

Housing plans for green belt scaled down

New round of consultation promised over plans

THE threat to Rotherham's prized green belt has eased after planners reduced housing targets by more than a quarter.

In perhaps the only council cuts to be welcomed this year, 60 per cent less countryside land will be steamrolled for buildings by 2027.

A revised Local Development Framework will reveal that 850 new houses are needed per year—compared with the 2009 target of 1,160.

There was uproar over the "sham" consultation two years ago and the backlash saw angry residents attend hurriedly-arranged meetings in their thousands.

Rotherham Borough Council would not disclose exact sites this week, but promised it had learned lessons from two years ago.

A Cabinet report next week will concede: "Previous criticisms have included a perceived lack of information."

Three months of consultation are promised from July, after accusations that the council paid lip service last time around.

But strategic director Karl Battersby said: "People ought not to be fearful of this

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document, it should be something that the people are happy to see.

"It's clearly not the case that it's a done deal and we will put in a lot more effort than we need to meet the consultation requirements."

"Over 15 years we will need just short of 13,000 homes," he added. "It's a significant reduction from before, but the LDF is still about jobs, investment and growth."

"It's positive, because it represents investment in communities and raising the standard of living. Rotherham is open for business."

The targets, published in May 2009, suggested that up to 34,000 extra homes might be needed in the borough over 15 years.

Up to 1,090 hectares of precious green belt land could have been sacrificed.

The new LDF identifies a maximum of 440, but the council expects the total amount needed to be closer to 300.

Mr Battersby said: "The world has changed with the new Government. Before,

the numbers of houses and developments had to hit regional and national targets, now we have targets local to Rotherham.

"We're in a much better place to deliver what's needed here, rather than what we were being told may be needed."

"We were never a fan of the imposed regional targets. Essentially, now it's our plan for our borough and we are best placed to get people involved in what will affect them."

This summer's consultation will include 32 drop-in and workshop sessions, on the overall strategy and individual locations.

Mr Battersby said: "Last time I think part of the problem was not talking about individual sites. People felt isolated because they thought they would be consulted on their local areas."

"The overall strategy wasn't something that people engaged with, it was what could happen in their village or neighbourhood. This time we're looking at linking the two and getting people actively involved."

If deadlines are met, and pending a Planning Inspectorate review, the new LDF could be helping to determine future planning applications from November 2012.

ROTHERHAM will keep fortnightly bin collections despite a Government cash plan to encourage councils to revert to weekly.

Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has spoken in favour of the more regular pick-ups and the coalition could offer authorities a cash enticement.

But Rotherham Borough Council this week said that it was happy with

Bin collections to stay fortnightly

the current system under which normal household waste is collected one week and recyclables the next.

A spokeswoman said: "It is not something we are currently considering."



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