Housing White Paper: Fixing our broken housing market shouldn’t break our vital green infrastructure

Monday 13 February, 2017

Last week Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government, published the Government's Housing White Paper, "Fixing our broken housing market", which outlines intentions to build more homes, make more use of local authority owned land for housing and in some places increase population density. Fields in Trust Chief Executive ***Helen Griffiths*** *responds to the minister's statement.*

Since the 1920's Fields in Trust has been protecting land for play, sport and recreation and campaigning about the importance of these spaces to the health and wellbeing of communities. We are concerned about the impact of building on greenspace sites in both urban and rural areas; local green spaces of all shapes and sizes are invaluable if we are to build a more active nation as the government's sports strategy aspires to.

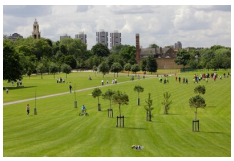
This is not easy. Whilst recognising the urgent need to build new homes we believe that all communities and particularly children should be able to enjoy healthy active outdoor recreation within walking distance of home. Our Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play, recently updated to take account of the devolved administrations' planning regimes, determines benchmark provision for accessible outdoor space; guidance that has been accepted and implemented by local councils since the 1930s.

Recreation spaces in residential areas must therefore remain a priority for protection, especially at a time when there is pressure on land for new housing or commercial development; this means hard choices have to be made. It is clearly the case that brownfield sites should be first for development, but these are not always available. Fields in Trust's position is therefore that if no brownfield site is available for necessary development, then other sites on the urban fringe should be considered for development before planning authorities contemplate sanctioning the loss of existing playing fields or other recreational sites.

This may not be a universally shared opinion; it is important that consultation and consideration of environmental and amenity issues takes place at a local level. But the importance of, and pressure on, land for sport and play in urban areas is such that they must be protected from development in the most robust manner.

Whilst there is this pressure on land across the UK local communities could take a pre-emptive approach to safeguard their green spaces with Fields in Trust. Existing planning legislation alone is not sufficient to prevent the loss of parks and playing fields. Land owners and local authorities working with us can secure their greenspaces through a Deed of Dedication and ensure that accessible public recreational land is protected forever.

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