The Case for a South Hampshire Green Belt

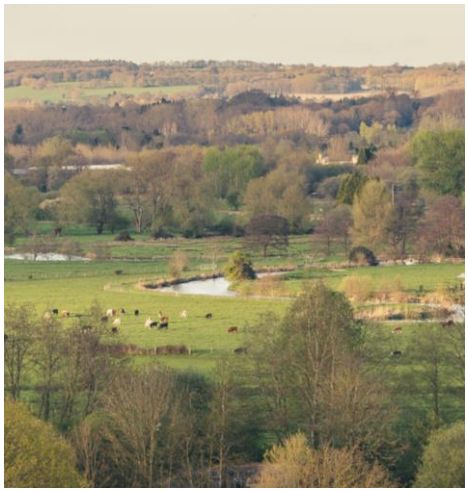
January 2018

CPRE Hampshire
Campaign to Protect Rural England

CPRE Hampshire's Vision For A Green Belt

South Hampshire is a growth area. A consequence of this is the need for more employment, and more housing. A demand for large numbers of new housing has been a feature of recent years and will remain so for years to come.

To date, these numbers have been accommodated by use of previously developed land within the urban areas, where available, but at the same time by a significant degree of urban sprawl into gaps of open countryside and into countryside north of the M27.



The Issues and Option consultation for the emerging Eastleigh Borough Local Plan illustrates the problem very well as, in the search for sites for housing, all the green areas within the Borough are identified as possible areas for new housing; and those not allocated within the new Local Plan are likely to be called on in future years unless something changes.

Yet the current Gaps in South Hampshire contain countryside which is much valued by residents, and the areas north of the M27 contain important countryside which is of considerable value in its own right. These spaces act as a buffer between the urban areas and the South Downs National Park, are an important resource for recreation and well-being of those living in the urban areas, ecology and ecosystems services.

Looking to the future of South Hampshire, CPRE Hampshire poses the following critical questions to which a solution needs to be found:-

- how can we protect the countryside surrounding urban development from further encroachment?
- how can we help prevent further coalescence of the towns and cities of Portsmouth, Southampton, Fareham, Eastleigh, Winchester, and smaller settlements?
- how we continue the good work regenerating urban areas to make a greater contribution to future housing numbers, meeting the needs of our younger generation?
- how can we continue to provide the residents of South Hampshire with access to green spaces for wellbeing and recreation, on their doorstep?

Photo credit: Dominic Brenton, www.dbrenton.com

What About our Strategic Gaps?

Strategic Gaps have largely prevented coalescence between the major urban areas, but are now at risk as the concept has lost national planning support, and in any event, do not prevent encroachment into the bulk of the countryside to the north of the M27.
The PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy is a welcome framework to protect our countryside, but only if we also realise a planning designation, underpinned by national planning policy and providing protection on a permanent basis.

One option which would provide a positive solution to our critical questions, which would be permanent and underpinned by statute and planning guidance is Green Belt and CPRE Hampshire wishes to engage in discussion as to how a solution can be found.

Green Belt for South Hampshire

There is almost no Green Belt in Hampshire, apart from a small area around the Avon Valley, Lymington and New Milton.

What is less well-known is that it 'nearly' had a substantial Green Belt around the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton on a number of occasions. Latterly it had Strategic Gaps which were the alternatives offered by government, but they lost their policy status with the demise of the SE Plan.

Now is the time to push forward a Green Belt designated around the cities to protect the strategically important countryside of South Hampshire.

Purposes of Green Belt

The first Green Belt was suggested by Sir Patrick Abercrombie in 1944, in his London Plan, following the introduction of the London Green Belt Act in 1938. There is also Green Belt around cities such as Oxford and Cambridge, applied to protect the historic core of the cities. Green Belt can encircle a city (Derby) or separate two (Cheltenham and Gloucester). 'White land', or areas allowed for development may be needed to allow for some natural growth. It's all about planning for sustainable development.

