



England's Green Belt: A Possible Future

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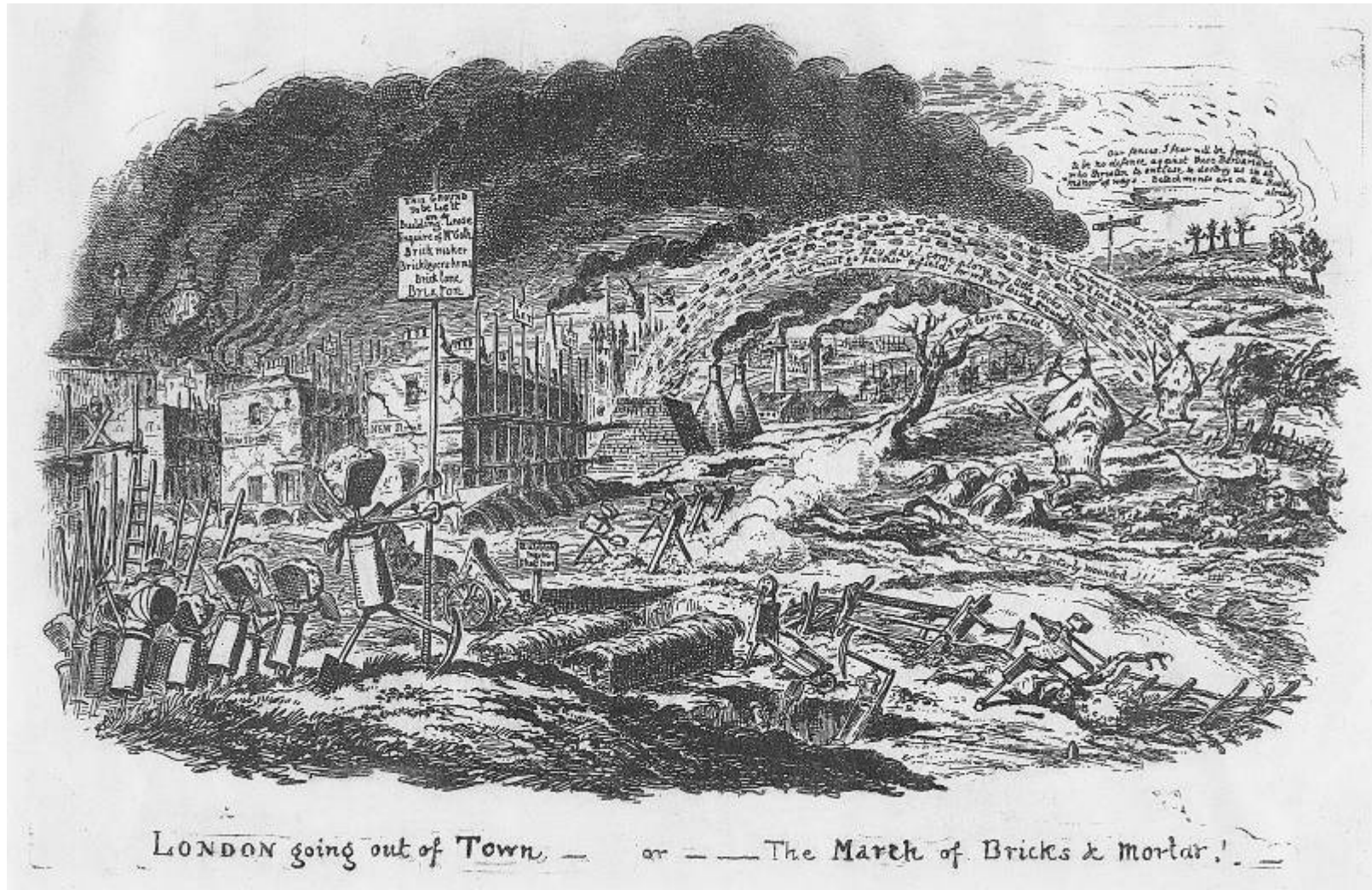
30 May 2008, Politecnico di Torino

Issues

Some reflections based on recent projects...

