



London

Campaign to Protect Rural England

# Driving in Circles

## Traffic growth in London's Green Belt



A report by CPRE London, February 2018

# DRIVING IN CIRCLES

**"In total an extra 5 million car journeys per week will be made"**

**The Government promised to protect London's Green Belt. However, local councils are now planning widespread development within it – and the Government is failing to stop them.**[1]

Currently there are firm proposals to build around 159,000 dwellings across 443 residential and commercial developments in London's Green Belt.[2] This number is likely rise by as much as 50% over the coming year as more councils publish their plans.

**As well as destroying precious green space, these developments will unleash a wave of extra traffic on already congested roads.**

**This is in direct opposition to the aspirations of the London Mayor who wants 4 out of 5 trips in London to be made by public transport, walking and cycling by 2041.** The Mayor's draft Transport Strategy sets out the Mayor's vision for 80 per cent of all trips in London to be made by active, efficient and sustainable modes (walking, cycling and public transport) by 2041. This is already proving a challenge in outer London where motorised traffic on roads has increased in 2016 by almost 2%, contributing to an overall rise in traffic across London for the first time since the year 2000.[5]

**The Mayor's efforts to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution are being undermined by developments just beyond the Greater London borders. How can we stop 'driving in circles'?**

- The Government must stick to its pledge to protect London's Green Belt, direct Planning Inspectors to challenge the allocation of Green Belt sites for development in draft Local Plans, and 'call in' Local Plans to prevent the loss of Green Belt.
- Developments around London

**Proponents of building new housing in London's Green Belt often justify it by pointing to easy commuting by rail or tube to London.**

The rationale used is that it will help alleviate the housing crisis whilst simultaneously providing homes within easy reach of a rail station, and hence commuter access, to central London.[3] In fact, there is no need to build on Green Belt to solve the housing crisis: see our recent publication *Space to Build*. [4]

should be in locations with sustainable transport options, not in the Green Belt, including adequate public transport, good access on foot or by bike to services and stricter controls over car spaces.

- Development in Low Public Transport Accessibility (PTAL) areas should be accompanied by improvements which increase the PTAL *rather than* low PTAL being a reason for allowing high car-space provision. The maximum car space per unit levels in low PTAL areas proposed in the Draft London Plan

**But, as this report shows, the majority of trips made to and from these new developments will in fact be made by car: in total an extra 5 million car journeys per week will be made.**

Our research shows that developments planned for London's Green Belt will be almost entirely car-dependent meaning that most of the trips made by people in the new households will be by car, even where developments are within walking or cycling distance from rail stations.

(as high as 1.5 spaces per unit) are too high to be consistent with the goal of 80% of trips to be made by foot, cycle or public transport by 2041. The maximum should be reduced to 0.3 for all areas whatever their current PTAL, with measures required to increase the PTAL if a development is to go ahead.

- The Mayor should work with neighbouring councils to develop strategic transport policies for the wider City Region which reduce the need to travel by car and promote investment in sustainable transport.

## GREEN BELTS

### Fact and fiction

#### **Green Belts can provide attractive countryside near to the city.**

Most people understand Green Belts exist to provide countryside within easy reach for city or town dwellers to enjoy but that is not their main function.

#### **The main reasons we protect land around cities are to**

- ***“check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas”[6]***

The main purpose of Green Belt land is to halt ‘urban sprawl’ which is when a city or town spreads outwards with no control over where or when it stops.

- ***encourage urban regeneration***

Green Belts encourage the ‘recycling’ of land within urban areas. In the UK it is recognised that

cities are continually changing, and that previously developed land needs to be recycled. Green Belt encourages the re-use of land rather than building ever outwards, promoting regeneration rather than letting derelict areas slip into further decay.

- ***and enable transport and utilities to be more efficient***

A sprawling town or city is more likely to be low density which has implications for running transport and other utilities. It is difficult to operate public transport efficiently where there is limited demand for the service. There are more metres of water, sewage, electricity and gas pipelines to manage per person in a sprawling city.

#### **Green Belts do not constrain housing growth, as is often claimed.**

There is no evidence for this.

Evidence shows there is plenty of brownfield or previously developed land available across the London City Region. In London there are 260,000[7] planning permissions already issued – a 10 year supply at the current build rate of 25,000 homes per year – and enough developed land for 1 million homes without building on green space.[8]

**Building new housing in low density areas means people often have no option but to use a car for most of their weekly journeys**, whether this is for work, leisure, taking children to school or visiting shops and amenities.

