

COUNCIL
29 JANUARY 2026

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

'Grey Belt' Land and Planning Applications in North Herts

To be moved by Councillor Louise Peace and seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown:

Changes to the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) in December 2024 introduced a new concept in planning: grey belt. *"For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the green belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143."*

Villages in North Herts now find that surrounding 'green belt' land can be considered as 'grey belt' as (a), (b) and (d) in paragraph 143 of the 2024 NPPF made no reference to villages – only that neighbouring *towns* should not merge into one another and it should '...preserve the setting and special character of historic *towns*'. Proposed revisions to the NPPF, currently at consultation stage, go further than this with (a) and (b) clearly stating that villages should **not** be included in these considerations. Provided that certain 'golden rules' are followed such as the provision of 50% 'affordable' housing, applications can now be made on green belt land that would previously have been untenable.

The result of this in Ickleford, in my ward of Cadwell, is that some 350 homes are currently under consideration or at pre-application stage on undeveloped edge of village green field sites with another approximately 50 homes on the border of neighbouring Bearton ward. North Hertfordshire needs new homes, but it needs to be able to build these homes where there is infrastructure available to support residents. Residents deserve readily available NHS services, good public transport options including safe walking and cycling access to employment and homes where the sewerage network isn't already at capacity. Large developments on edge of village locations result in communities reliant on cars, using roads that are already at a standstill at peak periods.

In December 2025, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) reported that of 1,250 homes submitted as part of applications on 'grey belt' land, 88% will be built on previously undeveloped countryside¹. When the policy was introduced, the government gave 'disused petrol stations' and 'abandoned car parks' as examples of sites in the green belt that could be considered 'grey belt' and released for development. Instead, the NPPF is allowing development on unspoilt rural landscapes. The requirement for local authorities to demonstrate a five-year land supply (also introduced in the 2024 NPPF) further reduces the protection for green field habitat as the 'tilted balance' in favour of development significantly raises the bar to demonstrate harms.

The Institute for Public Policy Research published research in 2025 that showed up to 1.4 million homes have been granted planning permission, but left unbuilt by developers since 2007², and commented "*This is not about pitting NIMBYs against YIMBYs, it is about ensuring the government achieves its ambitious targets whilst also maintaining local support and high quality.*" That is also the purpose of this motion.

Therefore, Council resolves:

That the Executive Member for Place –

- 1. Writes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express concern about the rise of speculative development in the countryside in North Herts.**
- 2. Responds to the consultation on proposed changes to the NPPF by 10 March 2026, including the following points:**
 - Green belt assessment should include villages.**
 - Ensure grey belt developments occur only on previously developed land**
 - Ensure high-quality farmland and important wildlife habitats are protected from development.**
 - Set ambitious and legally binding targets for genuinely affordable and socially rented homes in all new developments, with developers held to account if they are not delivered.**

<https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/research-shows-most-grey-belt-homes-planned-on-unspoilt-countryside/>

<https://www.ippr.org/media-office/revealed-1-4-million-homes-left-unbuilt-by-developers-since-2007>