Current Government policy on Green Belts is clearly set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (section 9) which is the responsibility of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

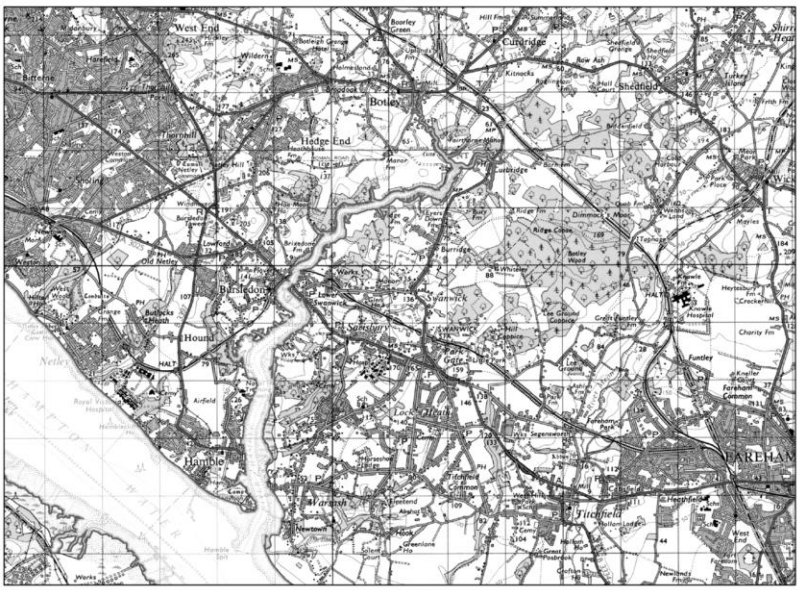
The policy states that the most important attributes of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. The effectiveness of Green Belts differs depending on the area and Local Planning Authorities can establish new Green Belts in their Local Plans in exceptional circumstances, if they are planning for larger scale development, as we are across South Hampshire.

The five basic purposes of a Green Belt:

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

What Happened in South Hampshire?

In the 1950s, Bournemouth, Poole, Southampton and Portsmouth were looking for area restraints and by 1957 a Hampshire Coast Green Belt was proposed extending from Totton and Chandlers Ford through to Hayling Island in the east. The principle of a Hampshire Coastal Green Belt was at that time accepted by government but mysteriously never happened. A Green Belt was eventually approved around Bournemouth, stretching just over the border covering Lymington and New Milton.



1966-71

Meanwhile in Hampshire, by the 1960s the South Hampshire sub-region was growing rapidly and had good prospects for continuing economic and urban growth. Somewhat reluctantly the County Council accepted the Government's decision not to approve the Green Belt and agreed instead to a study. The results of the Buchanan South Hampshire Study 1966 saw a grid plan drawn up for major urban expansion – Solent City.

2017

In 1972, the draft Structure Plan saw the Hampshire Coastal Green Belt replaced by an area of "restraint" covering the same area. The area of restraint didn't hold the same statutory weight as Green Belt and by the 2000s the lack of success of this restraint strategy was plain to see (images shown highlight this in The Hamble and surrounding area).

The principle of a Green Belt was raised again by Hampshire County Council as part of its response to the SE Plan Examination in 2005. Ken Thornber, then Leader, wrote to SEERA, stating that the County Council didn't believe that the current gaps "provided long term security and protection for the individual character of our Cities, Towns, Villages and Countryside". He recommended new Green Belt in South Hampshire.

Sadly, instead what happened is the area which had previously been proposed as Green Belt continued to exist in a policy vacuum and continued to shrink. The most recent opportunity for Green Belt was missed in 2015 when the Devolution proposal, which included plans for a new Green Belt, fell through.

Where Are We Now?

