

4. GREEN BELT

OBJECTIVES

- GB/a To secure a Green Belt around Cambridge whose boundaries are clearly defined and which will endure for the plan period and beyond.**
- GB/b To maintain the purposes and openness of the Cambridge Green Belt.**
- GB/c To preserve the unique setting of the city by maintaining the character and appearance of the surrounding villages.**
- GB/d To provide for improvements in biodiversity, the landscape, farm diversification, outdoor recreation and public access to the countryside.**

THE PURPOSES OF THE GREEN BELT

- 4.1 The Cambridge Green Belt serves a number of purposes which are derived from Government Guidance (PPG2) and the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan. The Green Belt keeps land open and free from development over a long period, which extends beyond the plan period, in order to give assurance that its boundaries will endure.
- 4.2 The Cambridge Green Belt is relatively small in extent. Its purposes are defined as:
 - To preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre.
 - To maintain and enhance the quality of its setting.
 - To prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city.
- 4.3 In defining the Green Belt and the policies which should be applied to it, regard will be given to the qualities which contribute to the special character of Cambridge and its setting, which include:
 - Key views of Cambridge from the surrounding countryside.
 - A soft green edge to the City.
 - A distinctive urban edge.
 - Green corridors penetrating into the City.

- Designated sites and other features contributing positively to the character of the landscape setting.
- The distribution, physical separation, setting, scale and character of Green Belt villages.
- A landscape which retains a strong rural character.

GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES

POLICY GB/1 Green Belt Boundaries

The boundaries of the Cambridge Green Belt are defined on the Proposals Map.

- 4.4 The Cambridge Green Belt was established in the 1965 Development Plan. A review of the Green Belt was undertaken in the 1980s resulting in the Cambridge Green Belt Local Plan 1992. A further review was undertaken in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- 4.5 The Green Belt boundaries have been reviewed to serve the long-term development needs of Cambridge, taking into account Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia (now RSS6) and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003. The Structure Plan identifies the broad locations where major growth will take place on the edge of Cambridge as urban extensions and at the new town of Northstowe. Revised Green Belt boundaries are required to enable these developments to take place. The outer boundary of the Green Belt has been reviewed to take account of the creation of the new town of Northstowe to ensure the continued separation of settlements.
- 4.6 Wherever possible, boundaries have been drawn along clear physical features on the ground such as roads, trackways, rights of way, streams and hedgerows. However, in some circumstances, especially in respect of the urban extensions, there are no physical features on the ground which would be appropriate to use; in these circumstances the boundaries have been drawn to take account of the purposes of the Green Belt and the new development areas will include proposals to define the Green Belt.
- 4.7 Given the complexity of the administrative boundaries between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, there has been considerable joint working to establish coherent and consistent Green Belt boundaries.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREEN BELT

POLICY GB/2 Development in the Green Belt

Within the Green Belt planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Development is defined as inappropriate unless it comprises:

- 1. Buildings for agriculture or forestry, unless permitted development rights have been withdrawn, provided the proposed siting, design and landscaping of buildings maintains the essential open quality of the Green Belt;**
- 2. Buildings providing essential facilities for outdoor sports and recreation directly related to an appropriate recreational use, for cemeteries, or for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with Green Belt purposes;**
- 3. Extensions and alterations to dwellings provided that the overall impact of any extension does not result in the dwelling having a materially greater impact, particularly in terms of greater height and scale, on the openness of the Green Belt, in accordance with Policy HG/6;**
- 4. Replacement of existing dwellings where the use has not been abandoned, or become derelict and uneconomic to repair, in accordance with the General Permitted Development Order, provided there is no adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt, in accordance with Policy HG/7;**
- 5. Dwellings to serve an essential agricultural need may be permitted in the Green Belt subject to other policies, including Policy HG/8;**
- 6. Affordable housing in accordance with the “exceptions” Policy HG/5 where there is an identified need and no suitable sites are available outside the Green Belt;**
- 7. The re-use of buildings as provided for in PPS7;**
- 8. Development within Major Developed Sites in accordance with Policy GB/6.**

Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Where development proposals are in the vicinity of the Green Belt, account will be taken of any adverse impact on the Green Belt.

