

3. *GREEN BELT*

INTRODUCTION

3.1 The Cambridge Green Belt concept has successfully protected the setting of the City and the surrounding villages for a period in excess of 40 years. This chapter deals with the conflicts that can arise between the need to control the expansion of Cambridge and the surrounding villages and the demand for appropriate development as defined in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.2. The Green Belt offers opportunities for outdoor sport and informal recreation to meet the demands of the Cambridge Area but this has to be balanced against the need to retain the landscape character of the area. The landscape of the Green Belt continues to change and much of this is due to elements outside the control of local authorities. However, there are opportunities to enhance the quality of the landscape through partnerships.

3.2 The Cambridge Green Belt has a depth of between 4.8 and 8 kilometres encircling Cambridge. This distance has only been exceeded where the physical setting, due to the topography is clearly wider. The Cambridge Green Belt primarily lies within the administrative area of South Cambridgeshire. However, part of the inner boundary extends into Cambridge City Council and the outer extent to the north-east of Cambridge is within East Cambridgeshire District Council.

OBJECTIVES

- To control the urban expansion of Cambridge and the coalescence of settlements in order to preserve the unique setting of the city by maintaining the character and appearance of the Cambridge Green Belt and surrounding villages.
- To enhance the visual quality of the area by promoting improvements to the landscape.
- To balance the opportunities for access to open countryside and outdoor sport and recreation against the needs of agriculture and to retain the open and rural character of the Green Belt.
- To shape the patterns of development by focusing future development on existing built up areas.

THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GREEN BELT

POLICY GB1: The setting and special character of Cambridge will be protected by a Green Belt, the boundaries of which so far as it affects South Cambridgeshire are defined on the proposals maps.

3.3 The Cambridge Green Belt is a well-established planning policy which seeks to prevent urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements and thus preserve the setting of the city. The boundaries of the Green Belt are shown on the Proposals Maps and are broadly similar to those defined in the Cambridge Green Belt Plan adopted by the County Council in 1992. Only minor revisions have been made (a) where there has been a change in circumstances which means that the land no longer performs a Green Belt function, (b) where the previous boundary was drawn arbitrarily across a parcel of land and it has been possible to select a more clear-cut and consistent boundary, and (c) to correct small local anomalies.

Hamlets and small areas of isolated or sporadic development outside village frameworks have been 'washed over' as part of the Green Belt.

3.4 Once this Plan is adopted it will supersede the provisions of the Cambridge Green Belt 1992 as far as it affects South Cambridgeshire.

3.5 Land at the Cambridge Northern Fringe was omitted from the Green Belt in the Cambridge Green Belt Plan and identified as an Area of Special Restraint, to be safeguarded as a reserve of land to meet essential needs of the City. Proposals for this land are now made in the policies set out in relation to Inset Map 103 in part 2 of the Plan.

3.6 Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia, published in November 2000 (RPG6), requires that a strategic review be made of the Cambridge Green Belt in order to make adequate provision for development in the Cambridge Sub-Region to 2016. This is being pursued through a revision of the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan and detailed consideration of revised boundaries will be undertaken as part of the 2nd review of this Plan.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

3.7 Government guidance through PPG2 stresses that the main purpose of a Green Belt is to keep land open by placing a permanent and severe restriction on inappropriate development. Most kinds of development can only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. It is not sufficient justification to override Green Belt policies because a development would be inconspicuous or would not harm the site or locality. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt.

POLICY GB2: Planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt 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;**
- 2. buildings providing essential facilities for outdoor sports and recreation, 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 criteria in policy HG13 are met and that the overall impact of any extension does not result in the dwelling having a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt;**
- 4. replacements of existing dwellings in accordance with Policy HG15 and provided that there is no adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt;**
- 5. affordable housing in accordance with the ‘exceptions policy’ (Policy HG8) where no suitable sites are available outside the Green Belt;**
- 6. the re-use of buildings provided that (a) the development does not result in a materially greater impact on the openness and purpose of the Green Belt; (b) strict control is exercised over any proposed extensions and associated uses of surrounding land; (c) the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction; and (d) the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings;**
- 7. development of Major Developed Sites in accordance with Policy GB4;**
- 8. development which is directly related to the operational efficiency of Cambridge Airport with the Licensed Airport Area.**

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

3.8 If a proposal is appropriate in principle, it is important that the effect on the locality is fully taken account in order to minimise its impact. Development which would adversely affect the open and rural character of the countryside would be contrary to the purposes of the Green Belt. Where appropriate development is permitted, the local authority will place landscaping conditions on any such planning permission, together with a requirement that any

planting is adequately maintained.

3.9 Although agricultural developments are ‘appropriate’ in principle, the proposed siting, design and landscaping of buildings must be carefully considered so to maintain the essential Green Belt quality of openness. Refusal may be justified if this would not be achieved.

