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## **PICKLES GIVES COUNCILS FREEDOM TO HALT GREEN BELT DESTRUCTION**

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles is taking swift action to call a halt to the urban sprawl that is threatening the Green Belt around 30 towns across the country.

Mr Pickles has today written to councils to tell them they now have the freedom to make planning decisions themselves, and will not have to wait for legislation to formally end Whitehall's grip on local planning policy.

While the current system of housing targets imposed from Whitehall in theory gives councils control over where houses are built, in reality it has forced them to redraw the lines of the Green Belt and designate large areas of countryside where new development will go over the next twenty years.

The new Government has committed to protect the Green Belt from any encroachment that communities have fought long and hard against, and give councils and communities the freedom to decide where new development will go.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said:

"The previous Government gave a green light for the destruction of the Green Belt across the country and we are determined to stop it.

"We've promised to use legislation to scrap top-down building targets that are eating up the Green Belt, but I'm not going to make communities wait any longer to start making decisions for themselves. That's why I have written to all councils to let them know from today they can make planning decisions in the knowledge Regional Strategies will soon be history.

"It will no longer be possible to concrete over large swathes of the country without any regard to what local people want. From now on communities will be trusted to make the right decisions about what development is suitable for their area, not bossed around by central Government and unelected regional quangos.

"Previously people from Bournemouth to Bromsgrove had to stand by and accept bureaucrats knew best. The new approach will allow local communities to control the way in which villages, towns and cities develop and they will be the ones who enjoy the benefits from the proceeds of growth."

Towns and areas that were planning to make Green Belt cuts and reviews because of Whitehall-imposed targets will now be able to make their own decisions where new development is built. They include: Bath, Bedworth, Bournemouth, Bristol, Bromsgrove, Broxbourne, Cheltenham, Chertsey, Coventry, Gloucester, Guildford,

Harlow, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Leeds, Lichfield, Maidenhead, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Nottingham, Nuneaton, Oxford, Redditch, Redhill, Reigate, Rushcliffe, Stevenage, Solihull, Tunbridge Wells, Welwyn, and Woking and Worcester and in West Yorkshire beyond Leeds.

The coalition agreement set out a commitment to rapidly abolish Regional Strategies and their centrally imposed building targets, and the Government announced in the Queen's Speech that they will introduce legislation to do it. However, ahead of this legislation Eric Pickles has written to councils to explain they now have the freedom to regard the commitment to end regional plans and housing targets as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently making on building in their area.