**In low density areas buses must be subsidised and in recent years these subsidies, and bus services, have been cut.** Bus services are being lost in the counties around London because local authorities can no longer afford to subsidise them. According to the Campaign for Better Transport’s recent Buses in Crisis, 2017 report “Funding for

## What to Green Belts have to do with traffic congestion and air pollution?

buses across England and Wales has been cut by 33% since 2010 .... Over 500 routes were reduced or completely withdrawn in 2016/17.”[9]

**By contrast, in compact cities with clearly defined urban boundaries, public transport can operate without subsidy.** Where cities are ‘compact’ it is much easier to run efficient and cost-effective public transport. That means people don’t have to use a car.

***If we build housing in London’s Green Belt, most of the trips taken by the new residents will be by car. This adds to traffic in what are often already very congested areas. And of course it all adds to the air pollution the London Mayor is trying to get under control.***

## Car dependent development in London's Green Belt: Research findings

Currently there are proposals for the building of approximately 159,000 dwellings across 443 residential and commercial developments in London's Green Belt. The counties with the greatest number of Green Belt sites under threat are Essex (114 sites), Surrey (80 sites), Berkshire (70 sites) and Hertfordshire (52 sites). For some council areas there is no published data at all, meaning these figures underestimate the number and impact of proposed developments.

This is happening despite the availability of brownfield land in all areas and without action from the Government despite its promise to protect England's Green Belts.

### How many proposed developments in London's Green Belt are close enough to a train or tube station to walk or cycle to it?

Our research found that 45% of proposed development sites in London's Green Belt are not sufficiently close to train or tube stations for householders to walk or cycle to them.

#### Methodology

A simple methodology was used to map the distance from each development to the nearest train or tube station. The map with straight lines between proposed development and nearest station can be viewed on CPRE London's website at [www.cprelondon.org.uk](http://www.cprelondon.org.uk). A development was defined as being within walking distance of a station if it was no more than 800m (roughly half a mile) away. To be defined as being within cycling distance it needed to be within 2km of the nearest station. These distances have been used in previous research.[10]

#### Using straight-line distances

Straight lines were used for simplicity so the actual distances are likely to be longer and the numbers of developments with easy access to stations via walking or cycling are likely to have been over-estimated.

Table 1 below shows that of the 387 proposed development sites for which we have site coordinates, 176 or 45% are not within walking or cycling distance of a train or tube station. This leaves residents with no option but to use their car for any trips which cannot be taken by a bus, should a bus service exist.

**TABLE 1. Number of proposed development sites in London's Green Belt within walking or cycling distance of a train station, and number not accessible by walking or cycling**

	Site within walking distance of a train station	Site within cycling distance of a train station	Train station cannot be reached via walking or cycling	Site coordinates not available	Total sites
Bedfordshire*	1	1	7	42	51
Berkshire	7	24	37	2	70
Bucks	6	12	15	3	36
Essex	13	44	57	0	114
Hertfordshire	8	18	23	3	52
Kent	1	3	3	0	7
London	2	23	6	2	33
Surrey	11	37	28	4	80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>443</b>

\*Coordinates were not available for the majority of proposed developments in Bedfordshire

## Why does evidence show that, even where a Green Belt development is near to a train or tube station, the vast majority of trips taken by householders will be by car?

This reflects the relatively low-density developments in the Green Belt, which are unlikely to be well served by public transport and where car journeys are the norm for most trips.

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) looked at this issue in a 2015 report where they examined commuting patterns for five medium-sized towns within London's Green Belt, "towns which are centred around railway stations and have direct connections to central London." They found that "only 7.4% of commuters actually travel to inner London by train on a regular basis, despite living within easy walking or cycling distance of a station. The majority of commuters (72%) instead travel by private vehicle, mostly driving to jobs within their hometown and to other places not in London." [11]

## How many additional car journeys per week will arise as a result of new developments in London's Green Belt?

Figures from the 2011 Census show that in council areas that comprise London's Green Belt, between 41 and 70 per cent of people travel to work by car. According to travel to work data from the 2011 Census, 55% of people in the counties that surround London currently travel to work by car, meaning they make at least 8-10 trips a week in their vehicle.

