

6. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK MEMBER WORKING GROUP

GREEN BELT ANALYSIS

MEETING DATE: 29TH MAY 2008

OFFICERS REPORTING: IAN BELLINGER SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER:
STRATEGY AND PLANS TEAM

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the LDF Member Working Group on the progress of the Green Belt Analysis exercise, including initial conclusions.
- 1.2 Members are asked to note that work on the Green Belt Analysis exercise is continuing. The final results will be published as part of the evidence base supporting the subsequent Issues and Options consultation exercises. Until this time any output from the Green Belt Analysis exercise should be treated as confidential.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the LDF Member Working Group:

- 1. Notes the results of the community engagement exercise and endorses the methodology for undertaking the analysis exercise; and**
- 2. Notes the initial results of the analysis exercise.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the meeting on 18th December 2007, the Local Development Framework Member Working Group (LDF MWG) resolved that Cabinet be advised of the need to undertake a Green Belt Analysis exercise in response to the direction of the Inspector examining the Submission Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document and the emerging regional policy context. The matter was reported to Cabinet, following the Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at their meetings on 24th January 2008.
- 3.2 Cabinet endorsed the LDF MWG's acceptance that Green Belt Analysis work was required as part of a wider exercise which would also consider development opportunities that could arise within settlements. Cabinet also endorsed that any Green Belt Analysis should include local elements in addition to those national purposes of Green Belts set out in Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts (PPG2).

4.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 In February, views were invited from elected representatives and interest groups on the importance of each national Green Belt purpose, and the local importance of characteristics and activities performed by the Green Belt or undertaken within it.
- 4.2 A total of 58 local interest groups were contacted, including all Parish and Town Councils. 38 valid responses were received. Of these, the largest response was from local interest groups, followed by RBWM Members and Parish / Town Councils. The main outcomes are summarised below:

- All 5 Green Belt purposes were strongly supported. A large majority of respondents (76%-82% range) indicated that 'checking unrestricted sprawl', 'preventing towns from merging', 'safeguarding the countryside from encroachment' and 'preserving the setting and character of historic towns' were 'very important'. 'Assisting urban regeneration' received a lesser but still strong level of support with 57% indicating 'very important' with an additional 41% as 'important'.
- The most highly supported characteristics / activities were 'retaining woodland', 'preserving the setting and distinctiveness of villages', and 'preserving the setting of historic and architectural features'. Other highly supported characteristics / activities were 'access to the countryside including walking, cycling and riding', 'providing opportunities for sport and recreation', 'providing public open space' and 'retaining long distance views of Windsor Castle'.
- New characteristics / activities proposed by responses include 'long distance views' and 'the setting of the River Thames'.
- When asked to rank importance the largest support was for 'preserving the setting and distinctiveness of villages' and 'retaining woodland'.

5.0 METHODOLOGY FOR GREEN BELT ANALYSIS

5.1 Members will recall that a comprehensive Green Belt Review involves four basic independent stages, namely,

1. Identify role and purpose of the Green Belt;
2. Identify constraints to development options;
3. Identify sustainable development opportunities; and
4. Identify defensible boundaries.

5.2 Given the strategic nature of the study at this stage, it is inappropriate for the Green Belt Analysis exercise to consider detailed boundary issues (stage 4). This will instead be the subject of an independent exercise which would address any consequences arising from the preferred approach to development and other site specific issues raised with the Council by residents and local businesses.

5.3 A full explanation of the methodology is included within the Green Belt Analysis: Part 1 Report, however for convenience a summary is provided below.

Stage 1: Identify role and purpose of the Green Belt.

5.4 The Royal Borough lies within the general extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt and at no point forms its outer edge. Green Belt boundaries have also been tested through a number of public inquiries and can therefore be deemed fit for purpose. This context therefore defines the project area as the whole of the Royal Borough. Settlement boundaries were defined as towns and villages excluded from the Green Belt for both settlements within the Royal Borough and within neighbouring local authorities. This is supported by the results of the community engagement exercise, which highlighted the importance of preserving the setting and distinctiveness of villages.

