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Lancashire

& North West magazine

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Help protect our precious green belt

The drive to build much needed new homes should not be at the expense of the countryside, writes Andrew Harris

The best way to minimize the loss of precious and attractive greenfield land is to make the best possible use of previously developed land – usually called ‘brownfield’ sites – of which the North West has more than any other region. If you agree, the Lancashire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE Lancashire which includes Merseyside and Greater Manchester) would like you to take every opportunity to urge political parties and prospective parliamentary candidates to support our ‘Brownfield Land Initiative’ which offers a real prospect of achieving this aim. This initiative is in THREE parts:

- Brownfield sites are slow and difficult to develop compared to a typical greenfield site. There are often problems caused by old foundations, poor ground conditions and contamination. We propose a ‘Brownfield Development Grant’ to meet or defray such extraordinary development costs and give a housing developer an added incentive to use such sites and spend the extra time and trouble needed.
- Funding ‘Brownfield Development Grants’ from the public purse is likely to be very difficult in the next few years due to the need to reduce the structural deficit. CPRE Lancashire suggests that funds should come from imposing a ‘Greenfield Development Levy’ following the grant of a planning consent for residential development

on a greenfield site. This would be payable when the land is sold with the benefit of the planning consent or when development starts – whichever comes first. The price of the resulting houses will not be increased as the ‘Greenfield Development Levy’ is just another development cost which is allowed for when calculating the residual value of the land. The landowner will still have a major incentive to sell as such land will typically go from agricultural value of perhaps £7-8,000 per acre to development value of anything up to £500,000 or more.

• CPRE Lancashire believes that these measures need a catalyst to make them as effective as possible. For this reason we propose that an agency is created or adapted to receive the ‘Greenfield Development Levies’ and award ‘Brownfield Development Grants’ directly or via local authorities. Such an agency should have compulsory purchase powers to ensure that suitable sites are brought to market rather than hoarded and left undeveloped for many years. The agency – possibly called the Land Exchange – would obtain and maintain the expertise necessary



Another brownfield site.



Land at Buckfield Avenue, Ordsall, Salford.

to use such powers and support local authorities which have lost these skills as there has been little call for them in recent years.

This initiative is self-funding and can achieve a transfer of funds from more prosperous areas to those in greater need of grants to make development worthwhile and feasible. It will encourage developers to use their energy and resources to find and develop brownfield sites and take some of the pressure off sites in the countryside and, especially, the Green Belt.

Sometime ago CPRE Lancashire submitted evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Communities and Local Government. The Select Committee has now produced a report recommending that a remediation fund is created although there is no mention of how it will be funded. It also recognises that some land remains undeveloped with the result that more – and usually better – land has to be identified to

achieve a five year supply of housing land. For this reason the Committee recommends that ALL undeveloped housing land with a planning consent should be included in the calculation of the five year supply. This is a major step forward and will – if implemented – take some pressure off our precious countryside.

CPRE Lancashire suggests three other much-needed measures which would help to protect the countryside:

- For many years there has been a 'sequential test' for retail development which favours city centres first followed by district then out-of-town shopping centres. We think a similar approach is needed for new housing development so that development is encouraged on brownfield sites first followed by greenfield sites which aren't in the Green Belt followed, lastly, by greenfield sites which are.
- The National Land Use Database could be used to quantify available brownfield land and identify what must be done to bring them into use again.

“Three is enough available brownfield land for 113,000 homes in the North West”



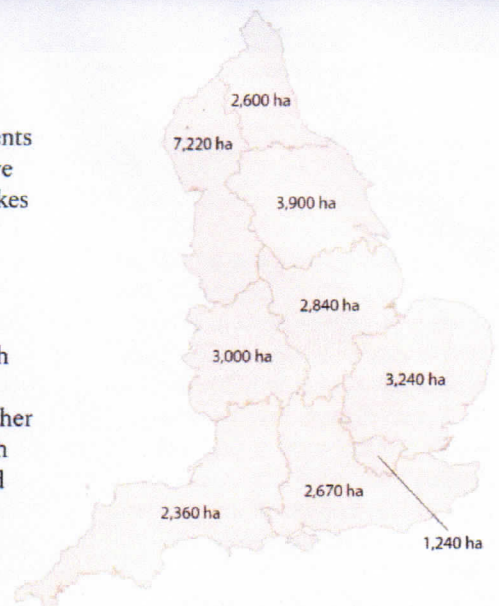
Wesley Street Mill, Bamber Bridge.

• Local authority rates should be extended to empty sites which remain undeveloped for more than, say, three years after the grant of a planning consent for new housing. The drive to deliver more homes is understandable given England's current housing crisis. However, this need not be at the expense of the countryside which is lost forever when developed. There is land identified and available for almost a million homes on brownfield sites in England and time should be allowed to plan, design and build new homes in suitable locations rather than merely focusing on what can be delivered within five years. Brownfield sites should be prioritised across the planning system. Current policies are confused and inconsistent. In 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework introduced a welcome brevity in planning policy replacing a huge volume of written Planning Policy Guidance. It quickly became an example of unintended consequences as councils were forced to produce Local Plans which identified a 5-year supply of housing land – including

greenfield or even Green Belt land if necessary despite ministerial statements to the contrary. 41% of Councils have not produced Local Plans which makes it very difficult to resist a planning approval on appeal.

CPRE estimate that in 2012 there were about 7,220 hectares of vacant and derelict brownfield land in North West England. This is more than double the supply available in any other region including London or the south east or the west midlands! This could accommodate an estimated 113,230 houses – so why use greenfield sites? CPRE Lancashire has launched a number of appeals to increase our ability to protect the Lancashire's countryside by opposing unacceptable developments and proposing better ways of meeting the needs of the community. If you can join us and/or volunteer as much or as little time as you can spare please visit www.cprelancashire.org.uk

• Andrew Harris is Chairman, CPRE Lancashire



Total areas of vacant and derelict brownfield land in 2012 by English region.

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