

REPORT

Local Plans adopted between January 2019 and September 2020 in which Exceptional Circumstances were cited to amend Green Belt boundaries

RPS Strategic Land Team

November 2020

Local Plan 2015 – 2034

Adopted 25 April 2019

The inspector identifies that the following amount to strategic-level Exceptional Circumstances to alter the Green Belt boundary to meet development needs in the interests of the proper long-term planning of the Borough:

1. It is not possible to rely on increasing the supply of housing within the urban areas. There are constraints within Guildford town centre which influence its capacity to accommodate more homes including conservation and flood risk issues.
2. Strategic allocations operate to deliver a range of benefits which cannot be achieved by smaller dispersed sites. The sites work in concert to deliver a sound, integrated approach to the proper planning of the area.
3. The plan also needs to be robust and capable of meeting unexpected contingencies such as delivery failure or slippage on one or more sites. The headroom between the housing requirement and the supply planned for avoids the need to allocate reserve sites, and provides for the anticipated level of unmet need from Woking. The overall plan provision would also provide more affordable housing and go further to address serious and deteriorating housing affordability.
4. The plan needs to be effective over its life and have regard to potential changes in circumstances, containing a balance of short – and long-term sites. By making strategic allocations now, the Council has aimed to future-proof the plan.
5. The alterations to the Green Belt boundary would have relatively limited impacts on openness, and would not cause severe or widespread harm to the purposes of the Green Belt. The allocations at A25 Gosden Hill Farm and A26 Blackwell Farm would be planned urban extensions rather than sprawl, and A35 Former Wisley airfield would include a substantial amount of previously developed land, and is separate in character from its wider Green Belt surroundings. The other Green Belt sites would be adjacent to settlements and have very localised effects on openness.
6. Given the very limited land available for additional business development in Guildford town centre and the urban area, and given that it is unrealistic to suppose that much extra capacity can be gained on existing sites, the ability to meet identified business needs depends on making suitable new land available, and there is no realistic alternative to releasing land from the Green Belt. Exceptional circumstances therefore arise at the strategic level to alter Green Belt boundaries to accommodate business and employment needs.

Nuneaton and Bedworth

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan

Adopted 11 June 2019

The inspector considers that, in strategic terms, Exceptional Circumstances exist to alter the Green Belt at Nuneaton and around Bedworth and Bulkington, as part of the most appropriate strategy for the plan to secure the most sustainable pattern of development.

The inspector considers (at issue 2) whether the spatial strategy for the district, including the over-arching approach to Green Belt, is sound. The inspector notes the contents of the Joint Green Belt Study 2015 prepared for the Coventry and Warwickshire authorities, and considers (paragraph 65) that it is reasonable given the scale of need for housing and employment, that all deliverable “low” performing Green Belt sites should be considered for their development potential. Indeed, the scale of need is such in the Borough that there are not enough low-performing parcels and accordingly the Council has been justified in considering low-to-medium performing parcels (para 66). As demonstrated through the Joint Green Belt Study, SHLAA, ELR, SA and Housing Topic Paper, the Council has examined all reasonable non-Green Belt options and demonstrated these would be insufficient to meet the need identified (para 67). Other recent Local Plans in the same HMA have found Exceptional Circumstances to alter the boundaries of the West Midlands Green Belt. The submitted NBBP is not out of step with neighbouring authorities (para 67).

The inspector considers at issue 4 (housing) and issue 6 (employment) whether the submitted allocations requiring Green Belt release are justified by exceptional circumstances.

Rushcliffe

Local Plan Part 2: Land and Planning Policies

Adopted – 8 October 2019

The inspector considers (at issue 3) whether in principle Green Belt release is needed to meet development needs. The inspector notes (para 44) that the Inspector’s report on the examination of the Core Strategy concludes that there is convincing evidence that the level of development set out in that plan cannot be delivered without removing significant amounts of land from the Green Belt. She found that “the need for sustainable development to provide an uplift in new housing provision and support economic growth by accommodating new employment constitute the Exceptional Circumstances to alter the Green Belt boundaries in Rushcliffe”.

Given the need to significantly boost the supply of housing and the lack of alternatives beyond the Green Belt to accommodate further development in a way which would achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to release land from the Green Belt to meet the overall minimum provision of new homes and employment land (para 55).