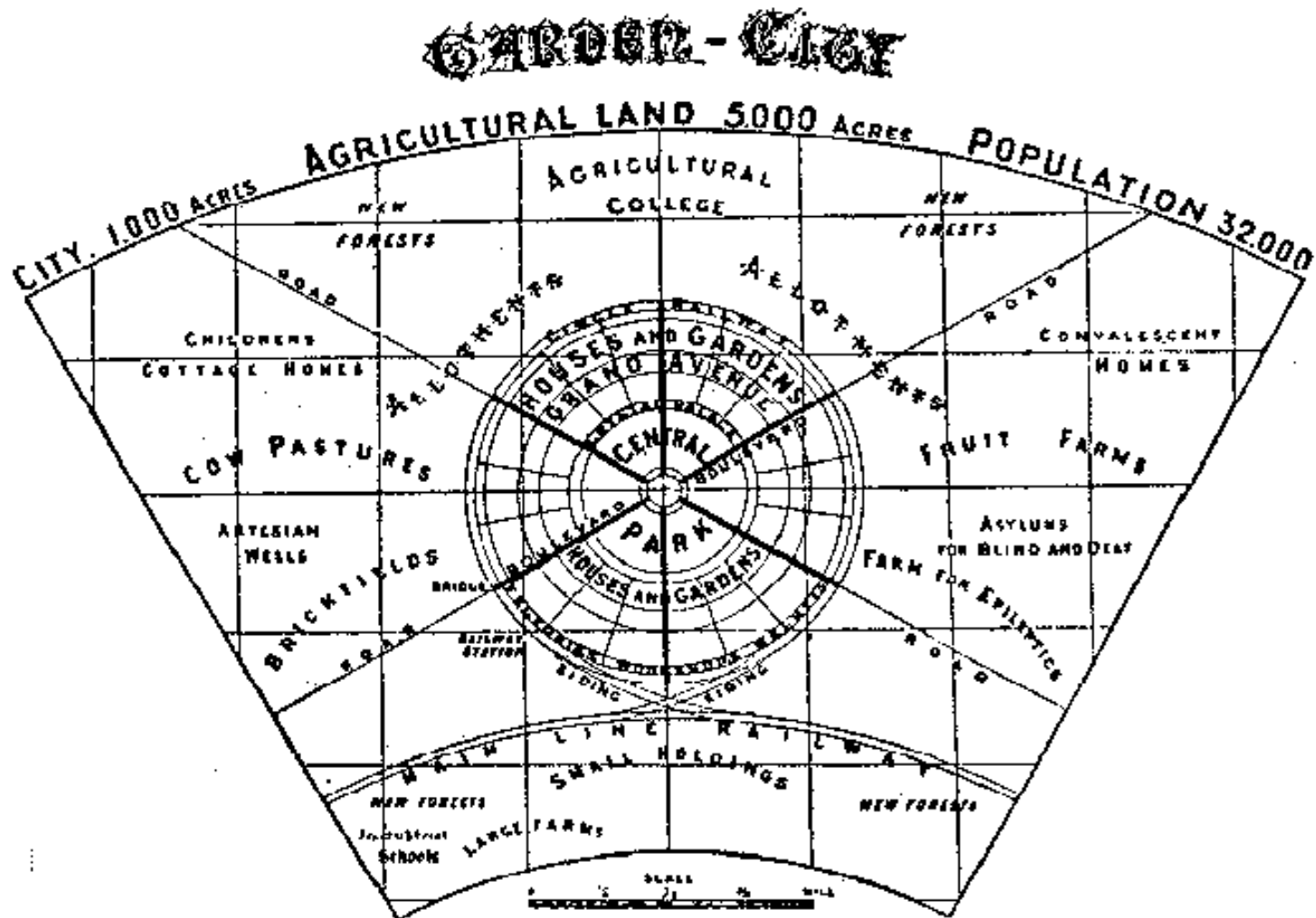
1. A 'potted history of the Green Belt'
2. Emergent Criticisms of statutory Green Belt
3. Rethinking the 'Rural-Urban Fringe' / CIAT
4. 'Enhancing' the Green Belt, as a means of achieving the 'fringe' agenda.

