

Guidance on green belt sales

NEW GUIDANCE published by the Local Government Association (LGA) has urged town halls to take swift action to protect green belt sites and warned people hoping to build new houses against buying land protected by planning laws.

Increasing numbers of landbanking companies buy up farmland, often in green belt or other protected areas, and divide it into plots. While they do not guarantee planning permission, many post quotes on their website that give the impression the Government's planning policy will change in the near future.

People pay a lot of money for agricultural land, which is then abandoned and can become neglected, because of the strict planning restrictions on protected land. High stakes, or even fences, are often set up to mark out the plots. The LGA is urging councils to:

- Make use of all available legislation, including "Article 4" notices, to stop fences being erected.
- Offer residents impartial planning advice. Sites protected by planning law are extremely unlikely to gain permission for development.
- Monitor the activities of known

landbankers and inform Trading Standards or the DTI of misleading or illegal trading practices.

Recently, the DTI took action against United Land Holdings plc. A petition to wind up the company was presented to the High Court by the DTI, and the firm has had to suspend all marketing activity.

The company dissuaded potential buyers from consulting West Wiltshire District Council and provided inaccurate information about the likelihood of gaining planning permission.