate development: these loopholes must be closed. There also needs to be clearer guidance about how housing need should be assessed. In addition, local authorities should be encouraged to review their green belts as part of the local planning process”.*

Some further examples of recent Green Belt planning issues are as follows:

- *Communities secretary Eric Pickles has refused permission for an incinerator in **Hertfordshire**, ruling that the 'very special circumstances' necessary to justify the green belt development do not exist. In his decision note, Pickles said that the proposed incinerator would result in "substantial actual harm to the openness of the green belt" and added that he considered that the proposed building would be harmful in terms of another of the purposes of the green belt – "to prevent neighbouring settlements merging into one another".*

*However this decision was overturned by the **High Court**: Mr Justice Lewis ruled that, when planning consent was refused by Pickles, he had not taken into account proposals to remove the site from the green belt. He held that this should have been weighed into the balance when considering the matter.*

- *A major multi-million pound business park project proposed for green belt land near **Coventry** airport was turned down by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles on the advice of the planning inspector who held the call-in public inquiry.*

*The scheme, known as the Coventry and Warwickshire Gateway project, was the brainchild of the Local Enterprise Partnership and involved a comprehensive development offering offices, research & development facilities, light industrial uses, hotels, a museum and a new countryside park on land within and to the north, west and south of Coventry Airport and land at the junctions of the A45 with the A46 and the junctions of the A444 with the A4114. The scheme had been approved by both the two planning authorities involved, Coventry City Council and Warwick District Council.*

*In his decision letter Pickles acknowledged that there was a strong case for the development and that it would deliver economic benefits and environmental gains. However, he also considered that the project would give rise to substantial green belt harm “to which he attaches very serious weight”. The Secretary of State concluded that the “very special circumstances do not exist” to justify what he argued was “inappropriate development”.*

*Jonathan Browning, chairman of the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP, said the decision was “extremely disappointing”.*

- *Notwithstanding a claim that a new bus depot within the **York** Green Belt involved local transport infrastructure which was by definition appropriate to such a location, an inspector has decided that it would fail to maintain the openness of the area and the justification for the development was lacking.... The appellant relied on paragraph 90 of the national planning policy framework which advised that infrastructure projects were acceptable within a green belt, a claim disputed by the council.*
- *The Court of Appeal backed the judicial review by Gallagher Homes and Lioncourt Homes against **Solihull** Metropolitan District Council's decision to adopt its local plan. Lord Justice Laws said the council needs to "think again" about the relevant parts of the document, which reclassified two previously undesignated sites in the Tidbury Green area of Solihull as green belt. The two developers argued that the green belt designation would thwart their plans to build almost 400 new homes on the sites and was unlawful because it failed to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.*
- *The Chair of **HS2** has stated ... "Applying a planning policy too rigidly ignores the special circumstances arising from construction of the railway: a policy of protecting the green belt might sensibly be adjusted to allow for individual buildings to be retained where they remain useful and where the new buildings have been essentially forced on those affected as a way to maintain the area while reducing the impact of the railway".*
- *The Secretary of State has recently emphasised as follows: "It has always been the case that a local authority could adjust a Green Belt boundary through a review of the Local Plan. It must, however, always be transparently clear that it is the local authority itself which has chosen that path – and it is important that this is reflected in the drafting of Inspectors' reports.*
- *"An appellant has been successful in obtaining permission for a barn at his farm in the **Surrey** green belt, with an inspector also deciding that a partial award of costs should be made against the council.*
- ***London's** green belt needs 'redefining' to meet the capital's need for one million new homes by 2030, says a report by an influential planning body. The study by the 'London Society' says the green belt's "preservation myth" needs to be dispelled with the recognition that new development will be required on some of it. With housebuilding levels at their "lowest for a generation", the paper calls for a "joined-up approach to growth" involving discussions about development in the green belt, a challenge that requires "strong, central leadership".*
- *A strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) commissioned by **Oxford** City Council, found that land within the local authority boundaries could only take between 32 and 43 per cent of the city's housing need up to 2031. According to the SHLAA, Oxford's land could provide about 10,200 new homes, leaving a shortfall of up to 21,800 further homes to meet the overall need. In a statement, the council said the SHLAA identified two green belt sites for development, at the northern and southern edges of the city for 150 and 180 homes respectively. It added: "The study provides irrefutable*