5.5 To allow for a robust and comprehensive spatial analysis, the Royal Borough was divided into 500m by 500m land parcels. To ensure a transparent and consistent

analysis, assessment criteria were identified by drawing upon PPG2 and other relevant national planning policy statements, an examination of other Green Belt studies, national legislation and the results of the community engagement exercise.

Table 1: Green Belt Purpose Assessment Criteria	
PPG2 Green Belt Purpose	Criteria
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Contribution to preventing continuous ribbon / linear development. <input type="checkbox"/> Distance from excluded settlement boundary.
To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance between excluded settlements.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<input type="checkbox"/> Nature conservation value. <input type="checkbox"/> River Thames Corridor. <input type="checkbox"/> Presence of trees and woodland. <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural land classification. <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape quality.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<input type="checkbox"/> Views to and from Windsor town centre and Eton College. <input type="checkbox"/> Presence of historic environment (Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments).
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other land	<input type="checkbox"/> All land parcels scored equally by encouraging developments in the urban areas.

- 5.6 A weighting system was applied to ensure that each Green Belt purpose held equal importance. This was supported by results of the community engagement exercise which suggested there was no justification for any ranking of the Green Belt purposes. The output is shown as a series of maps within the Green Belt Analysis: Part 2 Appendices, Appendix E. These show the results of each individual Green Belt purpose and summary maps showing the combined scores.
- 5.7 To allow for visual interpretation, the results of the Green Belt purpose assessment have been colour coded from dark green (low scores), through yellow and orange (medium scores, to red (high scores). Thus, areas shown as green have the lowest scores. It is these land parcels which make the lowest contribution to the purpose(s) of the Green Belt.

Green Belt Purpose Map Interpretation			
Colour	Score	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose(s)	Comment
Red	High	Highest contribution to Green Belt purpose(s)	Development within these areas would cause the greatest threat to Green Belt integrity
Orange	Medium / High	Medium / high contribution to Green Belt purpose(s)	-
Yellow	Medium / Low	Medium / low contribution to Green Belt purpose(s)	-
Green	Low	Lowest contribution to Green Belt purpose(s)	Development within these areas would cause the least threat to Green Belt integrity

Stage 2: Identify constraints to development options.

- 5.8 Areas where development is inhibited by hard constraints was then mapped. By definition, development in these areas is harmful and should not form the preferred location for settlement growth.

Hard Constraints	
Summary	Designations
Flood Risk	<input type="checkbox"/> Flood Zone 3b The Functional Flood Plain <input type="checkbox"/> Flood Zone 3a High Probability
International Nature Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Areas of Conservation <input type="checkbox"/> Special Protection Areas <input type="checkbox"/> Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites)
National Nature Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Sites of Special Scientific Interest
Public Safety Zones	<input type="checkbox"/> Heathrow Airport Public Safety Zone

- 5.9 In addition, national policy seeks to avoid the sterilisation of minerals sites by development. The working (extraction) of minerals prior to development results in a long timeframe. The extent of Minerals Safeguarding Areas was therefore provided as a time related constraint for the purpose of the study.

Stage 3: Identify sustainable development opportunities.

5.10 To allow the appreciation of the sustainability merits of different locations, sustainability indicators were identified. These cover a wide range of national sustainability objectives. Assessing sustainability is a complex matter, as an individual's opinion on the importance of environmental, economic and social indicators will lead to different conclusions. Due to these complexities, the scoring of land parcels was considered an unsound basis from which to proceed. Instead, indicators are presented and interpreted.