Using these measures, Table 2 below shows that there will be almost 780,000 new commuting journeys by car each week resulting from the new developments in London's Green Belt. We took the percentage of households travelling to work by car (2011 Census) in each county and multiplied it by the number of new households proposed in each county. Then, assuming a 4-day working week with some people working part-time or not making their journey every day, this was multiplied by 8, i.e. one person per household commuting 4 days a week to work and back. This reflects the approach taken in previous research.[12]

**TABLE 2. Estimated additional commuting trips by car which will be made per week as a result of proposed new developments in London's Green Belt**

Bedfordshire:	$(0.697 \times 17,300) \times 8$	= 96,465
Berkshire:	$(0.653 \times 7,569) \times 8$	= 39,540
Buckinghamshire:	$(0.653 \times 8,498) \times 8$	= 44,394
Essex:	$(0.592 \times 35,674) \times 8$	= 168,952
Hertfordshire:	$(0.609 \times 44,974) \times 8$	= 219,113
Kent:	$(0.581 \times 3,950) \times 8$	= 18,360
London:	$(0.415 \times 3,749) \times 8$	= 12,447
Surrey:	$(0.593 \times 37,590) \times 8$	= 178,327
<b>Total:</b>		<b>777,597</b>

The National Travel Survey 2016 found that commuting trips account for just 15% of all trips made.[13] Using the 'travel to work' data from the 2011 Census therefore does not reflect the true extent of the number of additional car journeys that will be made in London's Green Belt as a result of the proposed developments. Using a simple multiplier, and assuming a similar pattern of journeys for other purposes, Table 3 below shows that overall there are likely to be an additional 5 million car journeys made each week as a result of new developments in London's Green Belt.

**TABLE 3. Estimated overall additional car journeys which will be made (commuting plus all other journeys) each week as a result of proposed new developments in London's Green Belt**

Bedfordshire:	$96,465 \times (100/15)$	= 643,099
Berkshire:	$39,540 \times (100/15)$	= 263,603
Buckinghamshire:	$44,394 \times (100/15)$	= 295,957
Essex:	$168,952 \times (100/15)$	= 1,126,347
Hertfordshire:	$219,113 \times (100/15)$	= 1,460,756
Kent:	$18,360 \times (100/15)$	= 122,397
London:	$12,447 \times (100/15)$	= 82,978
Surrey:	$178,327 \times (100/15)$	= 1,188,846
<b>Total:</b>		<b>5,183,983</b>

## How many additional vehicles will be on the roads in London's Green Belt as a result of the proposed 159,000 additional residential units?

The National Travel Survey 2016 suggests that car ownership is on the increase. Over the last thirty years there has been a fall in the proportion of households without a car from 38% to 23% and the proportion of households with more than one car has increased from 17% to 34%. [14] People in London tend to have lower rates of car ownership than people living in surrounding counties.

Table 4 below shows that the proposed developments in London's Green Belt will result in more than 225,000 additional vehicles on the roads in London's Green Belt.

**TABLE 4 Additional cars on the roads in London's Green Belt: Number of new households proposed multiplied by the average number of vehicles per household in each county (DfT licensed vehicles statistics divided by number of households in the 2011 Census).**

Bedfordshire:	$17,300 \times 1.5$	= 25,602
Berkshire:	$7,569 \times 1.6$	= 12,051
Buckinghamshire:	$8,498 \times 1.5$	= 13,133
Essex:	$35,674 \times 1.4$	= 49,392
Hertfordshire:	$44,974 \times 1.3$	= 60,329
Kent:	$3,950 \times 1.4$	= 5,414
London:	$3,749 \times 1.1$	= 4,088
Surrey:	$37,590 \times 1.5$	= 55,343
<b>Total:</b>		<b>225,351</b>

## END NOTES

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2. <http://londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk/number-of-threats-to-londons-green-belt-doubles-in-just-one-year/>
3. Paul Cheshire and Adam Smith Institute, for example, referenced at p3 RTPI (2015a) 'Building in the green belt?' <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/building-in-the-green-belt/>
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**CRPE London campaigns to save Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and other green spaces within Greater London, and to make our capital city a better place to live for everyone.**  
**We are a membership based charity: please join us today by contacting us at [office@cprelondon.org.uk](mailto:office@cprelondon.org.uk).**



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