*evidence of the need for a sustainable urban extension [within the Green Belt], to meet Oxford's housing needs."*

- **London's reserves of brownfield land will not be enough to meet rising housing demand and councils should look to review green belt in their areas to provide for more homes, a report has recommended**

*London First, argues that it is unrealistic to assume that building on brownfield sites will provide sufficient land to meet London's housing need. It says London's boroughs "should be encouraged to review their green belt and consider how the land within it can be most effectively used and what the options are for re-designating a small fraction for new homes".*

*The document says that the starting point for any green belt review "should be to only consider areas that are close to existing or future transport nodes, that are of poor environmental or civic value and could better serve London's needs by supporting sustainable, high-quality, well-designed residential development that incorporates truly accessible green space".*

*The report also highlights key facts on the London's green belt including:*

- *A quarter of the land inside London's green belt (within the area of the Greater London Authority) is environmentally designated land, parks, or land with real public access.*
- *27.6 per cent of London is covered by buildings, roads, paths, and railways.*
- *22 per cent of all the land within London's boundary is green belt.*
- *Around 60 per cent of London's green belt is within 2km of an existing rail or tube station.*

*One of the authors says..."We need to make the most of brownfield sites, but if we want to protect the quality of London for the growing number of people who live in London, then we can't continue to rule out sensible reviews of the green belt boundaries."*

These decisions and differing opinions, expressed by various bodies help demonstrate the current uncertainty over the robustness of Green Belt as a policy and the pressure for reviews to be undertaken.

## **7 Why is there continual pressure for development on Green Belt land and Is there a current 'Housing Crisis'?**

7.1 There are number of factors affecting this issue:

- Many urban areas have been subject to regeneration programmes over the past 20-25 years and as a result, many or most of the developable land has already been taken up.

- Brownfield sites can be more expensive to develop due to the need for demolition, contamination works and other issues, which can make them less attractive to investors, compared with greenfield sites.
- There is no longer the same scope for public investment in infrastructure to help pump prime difficult sites, compared with the past. Regional Development Agencies were abolished in 2010 and whilst the Homes and Communities Agency does have role, its funds are limited.
- But brownfield sites within existing urban areas that can draw upon existing local services and facilities and support regeneration aims, have good potential to provide mixed use schemes as well as small affordable homes for those in greatest need.
- Inner urban areas' brownfield sites also often lend themselves to high density flat developments. As a result, there is often a shortage of housing that is most suitable for larger, family accommodation with areas of private as well as public open space, within inner town and city areas.
- This generates pressures on the edge of settlements for new, greenfield land releases; Green Belt or otherwise.
- There is overall, a significant shortage of housing in the UK and by 2030 there will be twice as many people over 80 as at present. There is a need for a diversity of house types and sizes, with the need for single person households to be accommodated, set to increase further.
- However, there is also the ever present demand for genuinely affordable housing to rent or part purchase and which successive governments have failed to address comprehensively over the past 30 years, with the planning system and 106 agreements being only a partial mechanism for delivering social housing. The sale of 'Council Housing' over the past 30 years has not been balanced by compensatory building of new, publically funded social housing. It has been said that for every 100 social houses built in the 50's & 60's, only 1 is being built today!
- A balance therefore needs to be provided of inner area, brownfield and other greenfield sites, arguably some of which need to be within the Green Belt, to meet affordable housing requirements into the future.
- However, standard 'dormitory' estates are far too common and do not result in the creation of 'places', destinations and balanced communities where people really want to live. Delivery is not meeting real needs, hence the objection to housing schemes.
- Creating neighbourhoods and communities is required through better design and housing mix. Howard's Garden City Movement aimed to do just this and in today's

environment, the desire to protect the Green Belt needs to be balanced with the importance of creating balanced new communities and meeting housing need.