Sustainability Indicators	
Social Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary Sector Education <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Sector Education <input type="checkbox"/> General Practitioner Surgery <input type="checkbox"/> Indices of Deprivation
Economic Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/> Town Centre Boundary <input type="checkbox"/> District and Local Centre <input type="checkbox"/> Employment Area
Environmental Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/> Air Quality Management Area <input type="checkbox"/> Noise Pollution <input type="checkbox"/> Public Open Space / National Trust / Crown Estate <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Areas <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife Heritage Sites <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Land Classification <input type="checkbox"/> Topography <input type="checkbox"/> River Thames Corridor
Movement	<input type="checkbox"/> Main Road Network <input type="checkbox"/> Train Station <input type="checkbox"/> Bus Route <input type="checkbox"/> Cycle Network <input type="checkbox"/> Public Rights of Way Network

5.11 Sustainability indicators have been interpreted to identify locations across the Royal Borough which generally satisfy a greater number of indicators and may therefore be interpreted as being more sustainable. These areas provide an opportunity to build upon inherent locational advantages. Development in alternative locations would need to deliver a greater level of infrastructure to offer the same sustainability performance.

5.12 Details of sustainability indicators are provided as a series of maps within the Green Belt Analysis: Part 2 Appendices Appendix G. These show the results of individual indicators and a summary map.

6.0 CAVEATS ON USE OF INITIAL RESULTS

6.1 Work on the Green Belt Analysis exercise is continuing to be refined. For example, the robustness of datasets gained from external organisations (e.g. Primary Care Trust, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre) is being checked and datasets relating

to bus routes and frequency and indices of deprivation have yet to be integrated into the project. Once all this data is gathered, the Strategy and Plans Team will review the formal findings to ensure consistency of interpretation throughout the study to ensure against bias.

- 6.2 The final results will be published as part of the evidence base supporting the subsequent Issues and Options consultation exercises. Until this time any output from Green Belt Analysis exercise should be treated as confidential.

7.0 INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Each stage of the Green Belt Analysis is completed independently. The outputs are then overlaid to show where the findings align or complement each other. The project summary maps are contained within the Green Belt Analysis: Part 2 Appendices, Appendix H.

- 7.2 Land making the largest contribution to Green Belt purposes is concentrated around east Windsor, stretching both north through Eton and Eton Wick, and south through Windsor Great Park. Land between Cookham Rise and Cookham also scores highly, as does land within the River Thames corridor and generally in proximity to Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale. Land achieving the lowest score, and thereby making a lesser contribution to Green Belt purposes is found to the south of central Maidenhead, to the west and south of Maidenhead, and in West Windsor. Smaller areas north of Sunninghill also score relatively low. These areas may provide an opportunity for settlement growth which causes the least threat to the integrity of the Green Belt.

- 7.3 The spatial mapping of hard constraints illustrates that development would be unsuitable in large parts of the Royal Borough. The most extensive constraints are flood risk and nature conservation, and affect the River Thames corridor and land to the south of Windsor within Windsor Great Park. The presence of hard constraints significantly inhibits development potential through Cookham, east Maidenhead, Eton, northern Windsor and throughout Datchet, Old Windsor and Wraysbury.

- 7.4 Areas which generally satisfy a greater number of sustainability indicators are found around north west Maidenhead, south west Maidenhead, south of central Maidenhead, and west Windsor.

- 7.5 Locations where the findings align or complement each other are:

- South west of Maidenhead
- South of central Maidenhead
- West of Windsor

- 7.6 Subject to the final outcome of the study and associated survey work on sites within the urban areas as part of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, and the townscape assessment, the results of this presented exercise will inform the development of possible options through the LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options Pre-submission Consultation.

8.0 **NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 The Green Belt Analysis will be completed and used to inform decisions regarding the possible direction and extent of settlement growth for inclusion in the LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation. It is anticipated that the final study will be brought back to the LDF MWG in September.

Background Papers: Report to the LDF MWG 'Green Belt Review: Report on Proposed Methodology' (18th December 2008);
Report to Council 'Local Development Framework: Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document: Submission Document' (26th September 2006);
Report on the Examination of the Windsor and Maidenhead Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document (7th September 2007) and accompanying covering letter of same date addressed to David Lunn;
Report on the Examination of the South East Plan (August 2007);
Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts (January 1995, amended March 2001).

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