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Garden grab homes on the rise

Quarter of houses built on land that was residential

By Christopher Hope
Whitehall Editor

THREE out of four new homes were built on gardens in some parts of the country last year, according to new figures which disclose the extent of "garden grabbing". Figures

from the Department for Communities and Local Government indicated that the rate of building on gardens was almost three times the national average in some of the most sought after areas of England last year.

Until June this year, gardens were classified as brownfield sites, which made them easier for builders to get planning permission.

Overall, 25 per cent of new homes were built on previously residential land, including back gardens. That was more than double the 11 per

cent rate when Labour came to power in 1997.

But the rate was almost three times higher in the Chilterns, where 71 per cent of new homes were built on gardens, compared with 22 per cent in 1997.

In South Buckinghamshire and Sevenoaks, 72 per cent of new homes were built on gardens, compared with 43 per cent and 24 per cent in 1997.

The garden grabbing rate was more than twice the national average in New Forest, Worthing, Runnymede, Winchester and Bournemouth.

The rates in these areas had more than doubled since 1997.

In June, Greg Clark, the decentralisation minister, said gardens would no longer be classified as brownfield for planning purposes in an attempt to halt building on gardens.

He said it would prevent unwanted development where residents objected, and protect the character of their neighbourhoods.

Mr Clark said last night: "Last year an even higher proportion of homes were built

on previously residential land, which includes back gardens. "Building on gardens robs communities of green breathing space, safe places for children to play and havens for urban wildlife.

"It was ridiculous that gardens were classified in the same group as derelict factories and disused railway sidings."

The plans to restrict building on gardens were welcomed by experts. Richard Baskford, from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, said: "If more garden space is

turned into buildings they [gardens] will likely decline further and the wonder that children experience on the doorstep will dwindle.

"We hope that the new measures will protect the habitats of species that have become synonymous with English gardens and demonstrate a rich eco system in our own back yards."

Dr Ross Cameron, from the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Reading, said protecting gardens was important to improving quality of life.