

Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD



Independent Examination

The Green Belt

Published 23 August 2007

HD/CFD/SRSI

Subject Response Statement I

The Green Belt

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Subject Response Statement has been prepared as part of a series of statements to provide additional information on a range of themes that have been raised by objectors in their Amplified Statements, specifically in relation to week I of the Examination in Public. They serve to provide additional information on a specific topic area and are cross referred to within the Council's individual responses to amplified statements.
- 1.2 In total five Subject Response Statements have been prepared addressing the following topics to be covered in Week I of the Examination in Public:
1. The Green Belt
 2. Housing Trajectory
 3. Sustainability Appraisal
 4. Infrastructure Delivery/ Standard Charges
 5. Conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy
- 1.3 This Subject Response Statement addresses the Green Belt in the national and regional context and the Council's approach to the Green Belt in relation to the spatial strategy contained within submitted Core Strategy Development Plan Document.
- 1.4 Specifically it addresses the following key issues (at section 4) that have been put forward by a number of objectors to the Core Strategy:
- a) whether the Council has properly considered the need for a review of the Green Belt boundary within the Borough, particularly in the light of emerging national and regional policy and specifically the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England Plan.
 - b) whether, in selecting its options for housing growth within the Core Strategy, the Council has taken into account the suitability and sustainability of potential locations within the Green Belt.
 - c) whether there should be any site specific significant alterations to the boundary of the Green Belt within the Borough.

2.0 National policy guidance background

- 2.1 National policy guidance concerning Green Belts is contained within **Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts**. PPG 2 outlines the history and

extent of Green Belts and explains their purposes, in particular setting out how they are designated and land within them is safeguarded.

- 2.2 Green Belt policy is one of the, if not the, most established planning policies in the country, dating back to early 1950's. The primary purpose of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open (the most important attribute of them being their openness). Beyond that, they help shape patterns of urban development by helping to ensure that development occurs in locations allocated in development plans.
- 2.3 The five purposes of the Green Belt and the use of land contained within them are well established within national planning policy.
- 2.4 The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their **permanence** and national planning policy is to protect them as far as can be seen ahead. It is a matter for development plans to establish detailed Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.5 National policy in the context of defining Green Belt boundaries states that:
 - a) Once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances (if an alteration is proposed the Secretary of State will wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered opportunities for development within the urban areas contained by and beyond the Green Belt)
 - b) Detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans or earlier approved development plans should only be altered exceptionally
 - c) Where existing local plans are being revised an updated, existing Green Belt boundaries should not be changed unless alterations to the structure plan have been approved, or other exceptional circumstances exist, which necessitate such revision.

3.0 Background to the Green Belt in Chelmsford Borough

- 3.1 The Green Belt, as it affects Chelmsford, is part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt. This was established in the 1950's to prevent the merging of the capital with other settlements and to provide for an area of open countryside that could be used for recreational purposes. In addition and just as significantly the Green Belt, insofar as it relates to Chelmsford, is of local strategic importance particularly in the context of the prevention of coalescence of settlements within the Borough and adjoining districts.
- 3.2 The initial Metropolitan Green Belt only included a small proportion of Chelmsford Borough and it was through the Essex County Development Plan and the subsequent Approved Review Development Plans in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's that the Metropolitan Green Belt was extended to its current boundary in relation to Chelmsford. Appendix I sets out a chronology of the establishment of the Green Belt boundary in Chelmsford through the development plan process.

3.3 The Green Belt boundary insofar as it relates to Chelmsford is now a firmly established planning policy. In line with national planning policy the Green Belt boundary has been defined through a range of iterations of the development plan policy and now defined should be permanently retained for the foreseeable future.

3.4 Although part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt, the Green Belt on the southern and western edge of Chelmsford does play an important and vital local strategic role in terms of preventing the coalescence of Chelmsford's urban area with nearby settlements. This is particularly the case in relation to Writtle and Galleywood.

4.0 **The Key Issues**

4.1 ***Has the Council considered whether a review of the Green Belt boundary in Chelmsford is required in the light of national and regional planning policy guidance in order to meet the Borough's future housing requirements?***

4.2 Background Topic Paper I "The Borough Wide Spatial Strategy" (BD/CFD/089) sets out the Borough Council's approach to the spatial strategy contained within the Core Strategy. Paragraph 4.8 sets out the Council's position in relation to safeguarding the Metropolitan Green Belt as follows:

"The protection of the Metropolitan Green Belt is a central element of the Spatial Strategy. It is the Borough Council's case that, through the preparation and selection of its options for meeting the Borough's growth requirement upto 2021 and beyond, those requirements can be met in a sustainable way, without any major releases of land within the Green Belt. As noted above, this approach is in conformity with the Draft East of England Plan, and is supported by EERA. There will be no major releases of land from the Green Belt within the LDF, with the exception that the "brownfield" employment site at Temple Farm, West Hanningfield will be promoted for employment regeneration in view of its strategic location close to the A12."