Proposals to change the use of existing buildings may be considered appropriate in the Green Belt if it does not have a materially greater

impact on it. For the same reason any proposal involving the extension of buildings will be strictly controlled. Associated uses, such as extensive hard-surfacing, car parking, boundary walls and fences, external storage and lighting will be considered against the need to maintain the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt.

Where development is permitted, landscaping conditions, together with a requirement that any planting is adequately maintained, will be attached to any planning permission in order to ensure that the impact on the Green Belt is mitigated, in accordance with Policies GB/4 and DP/4.

- 4.8 The main purpose of a Green Belt is to keep land open by placing a permanent and severe restriction on inappropriate development; therefore most types of development can only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Such exceptional circumstances will be regarded as Departures from the Development Plan and will only be permitted where other considerations outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. It is not sufficient justification to override Green Belt policies because a development would be inconspicuous or would not harm the site or locality.
- 4.9 For uses appropriate in the Green Belt, development which would adversely affect the open and rural character would be contrary to the objectives of the Green Belt. Where development is permitted, appropriate landscaping conditions, together with a requirement that any planting is adequately maintained, will be attached to any planning permission in order to ensure that the impact on the Green Belt is mitigated.
- 4.10 Although agricultural developments are appropriate in principle, the proposed siting, design and landscaping of buildings must be considered carefully so as to maintain the essential open quality of the Green Belt. Refusal would be justified if this would not be achieved. Proposals for new agricultural buildings may require the use of a condition to withdraw permitted development rights if it is considered that it would avoid a proliferation of additional farm buildings under such rights. Similarly careful consideration will be given to any proposal to re-use a modern building if it would lead to additional agricultural buildings being required which would prejudice the objectives of the Green Belt.
- 4.11 The Green Belt has an important recreational role but it is not a suitable location for all forms of sport and leisure. Any proposal for a building will need to demonstrate that it is directly related to an appropriate recreational use; this would not include buildings required solely for social gatherings, indoor sports and other activities which do not require a rural location. Facilities will be limited to those which are genuinely essential to the outdoor activity such as small scale changing rooms, refreshment facilities and small stables.

- 4.12 Cemeteries are acceptable in the Green Belt as they are essentially open in character. Proposals for woodland burial schemes will be looked upon favourably as they can assist in enhancing the visual quality of the Green Belt.
- 4.13 Extensions to existing dwellings and replacement dwellings may be appropriate although the impact must not harm the objectives of the Green Belt. The extension should not dominate the original dwelling in height and scale; there should be no material increase in the impact of the dwelling on the Green Belt, and accord with Policy HG/6. Where the use of a dwelling has not been abandoned, replacement may be permitted subject to the requirements of the General Permitted Development Order, and in accordance with Policy HG/7.
- 4.14 The change of use of land to residential curtilage (for example in any proposal to extend garden land) will not be permitted if it would harm the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt.
- 4.15 Residential development is not appropriate in the Green Belt. However, a Green Belt site may be used for Affordable Housing where there is an identified need and the District Council is satisfied that no other suitable non-Green Belt sites exist. Dwellings to serve an essential agricultural need may be permitted in the Green Belt subject to other policies. Sites for Travellers are not an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREEN BELT

POLICY GB/3 Location and Design of Development

Any development considered appropriate within the Green Belt must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.

- 4.16 Any development, even for uses appropriate in the Green Belt, can erode its open and rural character. In order to protect the purposes of the Green Belt, such development should be located within or adjoining existing groups of buildings or entail the redevelopment of redundant buildings. Similarly, where existing buildings are not capable of re-use or conversion, the redevelopment of such buildings or development within or adjacent to existing groups of buildings will be preferable to development on entirely new sites.
- 4.17 This policy must be read in conjunction with any design Supplementary Planning Document adopted by the District Council, which will be used in decisions on planning applications.

POLICY GB/4 Landscaping and Design Measures

Development on the edges of settlements which are surrounded by the Green Belt must include careful landscaping and design measures of a high quality in order to protect the purposes of the Green Belt.

- 4.18 In many cases this will require extensive landscaping, both within the development area and in the Green Belt, but there will be areas where a well designed and distinctive edge, with landmark buildings, including gateway buildings, may also be appropriate. However, account will also need to be taken of the proposals the impact on the adjoining Green Belt, including views from the Green Belt.

