



**Campaign to Protect
Rural England**
Hertfordshire

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Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

22 July 2026

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Homes for Working People: Prioritising Social Housing while Protecting the Green Belt

May I begin by congratulating you on your recent re-appointment as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

I am writing on behalf of CPRE Hertfordshire regarding the Government's plans for housing delivery and planning reform. We recognise the seriousness of the housing challenge facing England and welcome the Government's commitment to addressing it.

In your statement to Parliament in July 2024, you described England as facing "the most acute housing crisis in living memory", with nearly 1.3 million households on social housing waiting lists. You also called for a "council house revolution" and recognised the need to build more genuinely affordable homes. We strongly support those objectives.

However, we believe the debate should focus not simply on how many homes are built, but on what homes are built, where they are built, and who they are built for.

In Hertfordshire, as in many parts of England, the greatest housing need is for genuinely affordable council and social rented homes. Yet too much recent development has delivered housing that remains beyond the reach of ordinary working households. At the same time, waiting lists continue to grow and increasing numbers of families struggle to secure suitable accommodation.

We are particularly concerned that large areas of open countryside are being promoted for development under the banner of grey belt despite many of the schemes involved delivering overwhelmingly market housing. Such development does little to address the fundamental shortage of genuinely affordable homes.

We warmly welcome your statement that "the first port of call must be brownfield land" and that homes should be built in "the right places". We believe these principles should remain at the heart of national planning policy.

Urban regeneration, town-centre renewal, the redevelopment of previously used land, bringing empty homes back into use, and making better use of existing planning permissions should all be prioritised before Green Belt land is

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considered for development. Homes delivered close to employment, public transport, schools, healthcare and existing infrastructure are more sustainable and better support thriving communities.

Here in Hertfordshire, recent planning reforms are leading to the effective disappearance of the Green Belt. Local planning authorities are reviewing Green Belt boundaries and assessing land for potential release as part of emerging Local Plans. At the same time, the Government has highlighted examples such as Basildon Borough Council, which identified significant additional housing capacity within existing urban areas through a comprehensive review of development opportunities. Such examples demonstrate that a genuine brownfield-first approach can unlock substantial housing capacity without unnecessary loss of countryside.

The Green Belt remains one of the most successful and popular elements of the English planning system. It helps prevent urban sprawl, preserves the identity of towns and villages, provides accessible countryside, supports biodiversity and contributes to climate resilience. Once lost to development, these benefits cannot easily be recovered.

In Hertfordshire, significant opportunities remain to regenerate urban areas, develop brownfield sites, implement existing planning consents and bring empty homes back into use. We therefore question whether the increasing pressure to release Green Belt land is either necessary or consistent with the Government's wider environmental and community objectives.

CPRE Hertfordshire fully supports the Government's ambition to increase the supply of council and social rented homes. Indeed, if the objective is truly to provide homes for working people, success should be measured not simply by the overall number of homes built, but by the number of genuinely affordable homes delivered for those who need them most.

We support the right homes in the right places. We believe that a renewed focus on social housing, urban regeneration and brownfield development offers the best route to addressing housing need while safeguarding the Green Belt and countryside that communities value so highly.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further and to contribute constructively to the Government's efforts to deliver homes, strengthen communities and protect the environment for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

David Townhill
Chief Executive
CPRE Hertfordshire

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