

LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATIONS

CAMBRIDGE CITY AND SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

STATEMENT BY SAVE THE CAMBRIDGE GREEN BELT

MATTER 6A GREEN BELT GENERAL ISSUES

- i. **Does the level of need for new jobs and homes constitute the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify removal of sites from the Green Belt? What would be the consequences if the boundary of the Green Belt were to be retained in its current location?**

The Local Plan (LP) over-estimates residential housing needs in its rounded and arbitrary projection of 14,000 required dwellings. The 14,000 figure is based on out-date forecasts undertaken several years prior to the 2011 Census results becoming available. The latest forecasts on the Cambridgeshire Insight website show a need for just over 12,000 dwellings in Cambridge. The provision made in the Cambridge City Council (CCC) 2013 Local Plan for 13,761 dwellings outside the Green Belt is more than enough to meet projected demand and there is thus no need to release Green Belt land to achieve this target. Exceptional circumstances have not been shown.

The current CCC release and construction schedule precludes the need for Green Belt land as declared in the CCC LP 2013, until 2021. New sites for redevelopment are emerging including, for example, the Mill Road depot operated by the CCC. These will be available before 2021 and no justifiable case can be made for the further release of Green Belt through the LP in view of this. Retaining the existing Green Belt boundary will stop urban sprawl and ensure that brownfield sites are developed first.

- ii. **Does the 2012 Inner Green Belt Study provide a robust justification for the proposed boundary changes?**

The 2012 Inner Green Belt Study refers back to the 2002 study and reinforces the importance of the Green Belt to maintaining the scope of the City and preventing urban sprawl. Most of the areas chosen are defined as being medium to very high in importance for retaining the setting of Cambridge and other purposes of the Green Belt. Green Belt areas adjacent to elevated and overlooking ground, are deemed to carry extra importance. This document justifies the need to retain the Green belt and not to change existing boundaries.

- iii. **Does the Inner Green belt review take account of the need for sustainable development?**

The Green Belt land provides a boundary around Cambridge and is at this point in time undeveloped. Any development of the land would require the building of utilities, schools, shops and public amenities. The Inner Green Belt Review fails entirely to reference these issues. The absence of such amenities in the proposed plan will increase the pressure on existing facilities and infrastructures leading to

- Direct detrimental environmental effects (noise, pollution, carbon emissions, flooding)
- Indirect environmental consequences (fewer resources to provide essential regulating, provisioning and cultural ecosystem services as per the UK National Ecosystem Assessment)
- Social pressures (access to education, healthcare, care for and facilities available to elderly residents and those with limited mobility).

Moreover, the roads that pass through the Green Belt areas are often major transport arteries for the City. Cambridge is already beset with traffic congestion problems and building on Green Belt land will exacerbate existing traffic problems through increased access to sites and dwellings. At some sites, particularly on the primary Cambridge access routes, additional houses will be a catalyst for traffic gridlock at peak times.

Building on Green Belt land is not a sustainable approach.

iv. Are the Purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt as defined in the LP consistent with paragraph 80 of the Framework?

The purposes of the Green Belt as outlined in Table 2.4 of the LP are consistent with the definitions in the Framework and in other documents available in the public domain. To meet the criteria, it is essential that brownfield development as referenced in para (i) above, is pursued before any development takes place on Green Belt land.

v. Do the plans adequately cover the need to positively enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt?

The 2013 LP which proposes the construction of dwellings on the Green Belt does not positively enhance the beneficial use of the land. Currently the land is used for farming and by the public for walking and countryside access. The land has a significant variety and population of bird, animal and plant species, including some that are red-listed and endangered. Food production is beneficial to the UK by helping to reduce the balance of payments deficit and carbon budgets and access is beneficial to wildlife and the public.

A petition organised by Save the Cambridge Green Belt has to date attracted 2721 objections to construction on the Green Belt. The 2012 Inner Green Belt study highlights the importance of retaining the Green Belt to retain the setting of Cambridge. The Government's planning guidance states that the purposes of the Green Belt are to:

- a. check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- b. prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- c. assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- d. preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- e. assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

If construction is permitted on the Cambridge Green Belt, the beneficial use of the land will be lost and the Government's planning guidance will not have been followed.

MATTER 6B SITES GB1 & GB2

vi. What would be the impact of the proposed boundary changes be on the purposes of including land in the Green Belt?

Sites GB1 and GB2 are the first parcels of open land outside the City leading to the iconic Gog Magog Hills. Their protection from development is critical for three reasons:

1. **Environmental.** The sites are currently productive agricultural fields that deliver produce and biodiversity as well as drainage facilities and recreational services to the local population. While the removal of such ecosystem services can in principle be offset, the National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) included a clear message that biodiversity is deteriorating, especially on farmland. Any sites of farmland, such as these sites, where local (including red-listed) species thrive therefore should be protected to reduce the rate of decline across the region.
2. **Visual.** The sites currently enhance the setting of the City as seen from the Gog Magog Hills. New developments will substantially alter the visual approach to the City; the scope to create natural barriers is negligible.
3. **Precedent.** The sites are small parts of a much larger potential development (application CC911, currently rejected). Opening up GB1/GB2 sets a precedent for future developments to envelope the Beechwood, the Gog Magog Hills and open land around Wandlebury Park.

vii. Are there any (other) reasons why development of these sites should be resisted or any overriding constraints to development?

The absence of planned amenities and public services in the sites means that existing infrastructures and services, already under strain, will carry the burden of the added population. Given the location and distance from existing shops, surgeries, pharmacies and schools (average 2km, more than twice the Cambridge City Council's guideline for a sustainable community) it is inevitable that this will involve frequent car use.

The planned vast expansion of the Addenbrooke's Hospital site over the coming decade, together with the increase in city jobs that is projected, will already add substantial traffic to the current strained situation, and any further pressures on the road infrastructure will negatively affect quality of life for residents, commuters and hospital employees and patients alike. The added carbon and particulate emissions due to congestion will lead to environmental degradation and risks to human health.

11 January 2015.