4.3 National policy guidance states that the release of land from the Green Belt should only be considered as an option for local planning authorities in exceptional circumstances. Through the development of new policy, including the Barker Review, the Green Belt has been identified as a potential location to meet national housing needs, but only where these can not be met through other means. More specific policy guidance is available regionally through the regional spatial strategy and specifically in relation to Chelmsford, the East of England Plan.

4.4 The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Policy SS7 within the Draft East England Plan (see Appendix 2) does **not** include Chelmsford as a location where a review of the Green Belt is required. Paragraph 13.61 does not rule out a review of the Green Belt in Chelmsford as an option if LDDs

were to find this to be the most sustainable way of meeting development needs. However, it is clear from the reasoned justification relating to Policy SS7 that the locations identified as suitable for strategic reviews of the Green Belt have been put forward as exceptional circumstances exist in those locations to meet future growth requirements. No such circumstances exist in Chelmsford (and this has been confirmed by the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes) and no option put forward within the Green Belt is considered to represent a more sustainable option than that proposed in the Core Strategy.

- 4.5 At an early stage in the process of preparing the Core Strategy the Borough Council looked at the need to potentially review Green Belt boundaries in order to meet future housing growth within the Borough.
- 4.6 Accordingly, when the Borough Council first commissioned Entec to undertake Sustainability Appraisal work of the potential options for growth, a number of sites within the Metropolitan Green Belt were included and appraised (spatial scenarios 2B, 3C, 3D and 4B and proposals put forward by developers at Runwell, Great Baddow, Galleywood, North Wickford and others). The Sustainability Appraisal work of Entec was further refined and continued to include potential Green Belt options.
- 4.7 The Council's Reg.25 Core Strategy consultation identified key issues for the Core Strategy and key issues to deliver its vision. The continued protection of the Green Belt was identified as an element of the proposed vision and this was followed (on page 11) under Housing with the statement "If the Green Belt is going to be maintained and new homes are focused around existing urban areas, the areas of search are limited to locations to the north and east of Chelmsford or to the north of South Woodham Ferrers." This stance was strongly supported at the Reg.25 Consultation Stage by the local community and a number of key stakeholders (the public consultation response revealed that 89% of respondents agreed that the Green Belt areas of the Borough should be protected and enhanced). The protection of the Green Belt and an approach that sought to provide for the Borough's future housing needs on land beyond the Green Belt then became a part of each of the three options presented for consultation at the Reg.26 stage.
- 4.8 The Council's position on this particular issue is therefore that:
 - a) it has fully considered whether a review of the Green Belt insofar as it relates to Chelmsford is required to meet housing growth requirements.
 - b) potential locations within the Green Belt have been appraised as part of the Council's sustainability appraisal work. The Council considers that the spatial approach to growth being promoted within the Core Strategy is the most sustainable one and one that obviates the need for the release of land from the Green Belt which would be contrary to regional and national planning policy.

c) the decision to not release land from the Green Belt to meet housing growth requirements is entirely consistent with national and regional planning policy.

4.9 ***Has the Council considered potential locations within the Green Belt as being suitable and sustainable locations for housing growth in its approach to site selection?***

4.10 In assessing private-sector options and its own spatial options, the Borough Council considered options involving development within the Metropolitan Green Belt (spatial scenarios 2B, 3C, 3D and 4B and proposals put forward by developers at Runwell, Great Baddow, Galleywood, North Wickford and others). However, in developing the three Growth Options for Reg. 26 consultation the Borough Council took into account the results of the Reg.25 Issues and Options consultation (BD/CFD/040 and BD/CFD/041) and resolved that the need to protect the Green Belt should form a key element of the emerging Spatial Strategy. Options for development within the Green Belt were therefore discounted at that stage, as being directly contrary to that emerging strategy.

4.11 The Council's position on this particular issue is therefore that:

During the early stages of the preparation of the Core Strategy the Council, through its sustainability appraisal work, considered a range of development options within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Council considered the outcome of this work and following the Reg.25 consultation stage concluded that there was no requirement for the release of land from within the Green Belt to meet its housing requirements. The three options presented for consultation at Reg.26 therefore excluded options within the Green Belt and the protection of the Green Belt became a part of each of these options at that stage.

4.12 ***Is there a need for any site specific alterations to the boundary of the Green Belt within the Borough?***

4.13 The key diagram of the Core Strategy carries forward the permanent boundary of the Metropolitan Green Belt around Chelmsford that has been established through previous development plans (see section 3 above and Appendix 1).