- Some commentators report that the country is currently 1 million homes short of what is needed and affordable housing to rent and part buy is a crucial issue, especially for young people, 750,000 of whom, between the ages of 20-40 are still living at home as they simply can't afford to move out. But, quality in new housing is needed as much a quantity.
- Only 9% of England is developed, within the South East this is 12%. It has been assessed that if 3 million new homes were built in the South East, this percentage would only increase to 12.7%. The so called 'threat of development' therefore does therefore perhaps need to be kept in perspective! The UK has a culture that has developed over recent generations, where those who have the benefit of their own housing, notably owner occupiers, (in many cases within new housing developments), tend to vehemently oppose further new housing being built for other people, in their locality. This is despite the fact that members of their own families may well be in housing need.
- Local Planning Authorities have to demonstrate that they have a 5 Year Housing Land Supply, based on sound national and local assessments of housing need over the next 20 years or so. If they are unable to do this, then in accordance with the NPPF they risk losing planning appeals, with the whole planning of their area reverting to 'planning by appeal. This is a most unsatisfactory way to develop any local area and therefore coherent planning is the preferred solution.

7.2 Arguably therefore, given the general pace of growth and demand for land for various uses and activities, maintaining Green Belt boundaries in the same place in perpetuity, is unlikely to be a realistic prospect, if local economies are to thrive and develop and the needs of local and incoming populations are to be met; especially for housing. There is of course real scope to maintain the absolute size of Green Belts, by compensating for any loss close in the main settlements, services and transport routes, by extending or 'letting out' the 'Belt' a notch or two, at its outer edge, thereby maintaining the full extent of the Green Belt; albeit in different locations.



## **8 Green Belt in The Dorset, Bournemouth & Poole Context**

8.1 Within this area, the only area of Green Belt is around the Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch conurbation and this is shown in **Appendix 3**. The boundaries were originally developed and shown on the Dorset, Bournemouth & Poole Structure and have latterly been defined in relevant Local Plans of the various affected Local Planning Authorities.

## **9 So what role does the LNP have in respect of the Green Belt around the Conurbation?**

9.1 The LNP's primary planning role is to take a strategic overview of emerging strategies for growth and major development proposals, aimed at supporting the local economy and how these might impact upon the natural environment and biodiversity.

9.2 Boundaries of Green Belts are defined by Local Planning Authorities in their Local Plans and it would be expected that any review of boundaries would be undertaken in a strategic, joint authority/partnership manner, so as to ensure that a strategic assessment of the issue was undertaken and decisions based on the principle of protecting the most important parts of the Green Belt, having regard to the designation criteria, as well as planning new areas of Green Belt, to compensate for any losses.

9.3 Across England, some Green Belt in urban fringe locations are of poor landscape quality; they may be of minimal biodiversity interest, not in productive agricultural use and so could potentially provide land for housing growth, whilst some housing development could also take place on and in the environs of brownfield sites, within the Green Belt.

9.4 The proximity of Green Belt to existing development and settlements mean that new housing can capitalise on existing services, transport facilities and community facilities. However, as emphasised above, Green Belt should not be confused with general 'greenfield' sites, which may be open countryside, urban fringe areas or undeveloped land within settlements, but **not** designated as statutory Green Belt.

9.5 Protecting Green Belt boundaries at all costs can result in pressure to for development to 'leapfrog' the boundary which means that new development is then some distance from the main settlement or conurbation, with resulting increased transport movements and a generally less sustainable form of development.

