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The green sites to be lost under 300,000 homes

DETAILED research has revealed the extent of the wave of development that will sweep across England's green fields if the government presses ahead with its controversial new planning policy.

From Durham to Bristol, Merseyside to Kent, more than 230 big projects are in the planning pipeline, waiting for councils or inspectors to give them the go-ahead.

If all of them are approved, 313,000 homes would be built on greenfield or green-belt land, with a further 1,500 acres being lost to commercial and industrial developments.

The big developers have been building up their land banks in anticipation of the changes to planning rules announced in the government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). They have more than 600,000 plots on their books.

The latest research, compiled by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), reveals that virtually no area of England will escape the developers under the NPPF.

Under the plans awaiting permission, about 75,000 of the homes would be built on previously protected greenbelt land. The remainder would be on greenfield sites.

In Cambridge, 2,500 homes are proposed on green-belt land, as well as a 15,000 capacity stadium for Cambridge United football club.

Cookham in Berkshire could be swamped by a 3,750-home development, which protesters fear would make the village little more than a suburb of Maidenhead.

In Nottinghamshire, a plan for 97 homes on the green belt, including part of Sherwood Forest, is proposed around the village of Annesley.

Durham county council has said it intends to allow 3,500 homes to be built on the green belt, while Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead are set to lose part of their green belt to make way for 9,700 homes.

The key phrase in the NPPF reads: "At the heart of the planning system is a presumption in favour of sustainable development."

It does not give a strict definition of “sustainable development”, leaving the way open for an upsurge in building.

Although the framework is still under consultation and would not come into effect until next April, planning inspectors have been instructed to use the NPPF when considering current applications and appeals.

The framework drops the requirement that new building should take place first on brownfield land — sites that have been previously developed.

The CPRE research will add to the pressure on Greg Clark, the planning minister, to reinstate the brownfield rule.

Builders prefer greenfield sites because they are cheaper to build on and the homes attract higher prices.

The government insists the new rules will safeguard the green belt.

David Cameron has emphasised that the government wants to balance social and environmental factors with economic concerns.

Paul Miner, senior planning campaigner at the CPRE, said: “At the moment a huge number of developments [are] being proposed on the back of the statement the government has made that the default answer to development is ‘yes’.”

Nathalie Lieven QC, who has advised the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on the NPPF, said the lack of a specific definition of sustainable development gave scope for “almost endless arguments”.