1a. History of the Green Belt: 19th Century



George Cruickshank, 1829

1b. History of the Green Belt: 19th Century



Howard, 1898

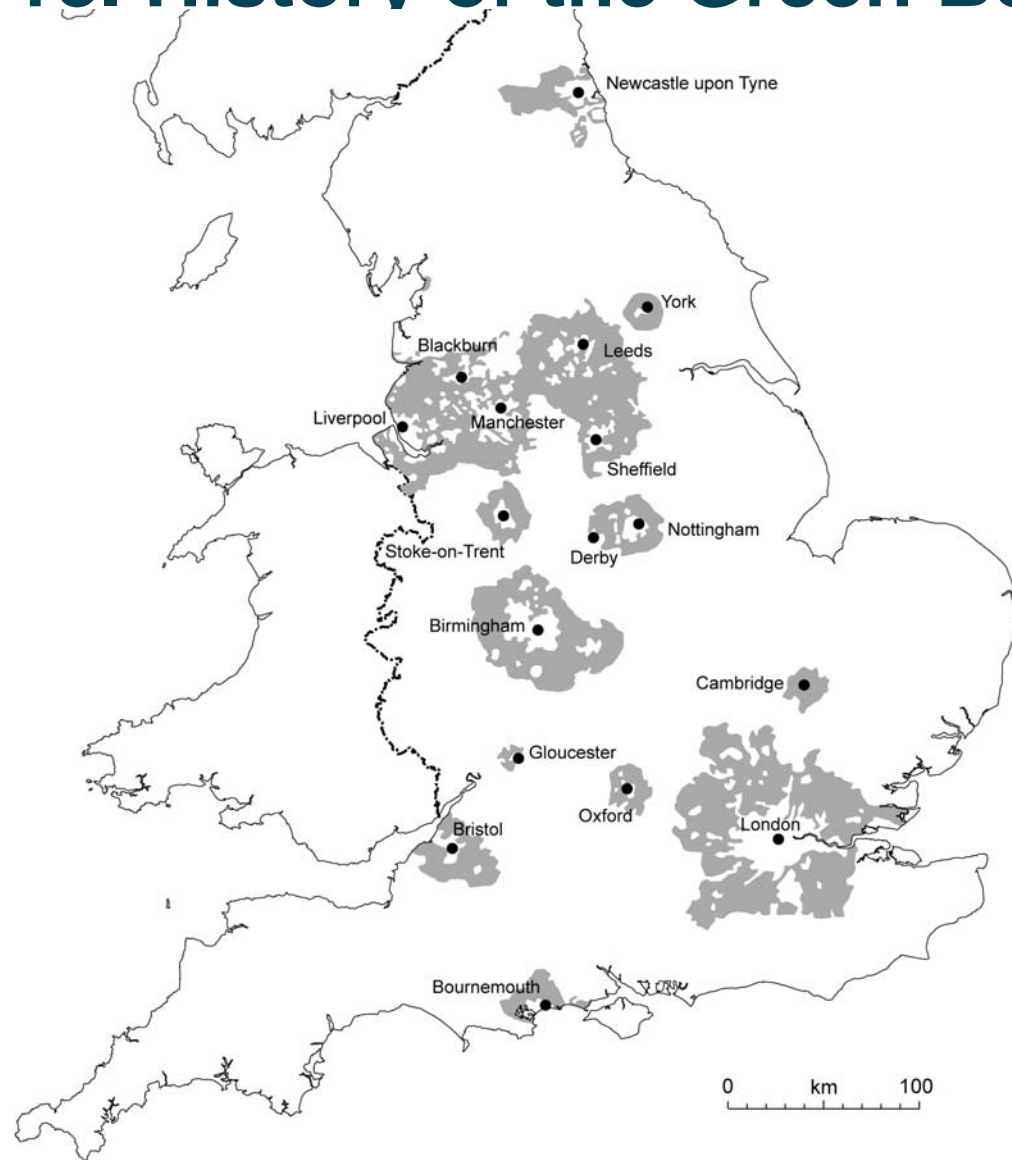
1c. History of the Green Belt: Before the War