9.6 If new housing development is to be contemplated on land that is currently designated as Green Belt in whatever location, then this should not be progressed through ad-hoc planning applications, but be proposed by way of Local Plan or Strategic Green Belt Reviews when the detailed boundaries of the Green Belt can be properly assessed as part of the formal plan process. This allows for extensive consultation with both the public and statutory consultees, as well as examination by an independent Planning Inspector, who will properly consider and weigh up the proposed amendment to include Green Belt land for development and balance the need for housing, employment or other land uses, against continued Green Belt protection.

9.7 All local plans, as they progress over time are reviewed and this usually results in some land that was previously protected from development in the local plan, being reconsidered and allocated for various land uses and developments. The concept of boundary and policy reviews in planning is therefore very much part of the process, that is repeated over a period of years.

9.8 As noted above, one of the reasons why development on the periphery of settlements is often opposed, whether in Green Belts or otherwise, is due to the fact that such schemes may be single land use, notably housing. As a result, large, edge of town, suburban estates are created which have little real sense of place or community and few public and community facilities. The challenge therefore is to 'create places' where people want to live and which meet housing needs and are set within a valued environmental context, where the development is complemented by the enhancement of biodiversity and environmental quality access to the adjacent countryside is improved. This clearly has echoes of Howard's original vision.

9.9 To try and overcome these concerns, proposals have been put forward for new settlements, (for example at Ebbsfleet; East of London), which are more balanced and have a mix of uses and so are potentially at least, are more self-contained and sustainable. Although adjoining Dorchester, rather than being free standing and not in the Green belt, the Poundbury scheme aimed to and has adopted some of these principles.

9.10 The Dorset Local Nature Partnership, with the diverse expertise has a valuable role to play in contributing towards any review of Green Belt boundaries if this is to be contemplated within the area. It also has an important role to in identifying opportunities for countryside/environment improvement and management schemes, as well as biodiversity offsetting where this is relevant, all of which should be secured as part of any major developments, with these requirements incorporated within Local Plans from the outset.

9.11 If Green Belt land were to be released for development through the Statutory Local Plan process or other mechanism, as a 'special case', then as well as extending the Green Belt elsewhere in the locality, there is a greater ability to negotiate such enhancements. As always, the cost of any environmental benefits needs to be taken into account along with other requirements for affordable housing etc. in assessing the residual land value. In allocating agricultural land on the edge of settlements for development, the notion that such schemes cannot deliver environmental enhancements as they are 'not viable' should be not countenanced, if all requirements and costs are established from the outset and before any land values are agreed.....some would say that is ....'Proper Planning'!

9.12 This paper to the LNP Board does not aim to influence board members views or opinions on the issue of whether or not specific new housing or other development sites should be released, and development permitted within the Green Belt in the locality.

9.13 However, looking at the issue from the perspective of the LNP Board's strategic role and with the need to consider these issues holistically, the Board has potential to use its influence and expertise to help ensure that new development takes place in the most sustainable manner and that benefits to biodiversity are secured. This might well be best be achieved by taking an open and flexible approach to reviewing Green Belt boundaries and considering the opportunities for development, as opposed to slavishly adhering to past policies, as being the only correct or conceivable solution in responding to future housing needs.

9.14 Clearly therefore if there were to be review of green belt boundaries around the conurbation, to ensure that it continues to address the future and changing needs of the area and to ensure that the role of the green belt remains fit for purpose and to reassess whether the current boundaries are appropriate, this would need to be done by way of Local Plan Reviews and/or a specific Strategic Study of the Green Belt, that crossed local authority boundaries.

9.15 The Dorset Local Nature Partnership has a valuable role in assisting with such a process and in ensuring that as well as developing land, parallel improvements and benefits are secured for public access, biodiversity and landscape quality, for local communities and for the long term.

9.16 It is also hoped that this report does properly explain the origins of the Green Belt, its current usage as a planning tool and policy and therefore promotes discussion about the potential future role and opportunities for the Local Nature Partnership in respect of Green Belt

issues locally. The consideration of this report is particularly appropriate at this time, given the national attention now being given to housing needs, affordability and the wide ranging debates amongst various sectors about Green Belt boundaries.

