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Regional Assembly stands firm on green belt

The West Midlands Regional Assembly in its role as Regional Planning Body for the West Midlands has expressed its continued commitment to the principles behind the green belt and has rejected Campaign to Protect Rural England's (CPRE) claims that this is being squandered to build housing beyond what is needed.

In preparing its development strategy for the Region, the Assembly has taken a responsible approach, balancing the need to make adequate provision to meet the future housing needs of the Region against other important considerations, including the need to protect the environment.

The Assembly's strategy has a clear aim of urban renaissance, to focus as much development as possible on brownfield sites, particularly in the Region's major urban areas of Birmingham, the Black Country, Coventry and the North Staffordshire conurbation. This will be vital if these areas are to be regenerated effectively and the long term sustainable development of the Region is to be achieved.

Green belt has a key role to play in this strategy, particularly by ensuring development is focussed within the Major Urban Areas. This will also protect precious local open space and prevent merging with surrounding settlements. The Assembly nevertheless recognises that, in a limited number of locations, adjustments of green belt boundaries may be required at local level, but only where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. These exceptional circumstances include where development helps to support urban regeneration or where it allows for the most sustainable form of development.

In light of this, it is difficult to make an estimate at Regional level but the Assembly believes that the figure of up to five square miles of green belt loss claimed by CPRE is a considerable overestimate.

In confirming the above position, Olwen Dutton, Chief Executive of the Assembly, stressed: "CPRE are well aware that the Assembly stands very firmly behind the principles of the greenbelt. However, in developing the strategy in liaison with our partner authorities across the Region, it became clear that in a limited number of cases, it would be sensible to allow for some small local adjustment of greenbelt boundaries if housing needs are to be met in the most sustainable way."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- 1 The greenbelt is land designated in development plans to be kept open in accordance with national planning policy set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 - greenbelt.
- 2 Land designated as greenbelt is distinct from 'green field' land. Green field land is land which has previously not been developed. Greenbelt land is land specifically designated to be kept open and can include previously developed and undeveloped land.
- 3 The Assembly submitted the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Phase Two Revision Draft to the Secretary of State in December 2007. The consultation on the Draft runs until 8 December 2008.
- 4 The Assembly is now awaiting the Government Office's Study into further housing options being undertaken by consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners. It is keen to emphasise that, in responding to this Study later in the year, the Assembly will take into account the views of all its regional partners, including those of the CPRE.

For any additional information please contact Jay Rana, press officer on 0121245 0181 or j.rana@wmra.gov.uk

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