

Responses to Green Belt Research questions by supporters of Save Stourbridge Green Belt. Compiled, May 2019.

1. To what extent do you believe that the West Midlands Green Belt around Birmingham has been a successful policy overall?

Historically successful but recent years it has started to be relaxed too much and we are already seeing land lost e.g. the massive estate in Hagley.

It's difficult to look at this Green Belt Policy in isolation, however it has generally been a failure as wildlife corridors and the environment have been and continue to be eroded; its often seen as a cheap option for housing development, as the total financial, wildlife and human costs are rarely accounted for. Whereas brownfield sites are left to blot the landscape and seen as an expensive option for developers. You see tranches of redundant and contaminated land even on the journey by rail from Stourbridge to Birmingham.

I believe that the Green Belt Policy for the West Midlands has been largely successful. It has retained areas of beauty and productive agricultural land around what is, in many places, an ugly urban area. It has also provided much needed leisure facilities for walkers, Dog owners, cyclists, runners and Horse Riders. It is also a refuge for people who seek tranquillity and for those wishing to communicate with Nature.

I believe that the implementation of a green belt around Birmingham has been an extremely successful policy

There are a number of reasons why there is so much opposition to the release of green belt around Stourbridge. The development of Stourbridge further would permanently & fundamentally change its character. At the moment whilst it is a town it is extremely close to nature allowing its residents the opportunity to enjoy walking through the remaining open spaces & these currently offer an opportunity for nature to thrive. There is a question of whether the lives of ordinary people should be restricted to the bare essentials of life or whether they should be allowed to get some actual enjoyment out of it. Additionally there is the fact that these spaces do help our environment. At a time when climate change & habitat loss is such a concern the loss of green space & the animals that live in them should not be underestimated.

I believe that the West Midlands Green Belt around Birmingham has been very successful and has provided essential protection against rampant development.

2. Given how currently unaffordability housing is in England and the West Midlands, why is there so much opposition to land being released from Green Belt at Stourbridge and generally in England? Also, would you say that your opposition is related to the land being Green Belt per se or perhaps it being in open countryside?

Green belt is countryside the two are not exclusive. In an age of obesity where will the exercise space be, with increasing environmental issues how does this help? Affordability does not seem to change when many of these houses being built are at the higher end of the scale, building £500k plus houses does not convey “housing crisis” to the vast majority of people. Equally the vast amounts of apartments being thrown up are a great cause for concern given the social issues in the past from high rise living, I fear we are building the slums of tomorrow with no concern for welfare or standards and not learning from our past, just because you brand it an apartment instead of a flat does not mean it is any better.

Housing need, is an effect, you should start with the root cause and pressures for housing; that is Population Growth and a subset of this is the breakdown of society and the family unit, putting greater pressure on precious land, be it labelled Green Belt or otherwise. I am more concerned with depletion of wildlife and the environment; which by the NHS's own admission is hugely beneficial for human physical and mental health.

In my opinion, Councils aren't building affordable houses. It seems to be far easier for them to approve planning on green sites, which deem to be more profitable, than build on brownfield sites. For example, the Mere playing field in Glebe Lane, Norton. One only has to travel to Stratford upon Avon, Leamington Spa and Warwick, to see the housing sites which have been built on green fields.

Affordable housing I see is commonly used regarding development proposals in green belt and brownfield sites. Is this smoke and mirrors/lip service to appease government strategy as I feel the percentage of people who can actually afford these homes is actually very low? Also the road infrastructure in and around the areas of Stourbridge is already at breaking point. Not to mention the high levels of pollutants? Does releasing green belt solve these issues personally I think no.

The lack of affordable housing is down to a capitalist system providing the housing. Large house builders hold land until it is profitable to develop. Need better LA involvement to ensure sites have a better mix of affordable and specialist accommodation. Need to use the thousands of empty homes by either providing incentives or penalising those who own them. This also prevents the decline of urban neighbourhoods, making them more attractive places to live. Better regulation of private landlords as sadly many do not keep their properties in good condition, again this would improve neighbourhoods.

There is so much opposition to development of green belt around Stourbridge and England in general because people realise that it is valuable resource that could be very easily lost forever. The question of affordability of housing is much more complicated than basic “supply and demand” economics. It is affected by distribution of wealth and people investing in bricks and mortar assets, the rental market, infrastructure, location of work and facilities, access to finance etc. Building desirable housing on green fields will benefit developers as they can make easy profits. I do in principal object to development in open countryside but I

am particularly concerned that the green belt is preserved to prevent urban sprawl and to protect the integrity of existing towns.

The issue of how to solve the housing crisis is obviously a difficult one. Brown field sites are the obvious choice and it does seem that these are not being taken advantage of. There are numerous sites in the area which have remained derelict for a number of years, Market Street in Stourbridge is a good example where there are a number of buildings which have remained empty. I feel that there should be far more incentives for the development of such sites. Obviously brown field sites cannot take the strain of all development without the creation of slum like conditions but it can go a large way to helping it.