***The views expressed in this report are those of the author.***

**Simon Williams**

**Dorset Local Nature Partnership Board Member**

**March 2015**

**Amended following March and June 2015 LNP Board Meetings**

**April & August 2015**

## Appendix 1: Circular 42/55 Green Belts



Circular No. 42/55

### MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1

SIR,

3rd August, 1955

#### GREEN BELTS

1. Following upon his statement in the House of Commons on April 26th last (copy attached), I am directed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government to draw your attention to the importance of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up areas, and of safeguarding the surrounding countryside against further encroachment.

2. He is satisfied that the only really effective way to achieve this object is by the formal designation of clearly defined Green Belts around the areas concerned.

3. The Minister accordingly recommends Planning Authorities to consider establishing a Green Belt wherever this is desirable in order:

- (a) to check the further growth of a large built-up area;
- (b) to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; or
- (c) to preserve the special character of a town.

4. Wherever practicable, a Green Belt should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable rural zone all round the built-up area concerned.

5. Inside a Green Belt, approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings for purposes other than agriculture, sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area.

6. Apart from a strictly limited amount of "infilling" or "rounding off" (within boundaries to be defined in Town Maps) existing towns and villages inside a Green Belt should not be allowed to expand further. Even within the urban areas thus defined, every effort should be made to prevent any further building for industrial or commercial purposes; since this, if allowed, would lead to a demand for more labour, which in turn would create a need for the development of additional land for housing.

7. A Planning Authority which wishes to establish a Green Belt in its area should, after consulting any neighbouring Planning Authority affected, submit to the Minister, as soon as possible, a Sketch Plan, indicating the approximate boundaries of the proposed Belt. Before officially submitting their plans, authorities may find it helpful to discuss them informally with this Ministry either through its regional representative or in Whitehall.

8. In due course, a detailed survey will be needed to define precisely the inner and outer boundaries of the Green Belt, as well as the boundaries of towns and villages within it. Thereafter, these particulars will have to be incorporated as amendments in the Development Plan.

9. This procedure may take some time to complete. Meanwhile, it is desirable to prevent any further deterioration in the position. The Minister, therefore, asks that, where a Planning Authority has submitted a Sketch Plan for a Green Belt, it should forthwith apply provisionally, in the area proposed, the arrangements outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 above.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. B. VALENTINE.  
Under Secretary.

The Clerk of the Council,  
Local Planning Authorities.  
County District Councils (for information).  
England and Wales.

Annex to Circular No. 42/55

STATEMENT BY THE RT. HON. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., MINISTER  
OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, IN THE HOUSE OF  
COMMONS ON 25th APRIL, 1955

"I am convinced that, for the well-being of our people and for the preservation of the countryside, we have a clear duty to do all we can to prevent the further unrestricted sprawl of the great cities.

The Development Plans submitted by the local planning authorities for the Home Counties provide for a Green Belt, some 7 to 10 miles deep, all around the built-up area of Greater London. Apart from some limited rounding-off of existing small towns and villages, no further urban expansion is to be allowed within this belt.

These proposals if strictly adhered to, should prove most effective. For this the authorities in the Home Counties deserve much credit.

In other parts of the country, certain planning authorities are endeavouring, by administrative action, to restrict further building development around the large urban areas. But I regret that nowhere has any formal Green Belt as yet been proposed. I am accordingly asking all planning authorities concerned to give this matter further consideration, with a view to submitting to me proposals for the creation of clearly defined Green Belts, wherever this is appropriate.

However, I do not intend on this account to hold up my approval of Development Plans already before me. Additional provisions for Green Belts can be incorporated later."