1926	Patrick Abercrombie publishes 'The Preservation of Rural England', suggesting that 'rural planning' needs to control 'urban decentralisation'. CPRE formed.
1931	747 acres of land on the outskirts of Sheffield purchased to prevent the sprawl of the city
1932	Town and Country Planning Act accepts desirability of 'rural planning'
1933	Raymond Unwin proposes the creation of a narrow 'green girdle' around London for recreational purposes
1935	Restriction of Ribbon Development Act provides powers to prevent linear 'ribbon' development extending out of towns along main roads.
1935	Greater London Regional Planning Committee supports Raymond Unwin's proposal for a London Green Belt.
1938	Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act results in London County Council allocating £2million to 'assist local authorities in the purchase of open spaces, offering to pay up to 50% of the cost of any land selected for the green belt'

1d. History of the Green Belt: Before the War

1944	Patrick Abercrombie incorporates the 'green belt' into his Greater London Plan. It has both a recreational objective, and the objective of preventing further continuous suburban outward growth.
1947	Town and Country Planning Act allows authorities to include restrictions on development in development plans. 'Local councils could refuse permission for land to be developed, with any compensation being paid by the Government from a fund of £300million'.
1953	A campaign is launched – by the CPRE and the Oxfordshire Preservation Trust – to establish a green belt around Oxford.
1954	Circular 45 / 54 – from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government – declares that development not in accordance with a green belt scheme, where applicable, requires prior reference to the Minister.
1955	Duncan Sandys, Minister for Housing and Local Government urges all 'local authorities to protect any land acquired around their towns and cities "by the formal designation of clearly defined Green Belts". The circular set out the aims of Green Belt policy as "of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up areas, and of safeguarding the surrounding countryside against further encroachment"' (MHLG, 1955)

1e. History of the Green Belt



1f. History of the Green Belt

ENGLAND PPG2 Green Belts, 2001	WALES Planning Policy Wales, 2002	SCOTLAND Planning Policy 21 Green Belts, 2006
Purpose of Green Belt		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; • To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land; • To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; • To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and • To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas; • To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land; • To prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements; • To protect the setting of an urban area; • To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration; • To protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities; • To protect and give access to open space within and around towns and cities, as part of the wider structure of green space.
Use of Land within Green Belts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population; • Opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas; • Land in agricultural, forestry and related uses; • Retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live; • Secure nature conservation interest; • Improve damaged and derelict land around towns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for access to the open countryside; • Opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation; • Land for agriculture, forestry, and related purposes; • Maintain landscape / wildlife interest; • Improve derelict land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational uses which are compatible with an agricultural or natural setting; • Agricultural uses, including the re-use of historic agricultural buildings in keeping with their surroundings; • Woodland and forestry, including community woodlands; • Horticulture, including market gardening (but not retailing unconnected with or out-of-scale with this purpose).

2a. Emergent Criticisms

- Lauded as ‘planning’s most celebrated achievement’ (CPRE, 2005);
- But there has been an opening up of criticism of the Green Belt in recent years;
- It’s no longer seen as a sacred cow that people dare not question;
- There has been intense debate on the future of the Green Belt since the 1990s.

