

Ministerial Replies

GOVERNMENT policy on the Green Belts, land speculation and the rating of land values was outlined by Mr. Henry Brooke, Minister of Housing and Local Government, in written parliamentary answers published on July 5.

On Green Belts, in reply to Mr. William Deedes, (Conservative, Ashford) Mr. Brooke wrote:—

"I should like to make it clear, in view of some recent comments in the Press, that there has been no change whatever in my policy towards green belts, which remains the same as that of my predecessor.

"Nor do I contemplate any change. I believe that green belts, once properly established, should, except in very special circumstances be maintained inviolate; and I believe further that they will be so maintained over the years, for this is a policy which commands wide support.

"It is, therefore, the more important to make sure that the land to be reserved for green belt should be decided upon initially with care and discrimination. Remarks to this effect have been misconstrued in some quarters giving rise to a false idea that policy was being relaxed. The right principles are that a green belt should be established only where there is clear need to contain the growth of a town within limits which can be defined at the time; and the limits of the belt should be carefully drawn so as not to include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open for the purposes of the green belt.

"Further, where a town is to be closely circumscribed by green belt, proper provision must be made for development beyond the green belt. This is a matter which local planning authorities examine when reviewing their development plans, and which it is my policy to take into account when considering and approving them."

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What progress is being made with the Government's review of the problems arising from the sharp rise in the price of land in certain areas; when does the Minister expect to be able to announce measures to deal with these problems?—Mr. Arthur Skeffington, M.P. (Labour, Hayes & Harlington).

In view of the recent rapid increase in land speculation, will the Minister take steps to modify his policy with regard to a free market in land?—Mr. W. Hamilton M.P., (Labour, Fife, W.).

Mr. H. Brooke: "What I am doing is to ask local planning authorities, in the review of their development plans now proceeding, to allocate more land to building beyond the green belts. In addition to that I am seeking to encourage the fullest use of land within the urban areas. But we have to face the fact that the demand in and around the most prosperous towns will continue to exceed the supply, unless we are to abandon planning policies of

restricting the growth of towns, preserving good agricultural land and protecting the countryside; and that I am not prepared to do. What this means is that builders must turn their attention increasingly to re-development of older areas within the towns which is our chief need.

"I am not prepared to modify the policy of a free market in land, without which of course we should not have had the vigorous building progress of the last few years. What the situation calls for is administrative action of the kind I have described, rather than more legislation".

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In view of the greater equitability of the system of the rating of land site values, why has the Government declined to abolish the present system of rating?—Mr. A. W. J. Lewis, M.P., (Labour, West Ham North).

Mr. H. Brooke: "I cannot accept the hon. Member's assumption. Rating of site values is a question which has been examined by a succession of committees and commissions since the beginning of the century and reported against by each one of them. I see no reason to reject their advice."

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Mr. J. S. Maclay (Scottish Secretary) on July 5 gave verbal replies to questions about Scottish local authorities and the price of land. Mr. E. G. Willis, (Labour, Edinburgh E.) inquired what extra financial burden they would have to bear this year as the result of having to pay market value instead of existing use value for land acquired compulsorily. Mr. Maclay thought that additional "capital expenditure" would not exceed £300,000. He had no evidence that Scottish local authorities were being exploited by land speculators and would be interested to hear of any case where they may, as his questioner suggested, have been so affected.

Planning and Urban Renewal

PLANNING and urban renewal was discussed by Sir Keith Joseph, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, when he addressed the R.I.B.A. conference on June 17.

There was a good deal of misunderstanding about the powers of local planning authorities, he said. "Under ordinary planning control, they can lay down the pattern of land uses, they can operate a plot-ratio control, and they can reject particular proposals which, even though they conform to the proposed land use, do not meet their standards of design and external appearance. But that is a negative form of control; and it is a very different thing from the authority being able to say that they insist on buildings of such and such a shape, or conforming to such and such requirements, being put up."

In certain special areas, particularly where major revision of roads was needed, public ownership might well