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## Appendix 2: Extract from National Planning Policy Framework 2012

### 9. Protecting Green Belt land

79. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
80. Green Belt serves five purposes:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
81. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
82. The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established. New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. If proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:
- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
  - set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
  - show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
  - demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
  - show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.
83. Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green

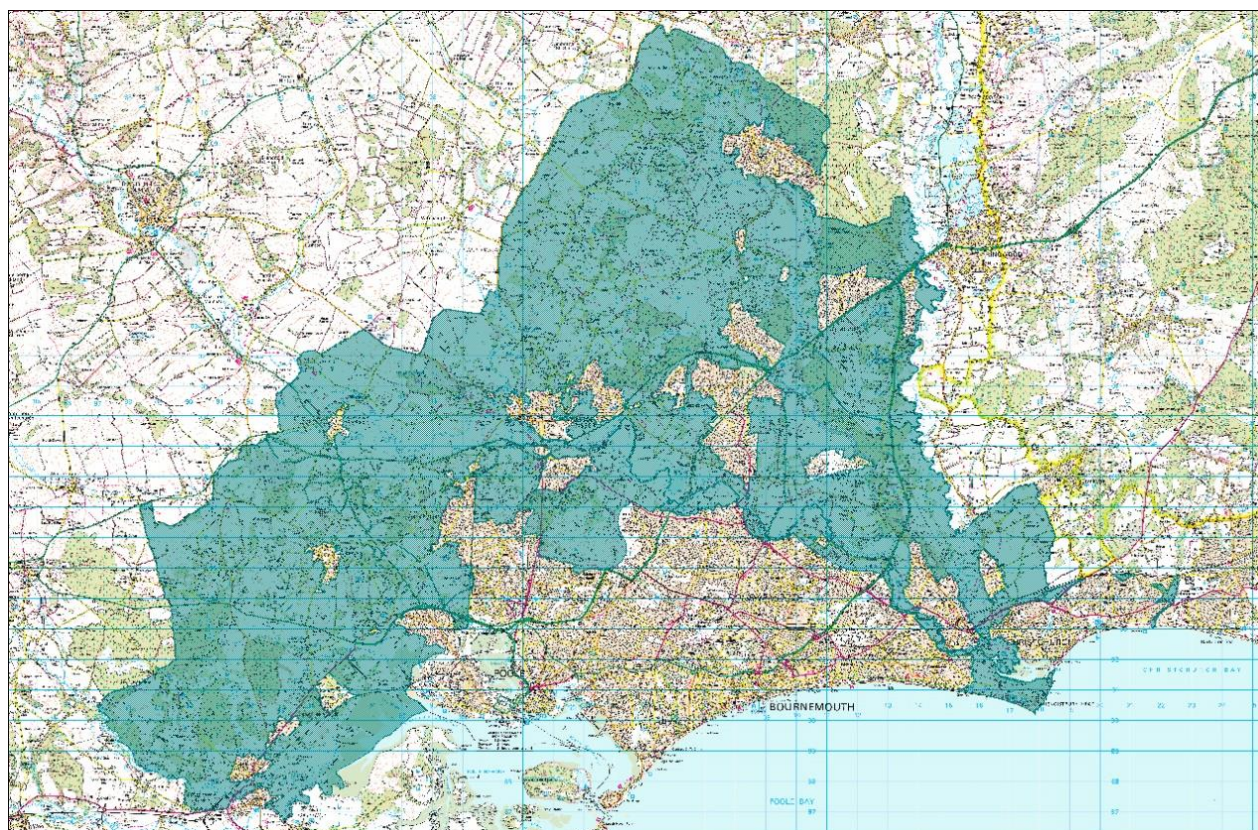
Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.

84. When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.
85. When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:
  - ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
  - not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
  - where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
  - make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;
  - satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
  - define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
86. If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.
87. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
89. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
  - buildings for agriculture and forestry;



- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
  - the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
  - the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
  - limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
  - limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.
90. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt. These are:
- mineral extraction;
  - engineering operations;
  - local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
  - the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and
  - development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.
91. When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.
92. Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife. An approved Community Forest plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications. Any development proposals within Community Forests in the Green Belt should be subject to the normal policies controlling development in Green Belts.

