



Chapter 7

Green Belt



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- 7.1. The Green Belt surrounding Cambridge has been in place since the 1950s. Green Belt policy has maintained the setting and special character of Cambridge, avoided coalescence with the ring of villages closest to the city, protected the countryside from development and prevented urban sprawl. The result is that Cambridge remains a compact city, surrounded by attractive countryside and a ring of attractive villages to which there is easy access by foot and bicycle. The city centre is unusually close to open countryside, particularly to the west and south-west.
- 7.2. These characteristics are valued assets and significantly contribute to the character and attractiveness of the city and the wider Cambridge area, and the quality of life enjoyed here. The Green Belt around Cambridge has an inextricable relationship with the preservation of the character of the city, which is derived from the interplay between the historic centre, the suburbs around it and the rural setting that encircles it.
- 7.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy being to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 7.4. The NPPF continues the five long established national purposes of including land within Green Belts as being to:



Green Belt Purposes in NPPF

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
2. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 7.5. At the local level, the following purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt have been established in previous Local Plans:

Cambridge Green Belt Purposes

1. To preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre;
2. To maintain and enhance the quality of its setting; and
3. To prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city.

- 7.6. Green Belt boundaries can only be established in Local Plans and according to the NPPF, once established they can only be altered in exceptional circumstances. The current inner Green Belt boundary has been established through the Cambridge Local Plan (2006) and South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (adopted between 2007 and 2010), including the Cambridge East Area Action Plan (2008) and North West Cambridge Area Action Plan (2009). The exceptional circumstances for establishing the Green Belt boundaries set out in existing plans came through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (2003), which sought to focus more growth close to Cambridge to increase the sustainability of development. The Structure Plan agreed broad locations where land should be released from the Green Belt.
- 7.7. In order to inform the current detailed Green Belt boundary, two important studies were undertaken. The first was the Inner Green Belt Boundary Study undertaken by Cambridge City Council in 2002 and the second was the Cambridge Green Belt Study by Landscape Design Associates for South Cambridgeshire District Council in September 2002.
- 7.8. The study for South Cambridgeshire District Council took a detailed look at the Green Belt around the east of Cambridge and a wider, more strategic look at the Green Belt elsewhere around the city, whilst the Inner Green Belt Boundary Study prepared by Cambridge City Council was carried out to specifically assist with identifying sites that could be released from the Green Belt for development close to Cambridge without harm to the purposes of the Green Belt including the setting of the city.
- 7.9. The City Council also commissioned a specific Green Belt study by Landscape Design Associates (2003) in relation to land West of Trumpington Road. This was a requirement of the Structure Plan (2003). This study concluded that there was no case for a Green Belt release within the land West of Trumpington Road, in that the land provides a rural setting of arable farmland and water meadows close to the historic core, which is not found elsewhere around Cambridge. A smaller area of land including school playing fields and the golf course was assessed for development within this broad location and it was concluded that these were

attractive features in their own right which contribute positively to the quality of the landscape setting of Cambridge, and the quality of life for people within the city.

- 7.10. The current Green Belt boundary around the city was established with the expectation that its boundaries could endure to the end of the plan period of 2016 and beyond. However, circumstances have changed, and whilst good progress has been made towards achieving the current development strategy, with development of the fringes all underway with the exception of Cambridge East, the Councils do need to consider as part of preparing their new Local Plans whether there are exceptional circumstances for reviewing Green Belt boundaries again. In reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the NPPF requires local planning authorities to take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, and with consideration given to the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development outwards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.
- 7.11. Both Councils took a joined up approach in the Issues and Options consultations in Summer 2012 and asked whether there should be more development on the edge of Cambridge, if there should be more land released from the Green Belt, and if so, where should this be. Ten Broad Locations around the edge of Cambridge were consulted on. A summary of the views received are contained in the Site Assessments for Edge of Cambridge Sites evidence document..
- 7.12. To help inform the process in moving forward, the Councils have since undertaken a joint review of the Inner Green Belt boundary. The purpose of the review was to provide an up to date evidence base for Councils' new Local Plans, and help the Councils reach a view on whether there are specific areas of land that could be considered for release from the Green Belt and allocated for development to meet their identified needs without significant harm to Green Belt purposes.
- 7.13. The Inner Green Belt Study Review 2012 builds on the studies that were undertaken in 2002 and 2003 as well as the broad updated appraisal of the Inner Green Belt boundary that the City Council undertook in March 2012 to sit alongside its Issues and Options consultation (Summer 2012). The broad appraisal of the inner Green Belt boundary areas was undertaken against the backdrop of the most recent land releases and how those releases have affected the revised inner Green Belt boundary. The appraisal specifically reconsidered zones of land immediately adjacent to the city in terms of the principles and function of the Green Belt. It did not identify specific areas with potential for further release.