Ultimately I feel that the answer is the development of new towns. Although there would of course be some inevitable loss of green spaces this does have a number of advantages over intensively developing around existing towns. It reduces the risk of urban sprawl & allows a suitable infrastructure to be put in place. To further develop around Stourbridge or the West Midlands in general means more cars on the roads without more space on the roads leading to more traffic jams & more pollution. This in turn leads to worse air quality, worse health for residents and the release of yet more fossil fuels into the atmosphere. A new town with a road system that was appropriate for its size could have a much better flow of traffic (& perhaps a well-designed public transport system) that could minimize these issues. It could also have the benefit of allowing its developers to ensure that places of work were in appropriate locations. For historic reasons the majority of places of work in the area are centred in Birmingham. This forces long commutes either using an antiquated & unfit road system or via overcrowded trains. With a new town the commercial centre could be well-planned to increase efficiency of travel which would have benefits to quality of life and hopefully also allow a reduction in carbon emissions.

What is key is that this town be built a reasonable distance from existing communities so that it does not just become part of the urban sprawl, although of course it will need suitable transport links in place.

It seems likely that some green space would need to be sacrificed, but if done efficiently & well planned; the loss could be less in the long run. Alternatively a town that has been historically in decline could be chosen to be redeveloped on these lines.

Whether the land proposed for development is Green Belt or open countryside is largely immaterial from the point of view of the effects of development. Green Belt status until now has given a measure of protection to our countryside but, as we are now seeing, Government policies are rendering this protection virtually meaningless.

Opposition to development arises for many reasons;

- a) Loss of a valuable resource which is both leisure and aesthetics related.
- b) More pressure on local infrastructure which is already under huge pressure in most areas.

- c) Traffic increased on local roads, journey times taking longer, increased pollution from higher traffic volumes and higher pollution levels.
- d) Local leisure facilities more difficult to access because of pressure of local population increases.
- e) Losing productive farmland reduces the capacity of Britain's ability to feed itself. This will come under pressure in the near future as the push to reduce our national Carbon Footprint becomes more acute and food imports are reduced.
- f) Green belt areas are generally further away from the areas where people work or shop. Development results in increased car journey lengths for both workers and shoppers with a consequential increase in pollution levels.
- h) The Green Belt is also home to much of the fauna and flora of Great Britain providing many diverse habitats.

3. Obviously you are opposed to Green Belt development but how would you solve the housing crisis, i.e. to what extent do you feel that the housing crisis can be by urban intensification/ brownfield development, especially when there is also often opposition to urban intensification? Moreover, how far do you think that people's housing aspirations, especially the desire of families for homes with gardens, can be accommodated in housing development on brownfield land? Also, is it fair to existing residents of urban areas to allocate all housing growth there? Or do you accept that some greenfield and/or Green Belt land has to be refused to solve the housing crisis?

Cleaning up brownfield sites removes eyesores and environmentally hazardous areas, and these areas need to be cleared anyway. We know that there are already enough cleaned and ready brownfield sites to deliver more than a million new homes. Why are these not being built on? There needs to be an end to land-banking. We need to follow the example of e.g. Wolverhampton where more than 1,500 Ha across 30 towns and Wolverhampton itself are being used to create the "Garden City" with walkable neighbourhoods, green spaces and improved public transport.

There are a lot of brownfield sites that can be used and these should be prioritised. Additionally having worked for a local authority where there are houses/flats sat empty you have to look at how these policies are being created and who they benefit. The property industry is a huge industry with huge profits, why aren't local authorities building more and still allowing right to buy if stock is such a challenge? Urban areas generally benefit from higher spend per capita for health and education so yes they should take the brunt. However where more housing is to be built there has to be facilities to match and in rural areas there isn't.

Totally against further development of land. We are only limited by 'our' imagination when it comes to accommodation issues, the Town and City centre needs to be reinvented and we have to cap, reduce the population. This is an economic necessity as resources are by their very nature finite.

The so called housing crisis is man-made.

They say there is a housing crisis but figures suggest there are as many as 250,000 houses lying empty in the country. Surely a better strategy would be to get those houses moving and make them habitable. Couple those houses with brownfield sites and Green belt will not have to be touched at all.

This area does not have sufficient infrastructure for any more residential development. Roads are overcrowded and in a poor state of repair, local schools don't have enough spaces and are expanding just to cope with the current local population. Hospitals and doctors surgeries are at capacity and beyond.

Builders need to stop land banking of brownfield sites in preference to green sites. There is still more that can be done in urban areas and town centres. There are plenty of empty office blocks and shops which could be made into accommodation.

