

Telegraph

'Garden-grabbing' epidemic as three in four new homes built in back gardens

Three out of four new homes were built on gardens in some parts of the country last year, according to new figures which reveal the extent of "garden grabbing".

By Christopher Hope, Whitehall Editor
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Greg Clark, the Decentralisation minister, said: "Building on gardens robs communities of green breathing space, safe places for children to play and havens for urban wildlife."

New figures from the Department for Communities and Local Government show the rate of building on gardens was treble the national average in some of the most sought-after areas of England last year.

Until June this year, gardens were classified as brown-field sites, which made them easier for builders to get planning permission.

Overall, 25 per cent of new homes were built on previously residential land, including back gardens. The figures are more than twice the rate – 11 per cent – when Labour came to power in 1997.

However the rate was three times higher in the Chilterns, where 71 per cent of new homes were built on gardens, compared with 22 per cent in 1997 and 55 per cent in 2005.

In South Buckinghamshire and Sevenoaks, 72 per cent of new homes were built on gardens, compared respectively with 43 per cent and 24 per cent in 1997.

The garden-grabbing rate was more than twice the national average in New Forest, Runnymede, Winchester, Worthing and Bournemouth. The rates here had more than doubled since 1997.

In June Greg Clark, the Decentralisation minister, said gardens would no longer be classified as 'brownfield' for planning purposes in a bid to put a break on gardens being developed.

He said it would prevent unwanted development on gardens where local people object and protect the character of their neighbourhoods.

Mr Clark said last night: "Last year an even higher proportion of homes were built on previously residential land, which includes back gardens.

"Building on gardens robs communities of green breathing space, safe places for children to play and havens for urban wildlife.

"It was ridiculous that gardens were classified in the same group as derelict factories and disused railway sidings.

The plans to restrict building on gardens were welcomed by experts.

Richard Bashford, project manager at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, said: "If more garden space is turned into buildings they will likely decline further and the wonder that children experience on the doorstep will dwindle.

"We hope that the new measures will protect the habitats of species that have become synonymous with English gardens and demonstrate a rich eco system in our own back yards such as frogs, toads and bumble bees."

Dr Ross Cameron, School of Biological Sciences, University of Reading said: "There are real benefits that gardens bring to our quality of life.

"Vegetation around buildings keeps us cool in summer and reduces our energy bills in winter, as well as protecting us from flooding.

"Gardens are also great for our mental and physical wellbeing.

"They reduce our stress and keep us fit because we can work in the garden for hours without feeling we are doing exercise as a chore.

"In essence, protecting gardens is important to improve quality of life, and particularly for people in cities."