

The Telegraph

Labour fights planning reforms to win rural vote

Labour has committed itself to fighting the Government's overhaul of the planning system, amid fears that large swathes of middle England will be concreted over.



Labour wants to ensure brownfield sites are always considered ahead of greenbelt

By Christopher Hope, Whitehall Editor

6:20AM BST 27 Sep 2011

 [5 Comments](#)

Speaking to The Daily Telegraph, Mary Creagh, the shadow environment secretary, set out a number of changes that Labour wanted to see made to the controversial draft National Planning Policy Framework.

The party now joins the National Trust, Countryside Alliance and the Women's Institute in demanding changes to the draft new planning rules. This newspaper has also launched a campaign urging ministers to rethink the proposals.

The Government is pushing through plans to replace 1,300 pages of planning regulations in England with 52 pages. The new document writes into planning rules a new "presumption in favour of sustainable development", without defining clearly what it means.

Ms Creagh said the framework should be amended so that it reinstates a requirement that previously-developed brownfield sites are developed ahead of greenfield areas.

Labour also wants ministers to define in law what is meant by "sustainable development" to avoid housing developers exploiting the plan.

Ms Creagh said: "We need a definition of what sustainable development is. They need to be clear about brownfield first, and what is their approach to town centre development? There should be town centre development."

Ms Creagh said Labour would also campaign against separate plans by the Coalition to charge

Building Consensus

Political Liaison | Community Consultation | Media Relations

Political Developments Limited. Registered in England, Company Number: 653378

communities up to £1,000 to apply to save their green spaces from developers' bulldozers. Currently, communities are able to apply for free for land to be designated as a "green", and therefore protected from development.

"Why is it going to cost villages £1,000 to protect their village greens? Why will it cost communities to protect their village greens?" said Ms Creagh. "It is a bit of green space, where you can walk your dogs, or meet for the village barbecue."

The shadow environment secretary said that "the Conservatives have lost touch with their rural voters, they have alienated rural voters".

She added: "There is no joined-up approach."

In her speech to the Labour conference in Liverpool, Ms Creagh will today make a grab for traditional Tory rural voters. She will say: "This is just the beginning of Labour's fightback in rural areas. Labour is the party of the countryside. The first time I said that in Parliament, the Tories laughed. They're not laughing now."

Labour has called for the consultation on the planning framework to be extended to allow for a debate by MPs.