

Report for: ACTION
Item Number: 4



<b>Contains Confidential or Exempt Information</b>	<b>Part I.</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Report of Consultation: Green Belt and Countryside Character</b>
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<b>For Consideration By</b>	Local Plans Working Group
<b>Date to be Considered</b>	24 November 2014

<p><b>Report Summary</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report is to update Members on the specific results of the Borough Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation document (January 2014) as they relate to the Green Belt and Countryside Character chapter.</p>
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## 1. Details of Recommendations

### **RECOMMENDATION: That the Local Plans Working Group:**

#### **1. Note the content of the report.**

## 2. Reason for Recommendation and Options Considered

### Introduction and background

- 2.1 The Borough Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation document contained six policies dealing with the Green Belt and Countryside Character matters:
- GBC1: Green Belt
  - GBC2: Countryside Character
  - GBC3: New Residential Development in the Green Belt
  - GBC4: Reuse and Replacement of Non-residential Buildings in the Green Belt
  - GBC5: Equestrian Development in the Green Belt
  - GBC6: Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt
- 2.2 These policy approaches mirror the Green Belt policies in the Adopted Local Plan with the exception of GBC2 which builds on the countryside character of the borough and translates key objectives into a number of principles that are suggested would be needed to be taken into account in assessing development proposals in the countryside.
- 2.3 This report provides a commentary on the representations received in response to the Preferred Options consultation with respect to Preferred Policy Option GBC1-5. Preferred Policy Option GBC6 will be considered in a separate report.

### Borough Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation

#### *Green Belt*

- 2.4 Preferred Policy GBC1 indicates that the preferred policy approach is to maintain and support the Green Belt in order to safeguard the open and rural character of the borough's countryside and to protect it from inappropriate development. It indicates that the boundaries of existing Recognised Settlements washed over in the Green Belt are to be maintained in order to identify the limits of any infilling and indicates that the council will determine whether local exceptional circumstances exist to warrant minor changes to these boundaries in neighbourhood plans. The policy approach refers to six major developed sites in the Green Belt and refers to areas 'excluded from the Green Belt but conspicuous when viewed from it' where proposals for development will only be supported in certain circumstances. At Question 11, the consultation asked "*do you support the principles and preferred approach included in preferred policy option GBC1?*"
- 2.5 43 objections were raised in relation to Question 11 and there were 46 representations of support to the approach. The main issues raised through the consultation on this preferred policy option are:

- The need for greater clarity of approach
- Concern about the council having the power to determine exceptional circumstances
- The need for a more detailed, criteria based policy
- The need to acknowledge the review of Green Belt boundaries and
- The Edge of Settlement analysis should be extended to consider Recognised Settlements.

#### *Boundaries*

- 2.6 The Preferred Options document indicated four areas/categories where Green Belt adjustments were proposed. Land on the edge of Ascot High Street and land at Little Farm Nursery, Maidenhead were identified as areas where development in the Green Belt would be supported to achieve community benefits. Land north of Ockwells Road was identified to be included within the Green Belt. Furthermore, several minor adjustments to the Green Belt boundary were proposed and were included in Appendix B of the Consultation document. At Question 12, the consultation asked “do you support or object to any of the minor adjustments to the Green Belt as listed in Appendix B? If so, which area(s) and why?”
- 2.7 29 objections were raised in relation to Question 12 and there were 39 representations of support giving a mix of support and objections to specific areas where change was proposed.

