

more character' for new towns

'Less concrete,

By Rowena Mason
Political Correspondent

A NEW generation of towns in the countryside will be built with character and green spaces, rather than sprawling "concrete grids", David Cameron has said.

The Prime Minister set out his vision of "characterful" new towns with plenty of gardens and parks, amid fears that the Government's planning reforms will blight parts of the countryside.

Critics yesterday said that new towns were still an "alarming" threat because the planning reforms will encourage developers to build on rural areas.

In a strong defence of the changes, Mr Cameron said it was crucial for Britain to find places where new towns can be built. He wants to copy the idea of garden cit-

ies, invented in the late Victorian era, to make sure new towns have enough green space. Towns surrounding the London green belt, including Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth, were built with open spaces and good transport connections.

"While everyone celebrates the success of the green belt, far fewer people celebrate the contribution that the new towns made to maintaining it intact," Mr Cameron said in a speech at the Institute of Civil Engineers.

"In the last century, private and social enterprise also created places like Hampstead Garden Suburb, Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City – not perfect, but popular – green, planned, secure, with gardens, places to play and characterful houses; not just car-dominated concrete grids." The Prime Minister

acknowledged that "sprawling over the countryside isn't the answer", saying the green belt and national parks would be protected. But he said there was an

"urgent need to find places where we are prepared to allow significant new growth to happen".

He also insisted that the Government

would push ahead with reforms under the National Planning Policy Framework, which is due to be published this week.

The draft planning reforms included a "presumption in favour of sustainable development", which critics such as the National Trust claim would make it difficult for local people to argue against new projects.

Campaigners hoped the wording would be changed, but it is understood the Treasury is anxious to encourage development to boost the economy.

Roberta Blackman Woods MP, Labour's shadow planning minister, said she was "extremely concerned if Treasury pressure means that sufficient care and attention has not been given to resolving the problems with the draft".

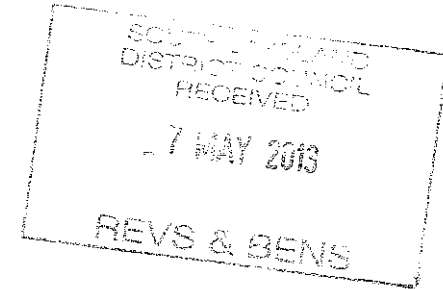
Last night, Neil Sinden, the policy

director of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said it was not enough for the Prime Minister to safeguard the green belt when vast swaths of other rural areas are also threatened.

"The Prime Minister is alarmingly misinformed," he said. "Of course we welcome his protection of the green belt, but there is other countryside that people often value more that is at risk."

The Government will later this year examine where new towns can be put with the minimum disruption to the countryside.

Under plans to build 16,000 new houses, the Prime Minister yesterday gave an extra £150 million in cheap loans to developers.



Dear Sir, Grange has always had character and green spaces.
Please do all you can to keep it this way.
Yours sincerely

Mrs Leaver