2b. Emergent Criticisms

- In the early 2000s, many national planning bodies started to question the direction of Green Belt policy:
- The RTPI argued that it was out of step with planning reform, and unable to respond to current challenges, relating to growth and infrastructure; it called for greater (local) pragmatism and flexibility;
- The TCPA argued that green belt is in essence an inert ‘green blanket’, and called on it to do more to promote sustainable development, and to help rural economies;
- Critically, the idea took root that Green Belt should not merely ‘**contain**’ but should provide a strategic framework to ‘**promote**’ all the things that we want to see in peri-urban hinterland.

2c. Emergent Criticisms

- But it's impossible to have a reasoned debate in England on the Green Belt;
- Any hint of reform will provoke outrage; any criticism will see you accused of wanting to:
 - ‘tear up the precious green belt...and plonking down rows of anonymous houses’ (Kampfner, 2003), or more commonly,
 - ‘concreting over the countryside’
- Basically, if you don't love the Green Belt you have no ‘environmental credentials’

2d. Emergent Criticisms

- **Criticisms were at first very general and focused on development impacts, e.g.:**
- Tightly drawn boundaries lead to town cramming;
- Pressure is only vented through ‘leap frogging’;
- It does not offer targeted assistance to regeneration efforts;
- Sustainable development should be promoted on the urban edge, including ‘extensions’ and green exemplar projects.

2e. Emergent Criticisms

- They have since become more sophisticated, and also focused on issues of ‘green infrastructure’, e.g.:
- Environmental quality is not enhanced by Green Belt;
- Landscape setting and sustainable development objectives can be served by ‘managing growth’ rather than simply restricting it; and
- **‘A positive approach’** could lead to the delivery of ‘valued environmental and social objectives’ (Barker, 2006: 10);
- Rather than being a limited ‘control tool’ they should come to constitute, where possible, ‘public spaces for recreation’ and for other functions

2f. Emergent Criticisms: Reform Ideas

Practically:

- Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should review green belt boundaries as part of their Regional Spatial Strategy/Local Development Framework processes to ensure that they remain relevant and appropriate, given the need to ensure that any planned development takes place in the most sustainable location;
- Local planning authorities should ensure that the quality of the green belts is enhanced through adopting a more **positive approach** towards applications that can be shown to enhance the surrounding areas through, for example, the creation of open access woodland or public parks in place of low-grade agricultural land; and
- The Government should consider how best to protect and enhance valued green space in towns and cities. In this context, the Government should review the merits of different models of protecting valued open space, including the 'green wedge' approach.

2g. Emergent Criticisms

- These ideas sparked outrage;
- The 'Evening Standard' ran headlines saying that government was about to open the 'floodgates' on development and, yes, 'concrete over the countryside'
- No legislation on Green Belt came from the Barker Review of Land Use Planning (2006)
- But, we are left with some feeling that Green Belt should 'do more' and should adopt a 'positive approach' to...something.