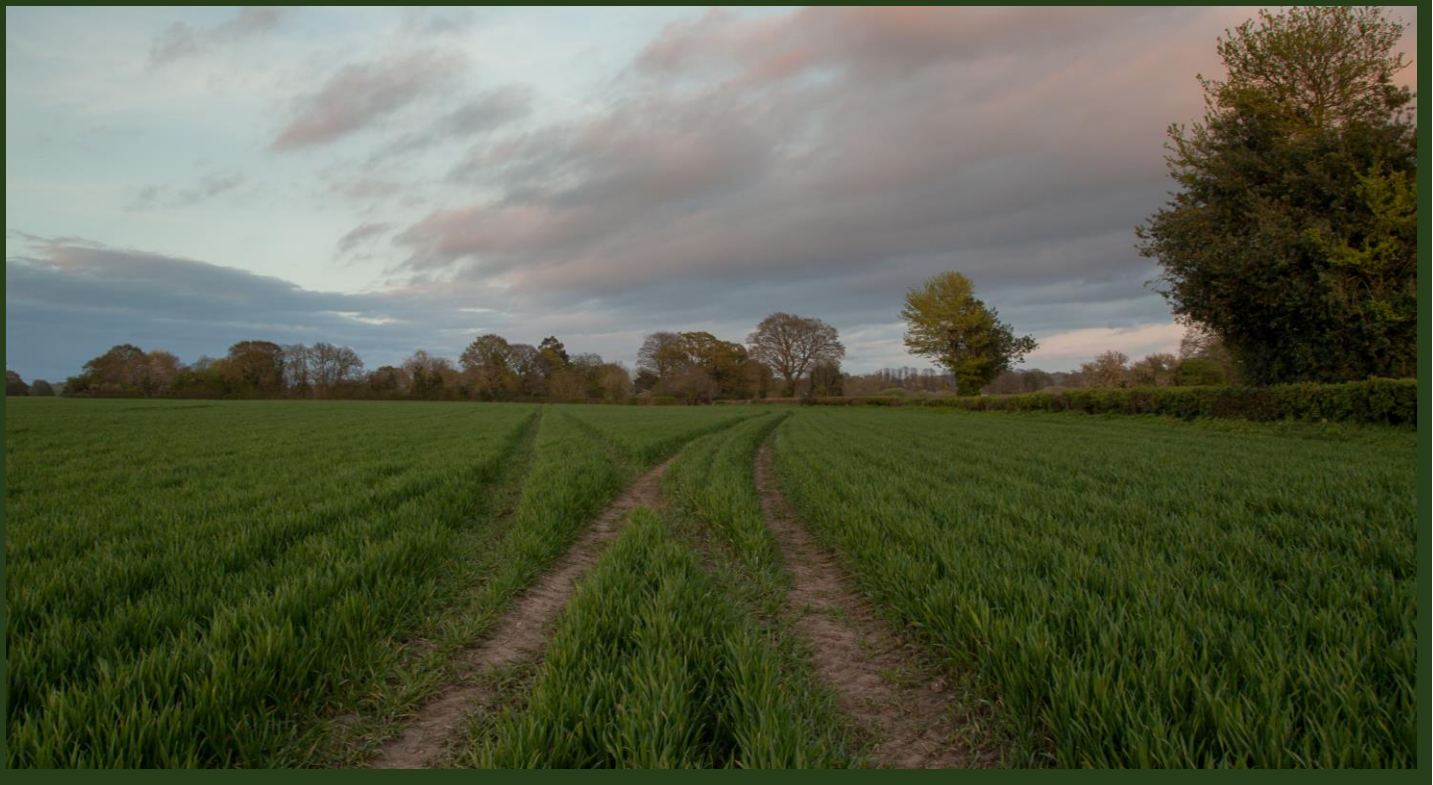
Our Green Belt is waiting recognition and with devolution off the cards for the near future, Hampshire authorities need to take the matter into their own hands and forge ahead with a Green Belt designed to meet the 5 basic purposes, all of which accord with the South Hampshire Strategy of today.

CPRE Hampshire is calling on the Leaders of Eastleigh Borough Council, Fareham Borough Council, Test Valley Borough Council and Winchester City Council, to work together to include Green Belt in their Local Plans.

“It is vital that we have a chance to breathe clean air, to remember what it feels like to be free from the confines of bricks and roads, and to be able to listen to natural sounds that soothe, rather than noise that grates”.