### Appendix 3: Inner and Outer Boundaries of the Dorset, Bournemouth & Poole Green Belt







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# THE PLANNER



**LETCWORTH**  
What can 21st century planners learn from the original garden city?





GARDEN CITIES



# MODEL TOWN



18 THE PLANNER 15 MARCH 2015



## Does the garden city model offer a realistic approach to 21st century living? **Simon Wicks** visits Letchworth to find out what planners can learn from the financial and governance arrangements in the original garden city

A

snowy day in February may not be the best time to see a garden city. But a town is a town and has to function as a place to live and work, whatever its position in the planning pantheon.

Besides, touring Letchworth without its greenery allows me to see it in a state of undress, as it were, and to ask: is the original garden city still blooming? Or is it a living museum, a failed social experiment that should fade into irrelevance?

### A pioneering place

Letchworth was a social experiment. Ebenezer Howard's garden city vision was a utopian dream of flight from the squalor of urban capitalism into a kinder, more egalitarian world of agriculture and artisanship.

Like the arts and crafts movement that informed its aesthetic, it was at once nostalgic, even conservative, and progressive, even socialist. It seems almost quaint in our knowing age – though in 1936, George Orwell claimed that Letchworth was full of "sandal-wearing, sex-maniac, 'Nature Cure' quacks, feminists and fuzzy-haired Marxists".

When another George – Osborne – announced that Ebbw Vale was to herald a new wave of garden cities, he was more likely pandering to the elites than the "fuzzy-haired Marxists" of today. How else to sell the idea of mass development on England's green and pleasant land than to wrap it in a horticultural package? Gardens? Lovely.

But strip away the green and peer through the fences of its cottagey homes, and Letchworth is surprisingly demotic.

"Howard's vision is not about [house and garden] design," insists David Ames, head of heritage and strategic planning for the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. "It's about long-term governance and community."

In the town museum, Ames guides me to Raymond Unwin and Barry

"Howard's legacy should be a forward-looking legacy" – David Ames (top right)



Parke's original plan for Letchworth. It could pass muster today, he says, and evidences new planning principles that are standard now, such as zoning and a green belt.

New garden city developments will need to be similarly pioneering, argues Ames. "Howard's legacy should be a forward-looking legacy, not constantly looking back." It has to be a "social city" for the 21st century.

"The economics has been done to death, and the different delivery mechanisms. But there hasn't been an advanced debate about the social city, about what it takes to make great places to live. Letchworth can lead that discussion," Ames insists. "The other thing I would respectfully suggest other places can learn from is having the stewardship model in place before a spade goes into the ground."

### Community governance

Deja vu hits as I tour housing in the company of Letchworth's town historian Josh Tidy. I've seen these houses before – uniform, a touch cottagey, yet plain, set back from communal greens in avenues and cul de sacs.

They remind me of the council estates of my youth on the outskirts of my provincial market town. The original garden city rose out of a desire to provide affordable housing in a clean environment to ordinary people.

The housing style emerged initially from the Cheap Cottages Exhibition of 1905, which in turn gave rise to the Ideal Home Exhibition. Unwin developed the principles to create a Letchworth 'look' which, in turn, informed the council house boom of the interwar years.

Letchworth, you might argue, gave us council housing as we know it – and to this day 33 per cent of the homes in the town are social housing. Behind the greenery is a community that is not particularly prosperous and which has had, at times, a surprisingly sketchy history – it took 60 years, a hostile takeover bid and an act of Parliament to get the governance structure more or less right. Even then it was almost derailed by a disastrous town council that the citizens voted out of existence.

Nowadays there is a two-tier local authority



## GARDEN CITIES

model, with the Foundation, an industrial and provident society, providing what Ames calls "additional". The Foundation generates £10 million a year in income from its ownership of large chunks of the Letchworth estate.