Broxtowe

Part 2 Local Plan

Adopted 16 October 2019

The inspector deals at issue 1 with the approach to release of Green Belt land. The inspector notes (para 22) that the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt is very tightly-drawn around the built-up areas, with non-Green Belt opportunities to expand settlements being very limited, and therefore at the strategic level Exceptional Circumstances require the boundaries of the Green Belt to be reviewed in order to meet the development requirements of the borough.

At issue 2, the inspector considers whether Exceptional Circumstances have been demonstrated for the removal of sites from the Green Belt, concluding that for those site allocations located within the Green Belt, the need for housing, the lack of alternatives in sequentially preferable locations outside of the Green Belt and their limited impact on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt constitute Exceptional Circumstances to justify the alteration of the Green Belt boundaries (para 125).

Sunderland

Core Strategy and Development Plan (2015-2033)

Adoption 30 January 2020

The inspector concludes at issue 2 that the need to promote sustainable patterns of development demonstrates, at a strategic level, the Exceptional Circumstances for the alteration of Green Belt boundaries in Washington, North Sunderland and the Coalfield (para 56).

At issue 6, the inspector deals with whether specific parcels of land identified for development are consistent with the Plan's strategy and national policy, including protecting Green Belt land. Exceptional circumstances justify the principle of some Green Belt release in locations where there would otherwise be a shortage of housing land. MM4 is recommended to articulate how Exceptional Circumstances are justified for the alteration of Green Belt boundaries. MM4 ensures that the policy is positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy.

Local Plan 2031 Part 2 Adopted 9 October 2019

The inspector deals (issue 2) with the question of whether there are Exceptional Circumstances to justify an alteration to the Green Belt at Dalton Barracks/Abingdon Airfield/Shippon (the area of Green Belt is deleted by policy CP13a). While four alterations to the Green Belt were made through LPP1 to provide for housing allocations, it was envisaged at that stage that further alterations may be necessary in the LPP2. The additional housing now needed for Oxford City, and the requirement for this to be closely connected to Oxford, amounts to Exceptional Circumstances that justify the principal of one or more further alterations to the Green Belt (para 36).

It only became known in Nov 2016 – too late for LPP1 and the Oxford Spatial Options Assessment – that the Barracks/Airfield site would become available during the plan period. Its release offers the potential for a large-scale comprehensively planned development well related to Abingdon and Oxford. This provides an opportunity to deliver a substantial amount of housing with one strategic alteration to the Green Belt, rather than a number of smaller alterations. This approach would better protect the integrity of the Green Belt as a whole (para 37).

The extensive built up Dalton Barracks and adjacent village of Shippon already result in a significant loss of openness, and the Barracks/Airfield site provides a unique opportunity to develop a sustainable new community well related to Abingdon and Oxford on a large area of essentially previously developed land with only a limited impact on the landscape. The area contributes to the purposes of the Green Belt, mainly by safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, but its deletion would only have a limited impact on the integrity of the Green Belt compared to the combined effect of deleting several alternative sites. This amounts to Exceptional Circumstances that justify an alteration to the Green Belt at the Barracks/Airfield site (para 41).

Wycombe

Wycombe District Local Plan Adopted 19 August 2019

The inspector deals with Green Belt at issue 4 of the report. In order to accommodate provision of an additional 1,139 new dwellings and 17ha of new employment land, changes are proposed to the Green Belt boundary which result in the removal of 77ha of land from the designation. The inspector notes that this release of land from the Green Belt will make a significant contribution to the reducing the shortfall in provision of land for new housing and employment development (paras 86 – 87). The inspector goes on to conclude that there is a compelling case for the release of land from the Green Belt to meet the OAN housing and employment development (para 88).

The inspector deals with the Exceptional Circumstances for the removal of land from the Green Belt, in issue 8. The inspector finds that housing sites identified by policies HW8 and HW9 only fulfil Green Belt purposes relatively weakly, and are on the urban fringe of a tier 1 settlement (High Wycombe), and are in a suitable location for growth (paras 137 and 139). The inspector finds, in relation to sites allocated by policies HW10 and HW11 fulfil Green Belt purposes only relatively weakly, are in a sustainable location for growth, and are capable of being removed from the Green Belt without having an adverse impact on the integrity of the wider designation (para 142). Whilst the combined site is situated largely outside the urban area of High Wycombe, because of its proximity, connectivity and predominantly semi-urban character, the area is functionally part of the larger area of the Tier 1 settlement and as such in a sustainable location. The removal of a relatively small area of land, which is largely semi-urban in character, would not materially increase the potential for High Wycombe, Lane End or Marlow Bottom to coalesce, promote urban sprawl, or result in the further encroachment of development into the countryside. The requirements outlined in Policies HW11 and HW16 would also for the most part ensure the establishment of appropriate and enduring boundaries (para 143).