MAJOR DEVELOPED SITES

POLICY GB/5 Major Developed Sites

Within the Cambridge Green Belt, the following are designated as Major Developed Sites:

- **Babraham Hall**
- **Fulbourn and Ida Darwin Hospital**
- **Girton College**
- **Spicer's at Sawston**

Within the boundary of Major Developed Sites, as identified on the Proposals Map, limited infilling or redevelopment may be permitted:

1. **Infilling is defined as the filling of small gaps between built development. Such infilling should have no greater impact upon the open nature of the Green Belt and should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site. The cumulative impact of infilling proposals will be taken into account.**
 2. **Redevelopment will be limited to that which would not result in:**
 - a. **A greater floor area than the existing built form;**
 - b. **A greater footprint unless there are significant environmental improvements;**
 - c. **Would the existing height of the built development being exceeded;**
 - d. **There being a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt.**
- 4.19 Major Developed Sites as identified on the Proposals Map, continue to be part of the Green Belt and remain subject to Green Belt policies. However, redevelopment where appropriate and infilling may be permitted within the defined confines of these sites subject to there being no adverse impact on

the purposes of the Green Belt. The footprint of existing development within these sites excludes temporary buildings, open spaces with external access between wings of buildings, and areas of hard standing.

- 4.20 Development Briefs, adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents, are required for all these sites.

RECREATION IN THE GREEN BELT

POLICY GB/6 Recreation in the Green Belt

Proposals for the use of the Green Belt for enhanced opportunities for countryside recreation, appropriate to the Green Belt, will be encouraged where it will not harm the objectives of the Green Belt. In those parts of the Green Belt adjacent or close to the areas developed as urban extensions to Cambridge, the creation of such opportunities, for example in the form of country parks and improvements to public rights of way, will be required.

- 4.21 Given the significant development which is proposed for the edge of Cambridge and in the new town of Northstowe, which will take place at higher densities than in the past, it is essential that the residents of these new developments have direct and easy access by foot or cycle to open countryside for recreation, which may include land in the Green Belt beyond the boundaries of the Area Action Plans. Much of the Green Belt consists of large arable fields and there are few woods, pastures or other areas of semi-natural vegetation, which limits the opportunities for public access and recreation.
- 4.22 In many instances access to the countryside can be assisted by improvements to public rights of way network, including the provision of new routes for footpaths, bridleways and cycleways. One project which is being developed is the “Cam Cycle Rings” – developing a ring of cycleways around Cambridge, which will provide routes into and around Cambridge and provide circular routes into the Green Belt countryside. As well as providing for recreation such routes can also contribute to sustainable commuting.
- 4.23 By working in partnership, the local authorities can improve access by better signing and improvements to and the maintenance of stiles, gates and footbridges. The maintenance of public rights of way to a high standard is also important in order to encourage use. Improvements to public rights of way may be implemented directly by the District Council, through the Green Belt Project or through the Parish Paths Partnership initiative with the support of Cambridgeshire County Council and the Countryside Agency.
- 4.24 The District Council will develop a strategy for the active management of the Green Belt.

IMPROVEMENTS TO LANDSCAPE AND BIODIVERSITY

POLICY GB/7 Improvements to Landscape and Biodiversity

The District Council will seek improvements to the landscape and bio-diversity of the Green Belt, through additional planting and habitat creation, to reverse the decline in its quality.

- 4.25 Modern farming methods have led to a decline in the quality of the landscape particularly in areas such as the Cambridge Green Belt. In addition much of the Green Belt landscape is over-mature and requires new tree and hedge planting to ensure the quality of the landscape does not continue to deteriorate.
- 4.26 Where there are areas of poor or damaged landscape, the District Council will seek improvements through tree and hedge planting, the creation of ponds and other areas of water and by the removal of rubbish and unsightly features. Such changes can also be helpful in creating wildlife habitats and thus adding to bio-diversity. The District Council will work in partnership with other organisations including voluntary groups, such as the Wildlife Trust, Cam Valley Forum, and landowners to secure such improvements. The Cambridge Green Belt Project is an example of good practice of such partnerships.
- 4.27 The need for improvements to the landscape and bio-diversity will need to be taken into account when considering improvements for recreation and public access. There may be parts of the Green Belt where public access has to be restricted, such as some parts of the riverbanks, if improvements to bio-diversity are to be achieved.