Money is reinvested in the community according to decisions made democratically, either by a general vote or by the Foundation's board of governors. This is made up of residents – some appointed, most elected – and local authority representatives.

"What we can demonstrate here is that there's a non-political governance model that genuinely involves the local community," says Ames. In recent years, the Foundation has modernised the art deco Broadway Cinema and funded the Ernest Gardiner Treatment Centre, a free private day hospital for residents.

The Ernest Gardiner's manager Lorraine Roberts explains that the ownership and funding mechanism means the hospital has greater independence than its NHS equivalents.

"We can decide what services will be beneficial," she says. "To the people that use us regularly we are very important. We can spend much more time with our patients."

The Foundation provides grants and polices planning applications to ensure that they meet the town's planning rules. Although not a statutory body, it's heavily involved in strategic management of the town.

"If you imagine a town with a big Article 4 direction and a very switched-on conservation team, that's Letchworth," says Ames.

### Issues and obstacles

It hasn't always run smoothly. The consequences of the 1960s takeover bid, for example, continue to be felt in the Foundation's reduced earning potential. The town is not experiencing population growth and its population is ageing. Although Letchworth provides 16,000 jobs for its 33,600 residents, many are low-skilled – too many high-skilled workers commute out of town.

Ames and his colleagues are working with North Herts College to bring



**"HOWARD'S VISION IS NOT ABOUT HOUSE AND GARDEN DESIGN. IT'S ABOUT LONG-TERM GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY"**

in more students and spur growth of knowledge-based industry. A biotech company is shortly to take up residence in the town, too, and the listed former Spirella factory has become a business centre.

But any attempt to alter the population profile will have to be supported by a change in the housing stock, Ames explains. Letchworth's housing has historically been designed for families but the market now wants one- and two-bedroom homes.

The Foundation's conservation-minded planning policies make transformation and new build challenging. "If you live in a large house and sell up, what happens in many places is that it can be knocked down and 10 flats appear. But we don't support that. The articles of management also say developers have to share the increases in land values with us."

Then there's the surrounding green belt.

"We've been having this debate about whether the town should be allowed to grow or not. We had a consultation and the great proportion of residents accepted there needed to be more housing. We've got three options: build on the industrial estate; relax our policies; look at the green belt."

The Foundation would prefer not to sacrifice industrial space or the housing policies that preserve Letchworth's character. It's waiting on an inspector's report into the district's local plan to see whether green belt development might be a possibility.

Ames acknowledges the irony of a garden city taking space from its own green belt for housing, but the town must remain a living community. Besides, it gives Letchworth an opportunity to be pioneering once again – both in terms of the type of housing offered and the ownership model.

### The 'unearned increment'

As landowner, the Foundation doesn't have to deal with the biggest obstacle facing a new garden city development – the market-driven economics of land.

In their winning entry to 2014's Wolfson Economics Prize, David Rudlin and Nicholas Falk of Ubed said large-scale development was contingent on overcoming this obstacle.

"In the absence of large-scale subsidy the only solution to the economics of the Garden City is

## Power of compulsory purchase

Dalia Lichfield, principal of Dynamic Planning, writes

The moment we decide to expand housing capacity land values will rocket, and landowners will reap larger benefits than future users. Is it really unavoidable?

In 2008, the government transferred powers of compulsory purchase to the Houses and Communities Agency (HCA). Compulsory Purchase Orders are a suitable mechanism for the HCA to purchase open land at low use value,

close to London, yet leaving sufficient expense of green belt to fulfil its original purposes of recreation and separation.

If that land were served by fast and inexpensive transportation into Central London, it would provide the desired housing standards and travel aspirations for many households.

If that development were owned and managed by a Garden City Corporation, collecting lease or rent payments that increase over time, they could invest it in community services – just as Ebenezer Howard was hoping to see.

● Dalia's full article can be read on The Planner online: [www.thep Planner.co.uk](http://www.thep Planner.co.uk)