3.10 Whilst the Green Belt fulfils a recreational role, it is not a suitable location for all forms of sport and leisure. It will need to be demonstrated that any building proposal is directly related to an acceptable recreational use and will not include buildings required solely for social gatherings, indoor sports, or other activities which do not require a rural location. Facilities should be limited to those which are genuinely essential and may include small scale changing rooms, refreshment facilities and small stables. Further guidance on proposals for Recreation and Tourism outside the Green Belt is given in the Tourism and Recreation Chapter at policy RTI.

3.11 Cemeteries are acceptable in the Green Belt in that they are substantially open in character.

3.12 Extensions to existing dwellings within the countryside may be appropriate to a Green Belt location. However, the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt will need to be carefully examined. The extension should not dominate the original dwelling in terms of height or scale and should not materially change the impact of the dwelling upon the Green Belt. Extensions either individually or cumulatively should not lead to an increase of more than 50% volume over the original dwelling. Replacement of dwellings need not harm the objectives of the Green Belt. Despite the presumption against housing in the Green Belt, there are dwellings which have become derelict and uneconomic to repair. Planning permission would not normally be granted to replace these. However, where the use of the dwelling has not been abandoned, replacement on a one-for-one basis may be permitted subject to the requirements of the General Permitted Development Order (ie. a maximum enlargement of 15% of volume). Replacement dwellings and extensions to dwellings must also accord with policies HG13 to HG15. The change of use of land to residential curtilage will be resisted where it harms the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt. Further policy guidance is given in the Housing Chapter.

3.13 Dwellings will not normally be permitted in the Green Belt. Exceptionally, where there is an identified need for affordable housing (defined at Policy HG7) and where the District Council is satisfied that no other suitable sites exist, Green Belt sites may be used subject to other policies in the Local Plan. Dwellings to serve an essential agricultural need may also be permitted in the Green Belt subject to other policies in the Local Plan.

3.14 Proposals to change the use of existing buildings are capable of being ‘appropriate’ development subject to criterion (6) of policy GB2. Such re-use can assist rural diversification through providing new accommodation for commercial, industrial or recreational uses, or for tourism. Such uses should not have a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, so any proposals involving the extension of buildings will be strictly controlled. In addition, the District Council will consider the impact of associated uses of surrounding land for extensive hard-surfacing, car parking, boundary walling/fencing or extensive external storage, lighting, and ancillary uses upon the openness and landscape character of the Green Belt.

3.15 Proposals for the erection of new agricultural buildings may be considered to justify the imposition of a condition withdrawing permitted development rights if there is reason to judge that this may avoid a proliferation of farm buildings erected under such rights. Similarly it may be appropriate to consider whether the re-use of a modern building will result in additional agricultural buildings being required, to the prejudice of the openness of the Green Belt.

3.16 Together with Coldhams Common, Cambridge Airport forms part of a prominent wedge of open land which stretches into the City. Most operational development within the airfield has the benefit of permitted development rights. However, when consulted on proposals, the District Council will accept essential development within the flight operations area. The following list indicates those uses and development which would be acceptable: runways, taxiways, aircraft hardstandings, navigational aids, flight control facilities,

emergency services buildings, fuelling facilities, roads, noise barriers and security fencing and any other buildings which are necessary for the operational safety or efficiency of the airport.

3.17 Inappropriate development will only be permitted in very special circumstances where other considerations outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. These exceptional cases will be dealt with as departures to the Development Plan. When any development or redevelopment of land which would be considered inappropriate in the Green Belt occurs, the District Council will take into account the sensitive nature of the Green Belt, and, as far as possible, ensure that the development contributes to the objectives of the Green Belt.

The Location of Development

POLICY GB3 - Development which is not inappropriate, as defined in Policy GB2, will be located within or adjoining existing complexes or entail the redevelopment of redundant buildings to protect the rural nature and openness of the Green Belt.

3.18 Even development and changes of use which are normally appropriate in the Green Belt can lead to an erosion of its open and rural character. Where existing buildings are not suitable for new uses, the redevelopment of such buildings or development within or adjacent to existing groups of buildings is preferable to development on entirely new sites as it will minimise the impact on the countryside.

3.19 Even if a proposal is acceptable in principle, it is important that the placing of any building or works on its site and the effect on the locality is fully taken into account to minimise its impact. In the same way, any road building can have a significant impact upon the quality of the Green Belt. Therefore, any road building should take account of the sensitive nature of the Green Belt.

Major Developed Sites

POLICY GB4: Within the development boundary of major developed sites identified on the inset maps, 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 District Council will consider the cumulative impact of infilling proposals.**
- (2) Redevelopment is defined as development which would not occupy a larger floorspace than the existing built form, would not occupy a larger footprint unless there are significant environmental improvements, would not exceed the existing height of the built form and would not have a greater impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.**

3.20 The Plan identifies three Major Developed Sites within the Green Belt. These are at Babraham Hall, Fulbourn and Ida Darwin Hospital, and Girton College. The Green Belt notation is carried across these sites and they remain subject to Green Belt policies. However, infilling and redevelopment is permitted within the defined confines of the sites provided that it complies with the guidelines set out in the relevant site-specific policies in part 2 of the Plan. In policy GB4 above, the 'footprint' excludes temporary buildings, open spaces with external access between wings of buildings, and areas of hardstanding.