4.14 Given that the Borough Council's spatial strategy focuses on the "greenfield" elements of growth being met from land not within the Metropolitan Green Belt it is the Council's case that a review of the established and permanent boundary is not required and that such an approach is entirely consistent with national and regional planning policy in regard to maintaining established Green Belt boundaries on a permanent basis. The Site Allocations Development Plan Document provides an opportunity for minor alterations to the Green Belt boundary, particularly around the Defined Settlements.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 In summary the Borough Council's position is that:

- a) the spatial strategy is entirely consistent with national and regional policy in respect of the Green Belt, in particular the requirement to maintain established boundaries once approved for the foreseeable future. No exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the release of land from the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- b) the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England Plan do not suggest that a review of Green Belt boundary insofar as it relates to Chelmsford is required. The Borough Council has considered whether there is a need for a Green Belt review to meet its housing growth targets and has concluded that this can be met in a sustainable way without the need for releasing land from the Green Belt.
- c) The Borough's housing and job growth targets can be met entirely within the urban areas of Chelmsford and South Woodham Ferrers and within the two new neighbourhoods north of Chelmsford, without requiring the release of land within the Green Belt.
- d) Any minor revisions to Green Belt boundaries can be dealt with through the preparation of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

Appendix I

Chronology of the establishment of the Green Belt within Chelmsford Borough

1957 – original Metropolitan Green Belt boundary approved.

1968 – Original Essex Development Plan established the outer edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt to include land from Harlow to Basildon and then to Thurrock.

1976 – Essex County Council's First Review of the Essex Development Plan proposed a substantial enlargement of the Metropolitan Green Belt (known as the "Extended Green Belt"). The Secretary of State did not formally approve this extension, but agreed that it should be given "Interim Green Belt" status.

1979 – Essex County Council's submitted Structure Plan included much of the "Interim Green Belt" as an extension to the approved Metropolitan Green Belt of 1957, but the Secretary of State's modifications to the Plan excluded land to the west of South Woodham Ferrers.

1982 – Policy S6 of the approved Essex Structure Plan establishes broad boundary of the Green Belt within Essex and Chelmsford.

1987 – Chelmsford Rural Areas Local Plan adopted setting detailed Green Belt boundary in relation to Chelmsford Borough.

1991 – Essex Structure Plan First Alteration. Boundary of Green Belt in the vicinity of western edge of South Woodham Ferrers clarified to accord with the adopted Chelmsford Rural Areas Local Plan and the key diagrams accompanying the approved Structure Plan.

The Secretary of State in his conclusion on the clarification of the Green Belt boundary insofar as it relates to Chelmsford at this time stated that "He is satisfied that the boundary as clarified is both defensible and permanent, and in checking the unrestricted sprawl of South Woodham Ferrers, preventing its coalescence with Battlesbridge and Rettendon, and safeguarding the countryside from further encroachment, fulfilling three of the purposes of the Green Belt."

1997 – Chelmsford Borough Local Plan adopted and Green Belt boundary insofar as it relates to Chelmsford confirmed.

Appendix 2

Regional Spatial Strategy background in relation to the Green Belt and the requirement for Green Belt reviews

1 *Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (December 2004)*

The Draft East of England Plan December 2004 (Policy SS7) states that the broad extent of Green Belts in the East of England is considered to be appropriate and will be maintained. It does state however that around some urban areas reviews of boundaries may be needed as part of an appraisal to identify the most sustainable locations for new development to respond to the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. Reviews are therefore identified for: Thames Gateway South Essex; Harlow; the Upper Lee Valley & Bishop's Stortford and around Stevenage. The Green Belt adjacent to Chelmsford is **not** identified as being necessary to review.

2 *Report of the Panel following the Examination in Public (June 2006)*

The Report of the Panel on the Draft East of England Plan (June 2006) recommended some changes to Policy SS7 to include the following locations as areas where a strategic review of Green Belt boundaries are needed: Stevenage; Hemel Hempstead; Harlow; Welwyn/Hatfield; Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis; local review at Broxbourne. The Report of the Panel does **not** suggest a review of the Green Belt in relation to Chelmsford.

3 *Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (December 2006)*

In December 2006 the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England Plan were published. The Secretary of State has confirmed that the broad extent of Green Belts in the East of England is appropriate and will be maintained. Strategic reviews to meet regional development needs at the most sustainable locations are needed at: Stevenage (involving land in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire; Hemel Hempstead (involving Dacorum and probably St Albans District); Harlow (involving land in Harlow, East Hertfordshire and Epping Forest Districts) and Welwyn/Hatfield (involving land in Welwyn Hatfield District and potentially St Albans District). A more local review will be required in Broxbourne.

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England Plan **do not** propose a review of the Green Belt boundary insofar as it relates to Chelmsford and regional policy is therefore that the extent of the Green Belt as it relates to Chelmsford is appropriate, not required to be subject to review and will be maintained.

Policy CHI contained within the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes identified Chelmsford as Key Centre for Development & Change. The supporting text states at paragraph 13.61 "The Metropolitan Green Belt

extends around the south side of Chelmsford. A strategic review of the Green Belt is not ruled out as option if LDDs were to find this the most sustainable way of meeting development needs. If taken forward, such a review should provide for compensatory extensions to the Green Belt to the north of Chelmsford.”

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Planning Policy
Chelmsford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Duke Street
Chelmsford
CMI IJE



Telephone 01245 606330
Fax 01245 606642
ldf@chelmsford.gov.uk
www.chelmsford.gov.uk



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