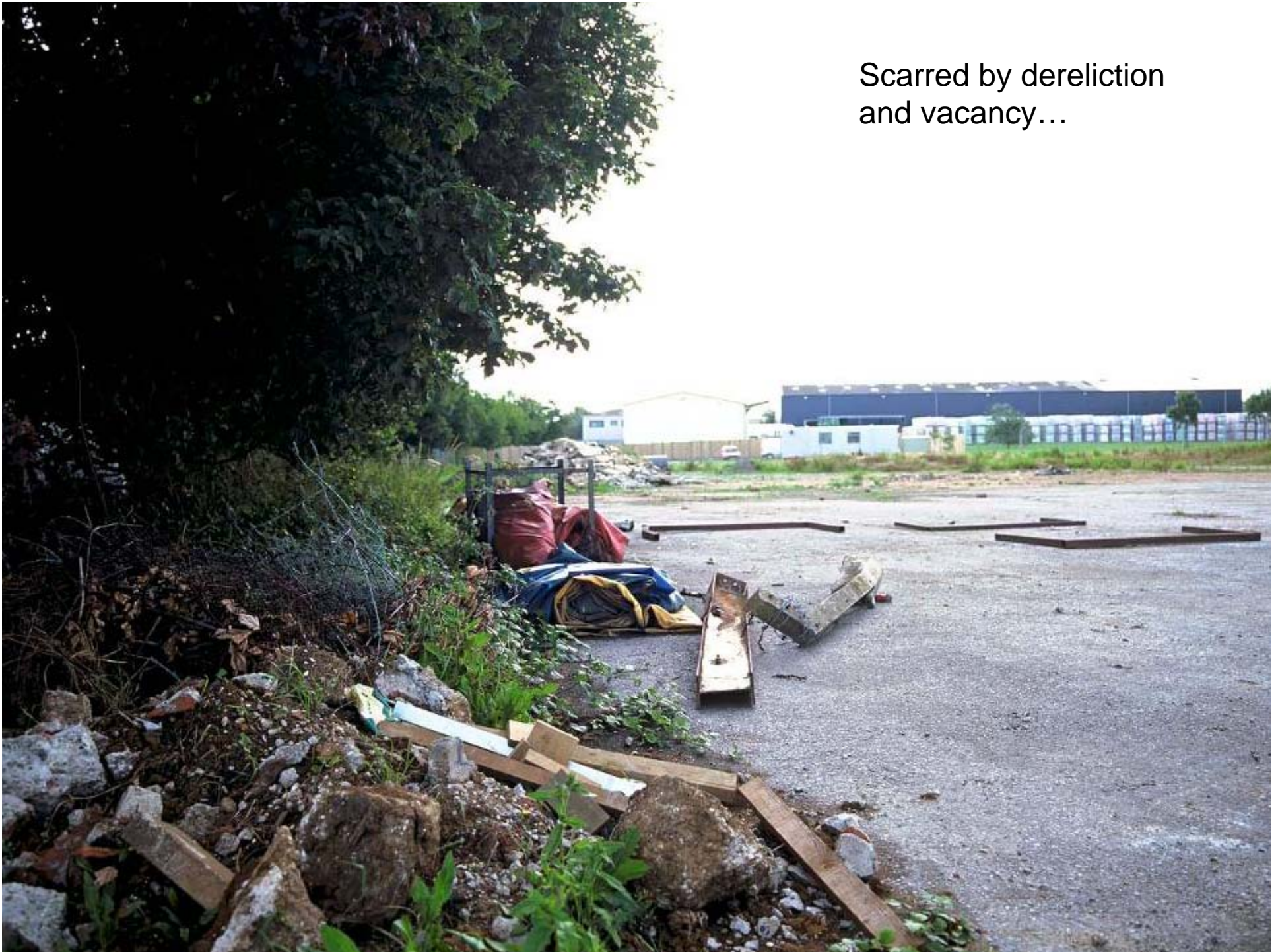
3a. Rethinking the Rural-Urban Fringe

- Some guidance on this ‘positive approach’ has been provided by Natural England (and by its predecessor, the Countryside Agency);
- Thinking on the ‘**rural-urban fringe**’ has filtered into debate on ‘enhancement’ of statutory Green Belt.
- The argument that fringes in general should be ‘improved’ has been linked to debate over green belt, seen by some as a potential improvement framework, at least where green belt exists.