3.21 A development brief for Fulbourn and Ida Darwin Hospital was adopted by the Council in May 1996, and one for Babraham Hall will also be prepared and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

RECREATIONAL ROLE OF THE GREEN BELT

3.22 The population of the area is increasing and there is a trend towards more people taking part in leisure pursuits. The Green Belt has a positive role in providing for the increased demand for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation. Certain recreational facilities such as country parks, golf courses, and playing fields need extensive areas of land, but generally preserve its openness. Any associated buildings must only provide the functions to support these outdoor uses. Such uses would be appropriate on suitable sites within the Green Belt subject to considerations relating to loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

POLICY GB5: The District Council will not support proposals for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation in the Green Belt which require substantial buildings, car parks, floodlights or which frequently attract large numbers of participants or spectators or which would result in the loss of the best and most versatile grades of agricultural land.

3.23 Policy GB2 proposes that outdoor sport and outdoor recreation may be appropriate in the Green Belt. The Local Plan aims to balance the provision of suitable recreational and leisure activities against the needs of agriculture and the landscape. The Cambridge Area contains a high proportion of the best and most versatile agricultural land and is one of the most intensively farmed parts of the country. Much of the countryside consists of large arable fields, there are few woods, pastures or other areas of semi-natural vegetation. However, the remaining areas of semi-natural vegetation add considerably to the variety of the landscape.

Access to the Countryside - Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways

POLICY GB6: The District Council, in partnership with the County Council, will investigate the opportunities to improve and maintain access to the countryside through the maintenance of existing rights of way and the provision of new footpaths, bridleways and cycleways, including circular routes.

3.24 It is recognised that access to the countryside represents the type of informal recreation suited to a Green Belt location. There are opportunities for short walks, rambles

and longer distance paths such as the recently completed Fen Rivers Way which demonstrate what can be achieved in partnership with other statutory and local organisations. Improvements to existing public rights of way can be made by better signing, maintenance and other features such as stiles and bridges. Responsibility for implementation lies with both the County Council and the District Council. 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 the Cambridgeshire County Council and the Countryside Commission.

3.25 Cycling is a very popular mode of transport in Cambridge and cycling tourism offers particular opportunities to benefit the rural economy. The gentle relief of the District makes it an ideal area for cycling. The District Council will work closely with other organisations to promote cycling provision.

THE LANDSCAPE AND THE GREEN BELT

3.26 The Green Belt forms the landscape setting for the historic and University City of Cambridge. It ranges from the level fens north of the city to a series of gentle chalkland hills and valleys southwards. It is intensively farmed. The generally low relief means that any building or other development in this countryside is visible over long distances. Changes of use may also affect the quality of the landscape, for instance when meadowland is changed to playing fields. The effect on the landscape must be taken into account in determining applications in the Green Belt.

The Decline of the Landscape

POLICY GB7: In order to reverse the decline in the quality of the landscape, the District Council will promote the improvement and maintenance of the landscape through the Green Belt Project with the assistance of the Countryside Commission, Parish Councils and voluntary organisations and will seek agreements with landowners and the co-operation of voluntary organisations to improve and maintain the landscape.

3.27 In addition to developing footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes, the Green Belt Project has been set up to help make the countryside in and around Cambridge more attractive for wildlife and people. The Green Belt Project advises on hedge and tree management, countryside information and habitat management for rare species.

3.28 Recent years have seen the gradual decline of the landscape. Much of the good landscape within Cambridgeshire is over-mature and requires new trees and hedges to be planted to ensure the quality of the landscape does not continue to deteriorate. Changes in farming practices and the loss and damage to trees through disease and drought have created large and featureless areas of prairie like landscape. Planting on field boundaries and in corners can do much to improve and maintain the landscape.

3.29 Remnants of historic landscapes make a valuable contribution to the Green Belt, as acknowledged in the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 1995 in SP12/4. The ways in which landscape management, tree and hedge planting and other measures should be undertaken varies according to the character of the local landscape. This largely depends upon the dominant land-use and type of hedge and tree cover.

3.30 When the District Council identifies areas of poor or damaged landscape, it will seek to improve those areas by the planting of trees and hedges and by the removal of unsightly features. Other measures such as the clearance of rubbish and the improvement, maintenance and creation of wildlife habitats are also important in protecting and enhancing the landscape. The District Council will work with voluntary organisations such as the Naturalists Trust, The

Council for the Protection of Rural England, The Cambridge Conservation Volunteers, the Green Belt Project and other amenity groups in securing landscape improvements as well as landowners.