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# Toton fields forever

by the Editor

TOTON residents are angry about the new threat to the green belt land bounded by Toton sidings, the A52 bypass and existing housing to the west of Stapleford Lane.

Two groups of campaigners, the Friends of Toton Fields and the Toton Environmental Protection Society (TEPS) agreed to meet a team from BBC East Midlands Today on Monday, October 17, at the threatened site in an attempt to draw wider public attention to their cause.

What began as a fight to have the trees illegally felled by the new owner of land above Toton Sidings in January 2010 replaced is now developing into a fight to stop Broxtowe Borough Council building on one of the few remaining areas of green belt in the borough.

During the campaign to get the trees replanted via an official restocking notice from the Forestry Commission, note was made by a sharp-eared campaigner that the council planners were ensuring that an access point to the land above the sidings was kept available.

The new landowner attempted an appeal, the Forestry Commission dismissing it but ruling that the lost trees could be replaced by natural regeneration rather than replanting.

At the time, Neil Riddle, Regional Director of the Forestry Commission, commented: "The Forestry Commission will continue to monitor compliance with the (restocking) Notice, which will remain in force *unless planning permission is granted.*"

## National Planning Framework

Whilst all this was going on, the coalition government was drawing up its draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

This controversial document will have a tremendous impact on Broxtowe if it becomes law with no amendments and the addition of watertight definitions of key wording. As it stands, it allows a presumption in favour of developers if the council has no Local Plan in place to preordain where necessary new housing might be built.

## In Toton

If the draft NPPF becomes law without amendment, residents of south Broxtowe may well find themselves looking over a few hundred shiny new rooftops where there are currently green fields on the right-hand side of the A52 bypass as they leave the M1 at

Junction 25 and head home.

About 60 of the Toton campaigners arrived at the site to meet the BBC. They are well aware that the land is under threat because of the draft planning policy. Norman Lewis of the Friends of Toton Fields group explained to the BBC East Midlands Today (EMT) team: "There is talk of building between 800 and 1000 houses on this prime farmland, some of the best agricultural land in the borough.

"It will be like another village, but no mention has been made of the essential infrastructure – schools, village halls, etc – just houses.

"Yet when a further 400 houses were being discussed for the Chilwell Meadows area last year, the plans were dismissed on the basis that the local schools didn't have room to accommodate the rise in school population numbers, so why is it suddenly OK to build 800 houses here without applying the same criteria?"

June Smith lives on Stapleford Lane, Toton. She said: "It's difficult enough already to get out onto Stapleford Lane at peak traffic times. If these houses are built, we'll not be able to move at all."

Local resident Emma Wickins supported the campaign action along with her Mum and Dad, Peggy and Roger Wickins. They agreed: "We think there are plenty of brownfield sites in the area that the planners should consider before they think about building on green belt. Then look elsewhere once every opportunity to build on that brownfield land has been exhausted."

Meanwhile, TEPS spokeswoman Christine Batham delivered an eloquent speech directly to the BBC EMT cameras on behalf of the mounting campaign to protect Toton's green belt.

## In parliament

In parliament that morning, Broxtowe MP Anna Soubry had been successful in securing a debate about the future of the Broxtowe green belt.

In replying to Anna's concerns, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Andrew Stunnell MP, said: "Far from weakening environmental protection, our planning reforms will strengthen them.

"The draft NPPF... retains the key protections for the green

belt. The government values the green belt highly. It is an essential planning tool to prevent sprawl, and its retention is a coalition agreement commitment.

The Minister finished: "We want plans to be developed in accordance with the wishes of local communities and to create the homes, jobs, transport links and recreational facilities that we need to produce environmentally, socially and economically sustainable communities. It is the government's clear intention to do so."

Are you all making notes?

## In Broxtowe

Somewhat belatedly, *The Beeston Express* tried to contact the development control portfolio holder for Broxtowe Borough Council, Cllr David Watts, seeking the council's official stance. We also made a call in an attempt to ascertain exactly what it is the NPPF says about green belt that makes the residents of Toton fear the worst.

Unfortunately, replies were not available by the time the paper went to press on Thursday afternoon.



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