

The Daily Telegraph

Hands Off Our Land: Housing estates will not be 'plonked' next to villages, pledges David Cameron

Sprawling housing estates will not be “plonked” on the edge of villages against the opposition of local people under planning reforms, David Cameron has said.

The Prime Minister suggested that the new planning rules which will fast-track planning decisions would be limited to schemes of fewer than 30 homes to avoid creating more urban sprawl.

Mr Cameron wants to cut 1,300 pages of planning guidance down to just 52 pages in a new 'National Planning Policy Framework', which critics say puts too great an emphasis on economic development.

The draft NPPF has been heavily criticised for making it easier for developers to build on rural parts of England, and is being fought by campaigners. The Daily Telegraph is also urging rethink through its Hands Off Our Land campaign.

His comments come as ministers are drawing up a new version of draft planning reforms which they hope will head off fierce criticism from countryside campaigners. The proposals are due to be published next month.

In a [television interview](#), Mr Cameron said the reforms were more about allowing communities to approve small-scale schemes than wave through sprawling housing estates on the fringes of villages.

He said: “I care deeply about our countryside and environment. Our vision is one where we give communities much more say, much more control. The fear people have in villages is the great big housing estate being plonked down from above.

“Our reforms will make it easier for communities to say ‘we are not going to have big plonking housing estate landing next to the village, but we would like 10, 20, 30 extra houses and we would like them built in this way, to be built for local people’.”

Mr Cameron, who was being interviewed in his Oxfordshire constituency, denied that the reforms would lead to large swathes of the countryside being built on.

He told BBC1's Countryfile programme: “Here we are in west Oxfordshire one of the most beautiful parts of our country, set in some of England's finest countryside. I would no more put that at risk than I would put at risk my own family.

“I care deeply about our countryside and environment. Our vision is one where we give communities much more say, much more control.”

Critics say a new presumption in favour of sustainable development in the draft framework means the rules are biased in favour of developers. But Mr Cameron said that the rules would continue to be balanced equally between the environment, heritage and economic development.

He said: "It is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and all those words are equally important. Let me clear because there has been quite a lot of scaremongering about this.

"We are not changing green belt, we are not changing areas of outstanding natural beauty, we are not changing SSSIs [sites of special scientific interest] - all those protections that are there.

"But at the heart of it is more local control, the neighbourhood plan, you decide, rather than 'the man in Whitehall knows best'."

Mr Cameron said the planning reforms would help people to conserve green space.

He said: "Villages will be able to designate new green spaces in their local plans, that they want to keep, that is a protection that they don't necessarily have now."

Campaigners welcomed the comments but expressed concern that they were not reflected in the planning reforms.

Fiona Howie, head of planning for the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said: "We are concerned, that his strength of feeling has not been reflected in the planning reforms to date.

What the prime minister and his colleagues seems to have overlooked is the importance of, and need to protect, undesignated countryside. Nationally, more than half of our countryside is not protected by designations and will face similar threats."

Ian Wilson, National Trust Head of Government Affairs, said the trust remained "unconvinced that our countryside will not be at risk, unless significant changes" to the planning rules.

He said: "The intention to give communities a greater say over development in their neighbourhoods may be there, but the Government is running the risk of raising expectations on this point.

"Ultimately, local planning authorities should be making these decisions based on a robust, balanced planning framework and development plan. The reforms do not put individual communities in a position to say no.

"The Government's intentions do not match the potential outcomes of the draft NPPF."