A number of other sites are considered under issue 8.

Reigate and Banstead

Reigate and Banstead Development Management Plan Adopted 26 September 2019

In issue 1, the inspector deals with whether the approach taken to review the Green Belt is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

The inspector accepts that Netherne-on-the-Hill, a dense settlement, has seen significant growth since the Green Belt boundaries were originally established in the 1994 Borough Local Plan, and no longer makes a contribution to openness of the Green Belt and little contribution to the Green Belt purposes. Exceptional circumstances exist for it to be inset into the Green Belt (para 30).

In issue 2, the inspector considers proposed site allocations, and whether Exceptional Circumstances have been demonstrated for the removal of sites from the Green Belt. The site identified by ERM1 (Land at Hillsbrow, Redhill) is considered to make a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes, and has a strong tree belt to the South and a road and further dense tree planting to the north providing clear and defensible boundaries (para 34). Exceptional circumstances are considered to exist which justify alteration of the Green Belt boundary. The same conclusion is reached in relation to a number of other sites dealt with under issue 2.

Hillingdon

Local Plan Part 2

Adopted 16 January 2020

The inspector was satisfied that minor changes to the Green Belt boundary to take account of mapping errors, planning permissions (including Heathrow Terminal 5, and changes in physical features, would ensure that the boundary remains logical and robust. Therefore, Exceptional Circumstances exist (para 87).

Further minor changes to the Green Belt are proposed to allow more logical and defensible Green Belt boundaries to be created – refining the Green Belt boundaries at Lake Farm School, 8 Woodfield Terrace, The Dairy Farm Cricket Ground, Duval House and 63 Daleham Drive (para 88).

Stevenage

Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031

Adoption 22 May 2019

The inspector deals at issue 4 with whether Exceptional Circumstances exist to justify the plan's proposed revisions to the Green Belt boundary (see para 75). The plan removes 5 areas of land from the Green Belt, totalling around 90 ha: land to the North of Stevenage (HO3); land to the South East of Stevenage (HO4); land to the north of Graveley Road for a traveller site (HO12); a site for employment use close to Junction 8 of the A1 (Exceptional Circumstances 1/7); and an existing garden centre site in the Green Belt is allocated for a major new food store (TC11).

Site HO3 is assessed as making a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes in all regards, except that it makes a significant contribution to preventing merging (para 81). However, the inspector considers that coalescence will be avoided, and agrees with the assessment that the parcel is contained by strong boundaries which could be substantiated through further landscaping (para 83). There is a pressing need for housing within the Borough that cannot be met outside of the Green Belt (para 84). The inspector agrees with the assessment that the release of HO4 would not damage the overall function of the Green Belt in this location. Exceptional circumstances exist in relation to HO3 and HO4 (paras 84 and 87).

Bolsover

Local Plan for Bolsover District Adoption 4th March 2020

A strategic site at Clowne Garden Village is allocated, part of which is within the Green Belt. The inspector deals with this matter at Issue 4.

The Council's Green Belt review concluded that all parcels surrounding the urban areas of Barlborough and Clowne robustly serve Green Belt purposes, and so the Council should consider whether there is a strategic rationale which demonstrates Exceptional Circumstances justifying the release of Green Belt land (para 151). After supplementary assessment removes purpose 3 (safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) from the scoring, and this resulted in two parcels only partially meeting Green Belt purposes (para 153).

The limited supply of appropriate non-Green Belt sites in sustainable locations to meet the employment need, along with the minimal harm to the Green Belt from the removal of the two parcels and the sustainable nature of the development proposed (sited adjacent to Clowne in accordance with the spatial strategy) would amount to the Exceptional Circumstances required to remove them from the Green Belt (para 157).