#### *Countryside character*

- 2.8 Preferred Policy Option GBC2 incorporated five key countryside principles that were considered important to the delivery of the plan. The policy option emphasised the need for development in the countryside to respect its character and to take into account a number of principles that addressed issues such as careful siting and location of proposals for new development; scale; design and layout; level of activity; protecting the best agricultural land and the importance of residential amenity. The approach encouraged the identification of important rural characteristics through neighbourhood plans or village design statements; identified the types of development that would be supported in the countryside and highlighted the importance of demonstrating very special circumstances in instances where significant infrastructure was proposed in the countryside. At Question 13, the consultation asked “do you support the principles and preferred approach included in preferred policy option GBC2?”
- 2.9 26 objections were raised in relation to Question 13 and there were 28 representations of support for the policy approach. The main issues raised through the consultation on this preferred policy option are:
- The status of Recognised Settlements within the context of the NPPF
  - Emphasis needed on the protection and enhancement of habitats
  - Policy is over-restrictive
  - Policy should more readily reflect rural economic growth and tourism in particular
  - The protection of best and most versatile agricultural land is overly restrictive
  - Policy should reflect principles which relate to the historic and cultural heritage

### *New Residential Development in the Green Belt*

2.10 Preferred Policy Option GBC3 mirrors Policy GB3-GB5 of the Adopted Local Plan. It sets out the instances where new residential development in the Green Belt is appropriate. It refers to infilling within the boundaries of Recognised Settlements; a proven need associated with agriculture or forestry; the creation of a subordinate dwelling; rebuilding or one-for-one replacements; affordable housing on rural exceptions sites; the reuse of a building; and reference to where proposals are identified in neighbourhood plans. It sets parameters for the extension and alteration of an existing residential buildings and also refers to extensions of residential curtilages in or into the Green Belt. At Question 14, the consultation asked “do you support the principles and preferred approach included in preferred policy option GBC3?”

2.11 35 objections were raised in relation to Question 14 and 22 representations of support. Most recognised the difference in allowing some development in recognised settlements. The main issues raised through the consultation on this preferred policy option were:

- Protecting gaps between settlements
- Concern about affordable housing
- ‘Limited infilling’ preferred as opposed to ‘infilling’ within Recognised Settlements

### *Reuse and Replacement of non-Residential Buildings in the Green Belt*

2.12 Preferred Policy Option GBC4 mirrors Policy GB8 of the Adopted Local Plan. It sets out the criteria by which proposals for development would be judged. For example, when the building was completed; its type of construction; its impact on the openness of the Green Belt. It also refers to instances where the reuse would be appropriate for business and industrial units. At Question 15, the consultation asked “do you support the principles and preferred approach included in preferred policy option GBC4?”

2.13 There were only 10 objections raised in relation to Question 15 and 42 representations of support, indicating considerable support for the policy approach. The main issues raised through the consultation on this preferred policy option are:

- The coverage of the policy should include all non-residential uses not just agriculture
- Policy should only apply to buildings that were substantially completed 10 years prior to the application and used for similar rural purposes

### *Equestrian Development in the Green Belt*

2.14 Preferred Policy Option GBC5 mirrors policy GB6-7 of the Adopted Local Plan. Whilst this is a very specific policy, its inclusion in the Preferred Options Consultation reflected residents concerns about the proliferation of equestrian establishments in the Borough. The preferred policy approach is divided by scale - dealing with large new or enlarged commercial or private equestrian establishments and small scale private equestrian related development subject to a set of criteria for each. At Question 16, the consultation asked “do you support the principles and preferred approach included in preferred policy option GBC5?”

2.15 There were only 5 objections raised in relation to Question 16 and 39 representations of support indicating considerable support for the policy approach. The main objection centred around the policy not being positive and failing to acknowledge the positive benefits of equestrian development with attention drawn to Ascot Racecourse and Guards Club Polo Club and their contribution to culture, tourism and the economy and that there is no policy basis within the National Planning Policy Framework to control equestrian development .

Comment on the main issues raised

2.16 In light of the above, it is considered that the issues raised through the Preferred Options Consultation document are not so fundamental that changes in policy approach are needed. As a consequence, it is not considered necessary to include these policies in the Second Preferred Options Consultation. Moreover, the representations made as a response to preferred policy approaches GBC1-GBC5 can be adequately addressed through the presentation of the fully worked up policies as part of the Regulation 19 (submission) consultation, later next year.