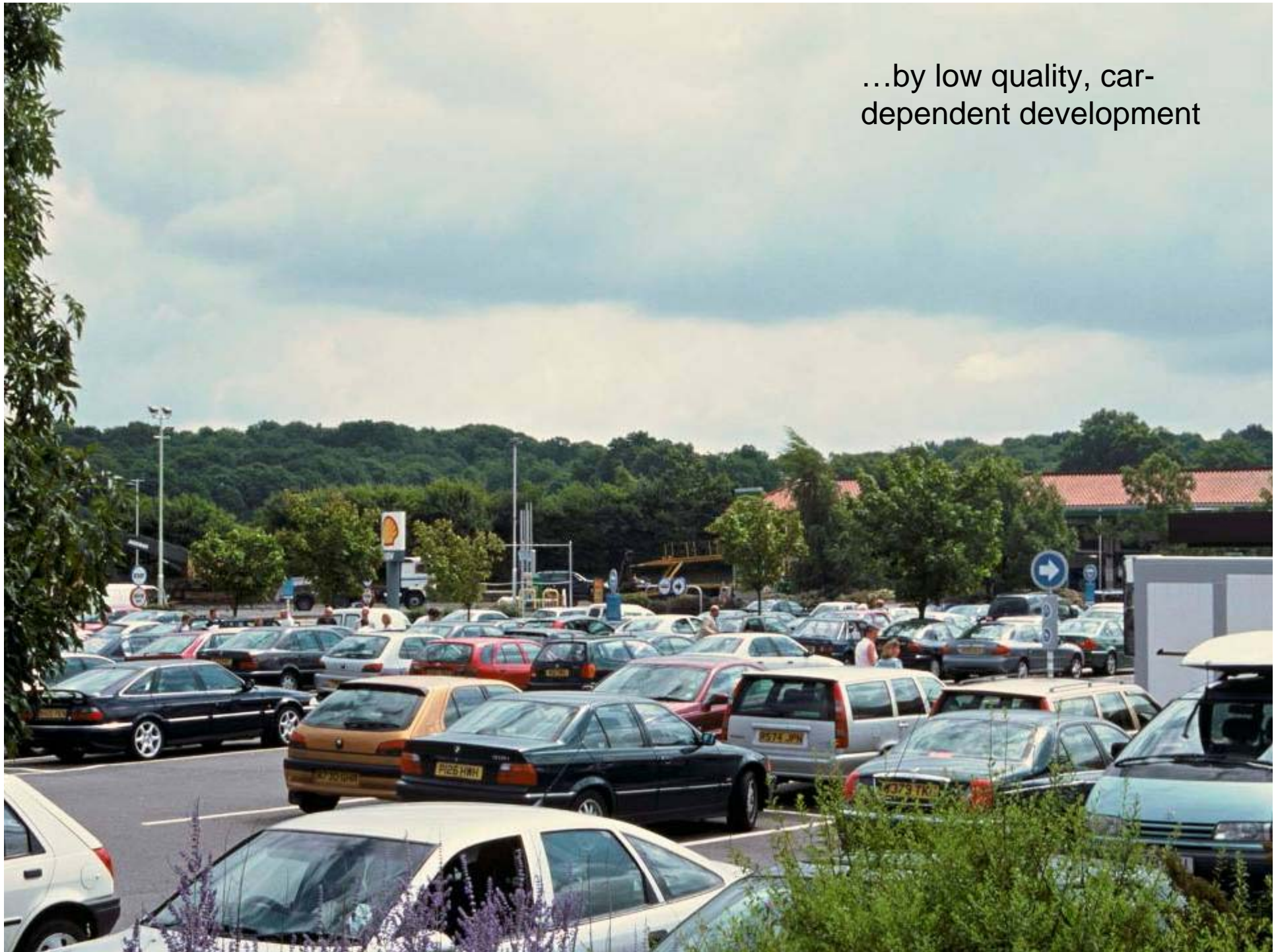
3b. Rethinking the Rural-Urban Fringe

- There is a belief in the limited current utility of fringe landscapes in the UK, but also a feeling that some hitherto hidden potential might be tapped;
- They are an open-space resource close to centres of population;
- They have been undervalued, but are a potential community asset;
- At the moment they are simply where development ‘gives way to nothing’; ‘non-places’ lacking identity, anonymous landscapes bereft of distinctiveness or meaning;
- They have been described as ‘dystopic’, a landscape of barbed-wire fences, patchy, ugly development which leaves a patchwork of illegible blots on the landscape;
- It’s less than sprawl; it’s simply a landscape of **near-urban scarring**.