I don't think many people have great aspirations to have gardens unfortunately, given by the amount of gardens being blocked paved for their 2-3 cars and extensions. Shopping centres are filled with children rather than families taking advantage of the outdoors, caused by 'stranger danger' and people's over-dependence on technology.

People do want to live in a nice area with a nice postal address, but if you develop the 'nice area', then it will no longer be perceived as a nice area to live. With no green spaces, (which is the attraction in the first place) more congestion and more pressure on the existing infrastructure.

Also I think it's disgusting that only families are the ones who should be suggested to have a home with a garden. Singles and couples have just as much right as anyone to a private outdoor space.

Green belt housing is nearly always in areas where top of the market property is built. That's not what is needed! As previously said a person should be appointed in each LA to identify ALL empty property and allocate funds to make it habitable Where it is privately owned it should be acquired for market value where it has been empty for 2 years.

They're knocking down Cavendish house in Dudley to make way for an entirely unnecessary 82 million pound shopping and restaurant complex. There's a restaurant and cinema complex only a couple of miles down the road from there, and the high street has plenty of shopping already. That land could be used for a housing estate, it's massive. But instead it's been sold off for profit for a use that isn't required.

There are thousands of empty homes, do those up first and use up brownfield and derelict sites before encroaching on green belt land.

Another bonus of brownfield sites is that plumbing and electricity points already exist on or nearby the sites. No need to lay miles of cables and pipes to an area without them. Road infrastructure is already in place too.

Prevent land banking by developers, and proper policing of polluter pays for brownfield, currently polluters deliberately go bust making clear up of brownfield the current developer's problem, making greenbelt a much cheaper option. Better standards on the quality of housing built. More council houses, controls on private landlords profiteering from housing benefit scams, social housing needs to be firmly back in the hands of local authorities, buying back homes if necessary, stop flogging off the housing stock. More than anything, austerity needs to end, if councils were properly funded they wouldn't be running these scams to build on the greenbelt to plug a massive hole in their budget.

There is a lack of vision in the building on green spaces, take the scheme outside Hagley. No thought was given to the infrastructure, so there is now congestion, pressure on schools, doctors, local shops and hospital. Profit comes first with little attention being paid to the afterwards.

Broadly speaking, people want to live reasonably close to work and leisure facilities. This reduces their travel times and expenses and makes their lifestyle logistics easier. So Brownfield development is largely desirable for those who want urban lifestyles.

Unfortunately, when development is allowed on Green Belt land it is often for 'Executive' homes which command a price premium that takes them out of the financial reach of those who need affordable housing. The footprint of these types of homes is also usually larger so as far as helping to provide affordable homes building on Green Belt land is usually inefficient.

When development is allowed to take place, planners should apply tighter restrictions to plot sizes to facilitate against larger, inefficient houses. With our burgeoning population we have reached a stage where land, both brownfield and particularly Green belt, must be used to its maximum efficiency. This may mean new homes having Courtyards rather than Gardens.

Resolution of the housing crisis needs a new approach with more careful analysis and imaginative, joined-up solutions. The current system seems to be market driven without due consideration to social impact and sustainability. Any new housing needs good infrastructure such as public transport links, schools, doctors etc. Houses built on the green belt will just encourage the more affluent to move further and further out, putting strain on the local services and leaving the urban areas to decline. This is detrimental to urban dwellers. It will also mean that urban dwellers will have to travel further and further to get access to countryside. It is very important for everyone's mental and physical well-being to be able to get to the countryside. This obviously, also, has a negative environmental impact. I believe that brownfield sites could be used better and it needs to be ensured that developments provide enough green spaces within them. Encouragements could also be given to ensure

people do not leave properties empty and more help could be given to elderly people who might be willing to move but find the process too difficult. If there really is not enough brownfield space available then any green field development should be carefully selected for its minimum impact and must not encourage people to travel for work or facilities, for example it may be better to build new towns or villages in suitable areas.

4. Under the current planning system, each local authority (or authorities in a joint plan) has to meet their own housing need. Do you feel that having a more regional approach to planning would be a better way to plan/ manage the Green Belt?

I am opposed to a regional development plan. The risk of this is that larger communities will be able to force smaller communities into actions which are purely for the benefit of the larger community. I think that local authorities with knowledge of the areas being developed should be making decisions on development. Ultimately I think that the long term planning needs to be smarter. The current system seems to be pushing communities to build an arbitrary number of houses without any wider consideration. The plans should take into account the needs of each particular area both in terms of houses but also in terms of infrastructure.

No. Whilst a good idea in practice in reality this would be at the expense of smaller boroughs like Dudley, whilst places like Birmingham would rule the roost.

Regional planning potentially allows for more joined up thinking, but set against the needs above. By its very nature, housing is required where work exists. Unless you engage in large social enterprise.

Keep planning under local control. Otherwise I think we would be pressurised to develop by larger authorities who want access to our areas of greenbelt and countryside.