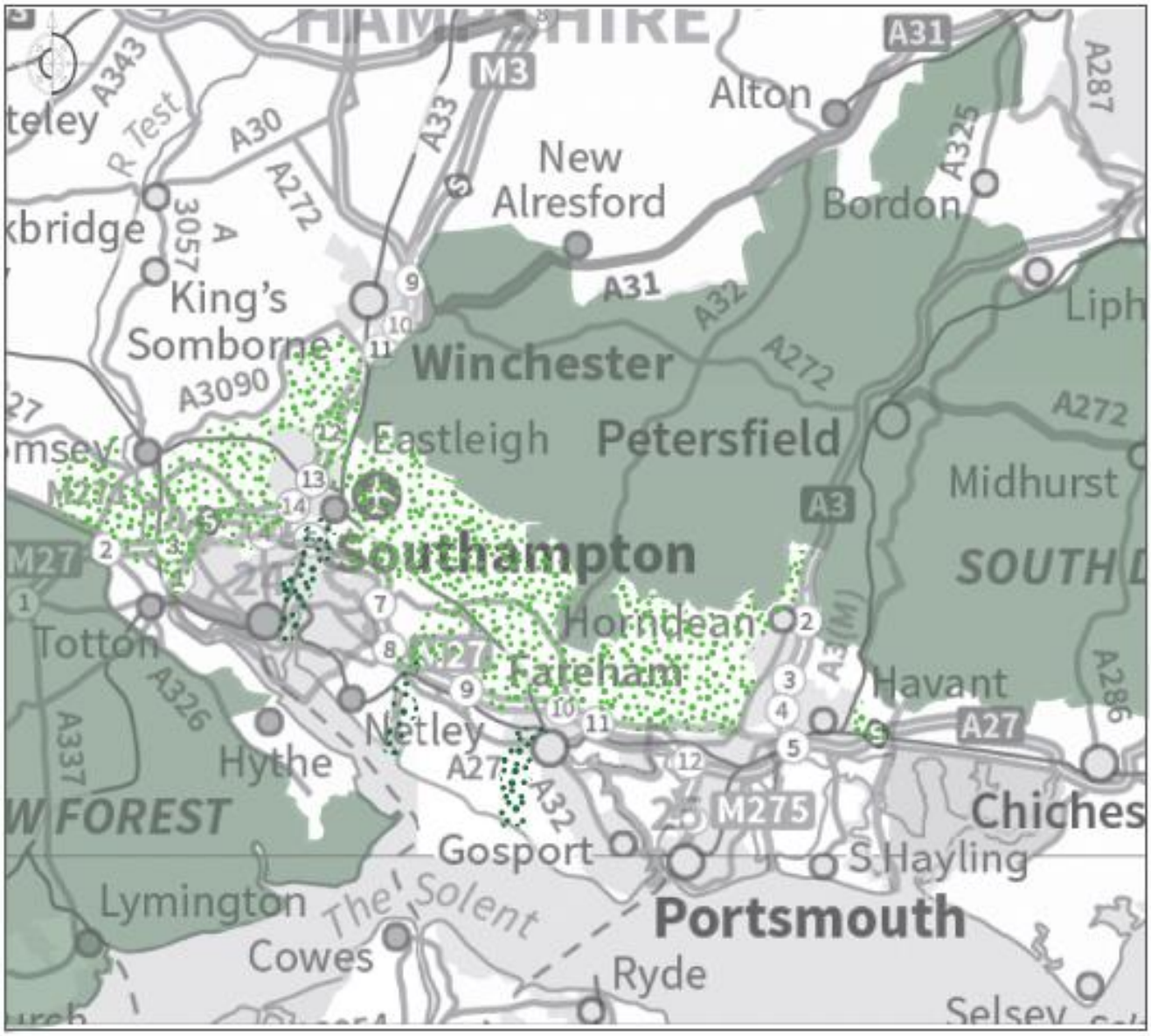
Joanne Davenport

Photo credit: Dominic Brenton, www.dbrenton.com



A Proposed Area of Search

To stimulate discussion, we have prepared a proposed an area of search detailing the areas that could be considered for Green Belt policy and we would welcome the chance to explore this with any interested parties.



Key

Area of Search for Green Belt

National Park

River Corridors

CPRE Hampshire
Campaign to Protect Rural England

cprehampshire.org.uk
01962 841897

HOW YOU CAN HELP

MP write to Council Leader to ask them to introduce new Green Belt policy to their Local Plan

Councillor write to Council Leader to ask them to introduce new Green Belt policy to their Local Plan

Council Leader meet with us to discuss the potential for new Green Belt policy in your Local Plan