Scarred by dereliction
and vacancy...



...by low quality, car-dependent development



...by land-fill and quarrying



...by urban detritus



...by orbital and arterial roads



...and more detritus



3c. Rethinking the Rural-Urban Fringe

- But from this near-urban ‘dystopia’, a potential has been identified;
- This recognises the different ‘functions’ that the fringe already plays, and that might be harnessed:

A historic function	A socio-cultural function	An ecological function
An Aesthetic function	An economic function	

...a post-industrial, historic landscape



...of (unorthodox) beauty,
according to Nicholas Pevsner



...a community landscape



...an economic landscape of shiny
business parks...





...or local food production

...ecologically rich and diverse,
often because it provides a
refuge from intensive farming



3d. Rethinking the Rural-Urban Fringe

- Can these ‘potentials’ be promoted, through some sort of fringe policy, or through planning;
- The ‘policy’ dimension is reliant on finding a shared vision for the fringe;
- Planning (i.e. delivery) could work through a **positive Green Belt framework** that required authorities to take actions, rather than merely divert or contain actions

4a. Enhancing the Green Belt: The Vision

- In 2004 / 05, Natural England's predecessor came up with a vision that involved grasping these potentials

A bridge to the country	A productive landscape
A gateway to the town	A place to live sustainably
A health centre	An engine for regeneration
A classroom	A nature reserve
A recycling centre	Heritage and cultural landscape
A power plant	Residential and industrial centres

- These are all 'labels' for basic landscape functions: being historic, aesthetic, socio-cultural, economic or ecological

4b. Enhancing the Green Belt

- Land / landscapes / space / place is inherently **'multi-functional'**, always possessing these core functions
- This capacity to perform core functions is essentially the 'potential' that is recognised, and that planning is being called upon to promote / enhance;
- **'[...] the concept of multi-functionality is getting increasing attention not only in the landscape sciences but in society in general, since it seems to be an important aspect of [...] sustainable development'**
Brandt and Vejre (2003)

4c. Enhancing the Green Belt

- ‘[...] used as a planning concept [**multi-functionality**] addresses the planning challenge to concentrate and combine several [...] functions in the same area, so as to save scarce space and to exploit economies of synergy’ (Rodenburg and Nijkamp, 2004)
- ‘[...] the future management of landscape must include some kind of **multi-functionality** in its approach [...] it is a task of spatial planning to assign function and future forms of function and use to land’ (Brandt et al, 2003)

4d. Enhancing the Green Belt

- Planning positively to harness potential can be viewed as the antithesis of what has happened within the framework of green belt;
- The jump from inertia to positive action, a presumption in favour of ‘green actions’ within a ‘green belt’;
- This offers one way forward

4e. Enhancing the Green Belt: Practice?

Green belt as a special planning framework, not a 'simplified planning zone but a zone of special consideration or positive presumption:

- Promote economic vibrancy by encouraging 'green' commercial development including organic food processing or renewable commercial energy production;
- Provide a framework for green recreation – which embraces the existing qualities of the fringe rather than seeking to replace them - and for education linked to the conservation of wildlife and built heritage;
- Provide a framework for green transport and the promotion of walking and cycling;
- Promote green housing where appropriate, that adheres to particular standards including green transport, energy efficient construction, and high quality design, and where appropriate, affordability;

4f. Enhancing the Green Belt: Practice?

- Promote sustainable, green and organic farming practices;
- Promote sustainable waste management and green energy production;
- Place social goals on an equal footing with environmental objectives within the context of a 'social green belt';
- Set out a duty to undertake landscape character and quality assessments that might lead to the protection of some areas and the promotion of green housing, green energy production and so forth in others;
- Avoid becoming an impenetrable barrier to change (Gallent, et al, 2004)

Enhanced Green Belt