- 7.14. In summary, both steps have found that releases of land on the edge of the city through the current Local Plans are sound. However, as a consequence of the releases, the adjacent rural land surrounding these sites does now have increased value for Green Belt purposes and to the setting of the city. This increase in value for Green Belt purposes comes from three considerations:
1. New developed edges are being created on land released from the Green Belt by previous plans and these edges are moving the city further into its rural surroundings and therefore lessening the extent of the Green Belt;
 2. The new edges are different from those previously seen on the edge of the city being more densely developed and usually higher and not so easily softened by vegetation; and
 3. Views of the city will be foreshortened as the edge advances into the rural surroundings sometimes making the foreground noticeably more important for the setting of the city.
- 7.15. The work has concluded that areas where the city is viewed from higher ground or generally has open aspects, or where the urban edge is close to the city centre are more sensitive and cannot accommodate change¹ easily. Areas of the city that have level views and where the edge has mixed foreground can sometimes accommodate change more easily. On a comparative basis these areas have a lesser importance to the setting of the city and to the purposes of Green Belt.
- 7.16. Given that the inner Green Belt boundary was looked at very closely only a decade ago it should not be unexpected that the new review has found that most of the inner Green Belt continues to be important for Green Belt purposes and specifically important to protect the setting and special character of Cambridge as a historic city.
- 7.17. The work has also confirmed that in areas where changes to the city edge are currently envisaged and they are adjacent to important view-points such as motorways or elevated vantage points, there needs to be an appropriately sized area of land retained as Green Belt between any future urban edge and the view/vantage point to still provide a green foreground setting to the city. This green foreground should be retained as Green Belt. This need is vital because development requires a minimum distance between it and the viewpoint to avoid a harmful effect on the setting of the city. This can be demonstrated on the northern edge of the city where development now abuts the A14 with no foreground between the viewpoint and the development. As a result, the development cannot be viewed in any sort of landscape context or setting making it appear severe and discordant.

¹ 'Change' means the introduction of a different feature into the rural/agricultural landscape. This could be an electricity pylon, built development or even a bio-mass crop, but in this instance it is built development.

- 7.18. Having thoroughly tested the inner Green Belt boundary, the Inner Green Belt Study Review 2012 finds that there are a limited number of small sites, which are of lesser importance to Green Belt purposes. The findings of the study have been incorporated into the technical assessments of sites. The site options both proposed and rejected are considered further in Chapter 9.
- 7.19. Furthermore, the Inner Green Belt Boundary Review 2012 has also concluded that the significant majority of the remaining Green Belt close to Cambridge is fundamentally important to the purpose of the Cambridge Green Belt and should not be developed. This is considered to be the tipping point, at which if you extend beyond this point for development, the Green Belt purposes and setting of the city are compromised. Any further significant development on the inner edge of the Green Belt would have significant implications for Green Belt purposes and fundamentally change Cambridge as a place. The conclusions of the Green Belt Study 2002 by Landscape Design Associates remain that despite extensive development to the south-east, east and north of the historic core, the scale of the core relative to the whole is such that Cambridge still retains the character of a city focussed on its historic core.