A regional approach to meeting housing needs would be unfair. The ability and will to identify Brownfield sites within individual Boroughs may well vary. Councils and residents with Green Belt land would be penalised by having to meet the targets of those boroughs that had not met their Brownfield sites targets as well as their own.

In terms of the green belt I feel that the priority is that it maintains green open spaces and prevents sprawl, however more focus on the quality of the land would be welcome e.g. more protection for wildlife habitats, ancient woodland etc. It is also important that it is not wasted so increased opportunities for its enjoyment by local communities would of course be welcome. It perhaps could also look at creative ways of bringing new green spaces into urban communities such as roof gardens.

I do not feel a more regional approach would be appropriate as it would allow the larger areas to dominate the smaller. In this case Birmingham could very quickly envelope the whole area. The Black Country would lose its distinctive character and an amorphous urban sprawl would result. The green belt would also be in greater danger as Birmingham would have less interest in preserving it.

5. Given that you are opposed to housing development in the Green Belt, how would you like to see a 21st century Green Belt? Do you think that it could be used more for recreation/community farming for example?

Absolutely but also some elements should remain naturally untouched to provide safe habitats for wildlife, offer environmental sustainability and spaces for all.

Green belt, it's just a label, a semantic. Farms and farming practices unless they are enlightened are natural environmental and wildlife deserts and would need further regulation. Farmers are NOT the custodians of the countryside in many cases. As for recreation, low impact would be beneficial, but as a walker I am always amazed at the detritus that human activity leaves in its wake, people would need to be Educated.

I would like to see more Nature reserves, so people can enjoy the countryside. Community farming would be great, especially if our Governments concentrated on the benefits of buying and growing British rather than importing.

I will never accept the green belt should be used for housing.

If it is decided that greenbelt must be developed, then it should be aimed at recreational/farming activities. Also for 90% affordable, with specialist housing (which is in short supply) for vulnerable people and for affordable schemes for the elderly (there is a growing demand). As this is affordable, people don't all rely on cars so you need good public transport and good local facilities people can walk to. Make greenbelt developments 100% sustainable, use recycled materials, make them carbon neutral, minimal pollution etc.

If green belt land is to be used for anything it should be allotments so people can grow some food. At least that way those with no garden can have a green patch of their own to use.

The Greenbelt absolutely is vital, and climate change a real concern, we need our 'green lungs'.

Open space is good for your mental health and it is now understood that mental health is a growing problem. Obesity is a real issue for our children; therefore you need the green belt to protect those resources.

Greenbelt is there to protect wildlife habitat for birds, mammals, insects, flora etc. and numbers of many species are dwindling. Trees help to combat the pollution, which is now recognised as causing many illnesses. Wordsley High Street is one of the most polluted roads in the West Midlands, development will add to this.

I would like to see the Green Belt used for the purposes that we now use it for i.e. Agricultural, Forestry and leisure pursuits such as walking, equine pursuits, cycling, anglers, joggers and bird watchers. It should also be a place where the stresses and strains of those living in urban areas can be left behind for a little while and spiritual renewal can be gained by being in nature and peace.

Housing development needs to be smarter. It should not just be about cramming as many people into an area as possible but it needs to have more overall thought on whether the current infrastructure is appropriate for the development. It should always try to use existing Brownfield sites where possible & quality of life should be of paramount concern.

I believe that a 21st century green belt should continue to protect against urban sprawl. It should also protect the environment and wild life and help to mitigate climate change.

One only has to listen to the views of Sir David Attenborough and Chris Packham's 'ecological apocalypse', to acknowledge that the continuous urban spill into the greenbelt is not only disastrous to our natural world but to the health and mental well-being of mankind.

6. How could housing development be improved in this country? What sort of things would you make you less opposed to housing development or would you say that your opposition is more connected to the principal of housing development?

It sounds controversial, but I don't think 21st Century families will have large families, as people won't be able to afford it without the financial support of their elderly parents. Future housing needs may be for the older person, singles or couples. Retirement complexes and nursing schemes. Councils need to develop the infrastructure first, so people are less reliant on cars. Develop trams, walk and cycle ways.

Housing development could be improved by greater importance being given to environmental and social impacts. It needs to be social housing. That's what is so desperately needed. Controlled immigration, sensible use of existing stock. Housing development is fine but in sensible places - building in villages with no facilities is not the answer.

The decisions to build on Green Belt land are taken by Governments and Councils. This building can have huge impacts on local residents but they feel powerless against the massed ranks and power of Developers and councils. Much of the process of objection is merely a formality, disregarding the will of local objectors. When a developer and the Council want to build on Green Belt land there should be a process whereby they have to sell the project to local residents and/or their representatives. This would not be the Council, but local organisations that have an interest such as residents associations and local groups that have an interest in the Countryside.