Oxford

Oxford Local Plan 2036 Adopted 8 June 2020

The inspector considers at issue 5 whether there are Exceptional Circumstances for altering the boundary of the Green Belt and whether the plan's policy for the protection of the Green Belt is sound. It is noted (para 103) that there is a compelling need for new housing, meanwhile only a portion of this can be delivered on non-Green Belt sites, with an apportionment agreed for neighbouring authorities to meet some of Oxford's needs (para 104).

The Green Belt Study (2017) found sites referred to in policies SP24 to SP31 to have a low to moderate effect on the purposes of the Green Belt (para 105). They would either not extend the urban edge significantly, or would not be significant in the landscape, or would be adequately contained by boundaries so they have little impact on sprawl. They are mostly related to, or seen in the context of, existing built features. Their development would have an effect on the openness of the Green Belt locally, but they are relatively small and mostly disparately located, delivering between 31 and 162 homes each, and represent only minor encroachment into the countryside. They would have little or no effect on the setting of the historic city. Yet in total they would provide the equivalent of 724 homes, making an important contribution towards meeting Oxford's housing needs.

The alteration of the Green Belt boundary in each of these cases, and cumulatively, would not significantly affect the openness of the Oxford Green Belt or generate urban sprawl, and the Green Belt would continue to fulfil its NPPF-defined purposes (para 106). There are therefore both strategic-level and local-level Exceptional Circumstances to alter the Green Belt boundary to allow for development on these sites (para 107). MM79 expands the relevant section of the plan to clarify the reasons for the alteration of the Green Belt boundary in the interests of effectiveness.

Rugby

Local Plan 2011-2031

Adopted 4 June 2019

The inspector concludes (para 66) that Exceptional Circumstances exist for the alteration of the Green Belt boundaries to justify the relevant allocations at the Main Rural Settlements at Binley Woods, Long Lawford, Ryton on Dunsmore, Stretton on Dunsmore, Wolston and Wolvey.

The Exceptional Circumstances suggested by the LPA are that these sites are required to provide for rural housing needs, to support the role of the Main Rural Settlements as sustainable rural communities, and to ensure a 5YLS on adoption of the plan (para 159). The Rural Sustainability Study identifies the Main Rural Settlements as the most sustainable rural settlements in the borough with a range of local facilities. The provision of some limited housing development at these settlements will help to sustain these facilities and the rural communities they serve (para 161). The additional sites will also help the Council to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing, taking into account past undersupply, and assuming a 20% buffer is applied for the first five years post-adoption of the plan (para 162). SHLAA evidence demonstrates that there is insufficient capacity within the urban area boundaries of Rugby and the Main Rural Settlements, or within the Smaller Rural Villages. Whilst the existing commitments and the proposed SUEs on the edge of Rugby would be sufficient to meet the Plan's overall housing requirement, there would not be enough land coming forward from these sources in the first 5 years to meet the stepped up housing requirement, principally due to the capacity constraints on the existing highway network and lead in times for the delivery of highway mitigation schemes, in particular the spine road infrastructure at SWR (para 162).

Site-specific consideration of each allocation's contribution to Green Belt purposes is given at para 169 onwards.

Nottingham

Nottingham City Land and Planning Policies Development Plan Document (Local Plan Part 2)

Adopted 13 January 2020

The plan seeks to remove one site from the Green Belt to be allocated for residential development, and also some further minor changes to account for previous drafting errors and to follow clearer defensible boundaries. The inspector considers that there are Exceptional Circumstances to justify this, both at a strategic level, and at a site-specific level. The inspector deals with this at Issue 2.

At para 63, the inspector records that one site (the former Fairham Comprehensive School site PA59) is to be removed from the Green Belt to accommodate development in order to assist in meeting the city's housing requirement and more specifically the need for family housing (para 160). The Green Belt assessment finds that the site no longer performs well against four of the purposes of the Green Belt set out in the NPPF. The site is a brownfield site adjacent to the built-up area, and its development represents a rounding-off of this part of Clifton, following the curve of the settlement edge. It will create new defensible boundaries which will endure beyond the plan period, along with compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. A large parcel of land to the immediate south, within the neighbouring area of Rushcliffe, has been removed from the Green Belt to allow for future development, which will complement the development of this site (para 65).

The inspector concludes that the approach used to review the Green Belt accords with the principles set out in the Core Strategy, and that Exceptional Circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the alterations to the Green Belt.

If you wish to promote land for development, even if it is within a Green Belt designation, then get in touch with our [Strategic Land Team](#).

