

Making the Case for a South Hampshire Green Belt



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Summary

South Hampshire has experienced a substantial amount of development over the last 50 years. It has seen its population grow, the expansion of the cities and larger towns into the countryside and completely new communities established.

The growth up until the early 2000s was managed by the local planning authorities under the umbrella of structure plans prepared by Hampshire County Council and for a short period the South East Regional Plan. However, since 2011 there has been no formal strategic framework to guide decisions on where development should and should not take place.

The absence of such a framework together with the pressure for more development means that the countryside of south Hampshire, which is one of its greatest assets and which helps define the identity of the towns and villages within, it is at risk from unplanned and un-coordinated development.

This paper sets out the case for a new Green Belt for south Hampshire as part of a wider strategic vision for Hampshire.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the paper is to make the case for a green Belt for south Hampshire having regard to the advice set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.2 The paper's focus is demonstrating how the tests set out in paragraph 82 of the NPPF can be met.
- 1.3 Once the principle of a Green belt had been agreed by the local authorities within whose area it could be the next step would be to assess options for a boundary. The CPRE Hampshire considers that the local authorities should lead on defining a boundary given their expertise and role in the formal designation process. It would however like to be involved in the process.

2. National Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.1 A good starting point is the NPPF which sets out the Government's policy direction on planning. Crucially in paragraphs 79 - 92 its approach to Green Belts. In addition, the context for the debate on a Green Belt for south Hampshire is provided by the paragraphs covering the purpose of planning, the elements which comprise sustainable development and the core planning principles which are relevant to the satisfying of the five tests in paragraph 82. The following comprise a summary of the key elements of the NPPF considered pertinent to the discussion.
- 2.2 The NPPF sets out in para 9 a number of positive outcomes that sustainable development could deliver including;
 - moving from a net loss of biodiversity to achieving net gains
 - improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure
- 2.3 The NPPF sets out 12 core principles ref para 17 including:
 - planning should be a.... creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives
 - take account of the different roles and character of different areas.....
 - contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment..... allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value....
 - manage patterns of growth.... and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable
 - .. improve health social and cultural wellbeing for all...

- 2.4 The NPPF sets out the Government's position on Green Belts. The fundamental aim is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence ref para 79.
- 2.5 The NPPF identifies five purposes of Green Belt ref para 80:
- check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
 - prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
 - assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land
- 2.6 New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances eg planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. If proposing anew Green Belt local planning authorities should ref para 82:
- Demonstrate why normal policies not be adequate
 - Whether any changes in circumstances made adoption of exceptional measure necessary
 - Show consequences for sustainable development
 - Demonstrate necessity for green belt and its consistency with local plans for adjoining areas
 - Show how green belt meet other objectives of the NPPF
- 2.7 Established boundaries in local plans, should only be altered in exceptional circumstances and should endure beyond the plan period. ref para 83
- 2.8 The need to promote sustainable development, consider consequences for areas inside and beyond the Green Belt. ref para 84
- 2.9 Local planning authorities should meet development needs and identify safeguarded land to meet longer term needs. ref para 85
- 2.10 Local authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations. ref para 88

Housing White Paper (Feb 2017)

- 2.11 The Housing White Paper (February 2017) has made some interesting comments regarding Green Belts, see paras 1.37 - 1.40. It retains the test of exceptional circumstances to justify the release of land when local authorities can demonstrate that they have examined all other reasonable options ref para 1.38
- 2.12 Where land is proposed to be removed local policies the White Paper suggests that the impact of development to be offset by compensatory improvements to the environment of

the remaining Green Belt land and of accessibility to it ref para 1.39. Where there is pressure to release Green Belt the White Paper highlights the role of the Duty to Cooperate by including the exploration of need with adjoining authorities as one of the criteria for removing land ref para 1.39.

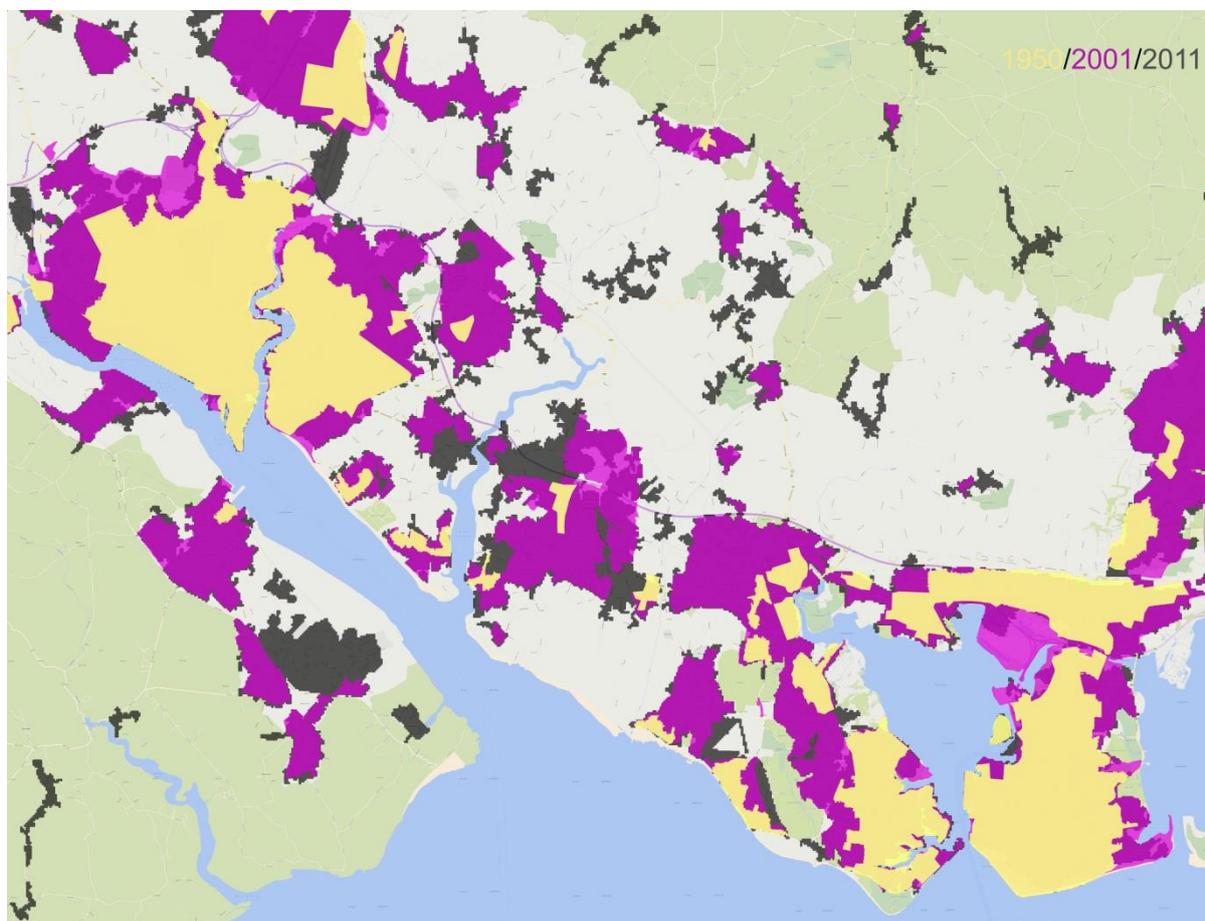
2.13 The Government is also to consider the merits of seeking higher developer contributions where land is released.

2.14 In the Annexe to the White Paper further proposals are put forward. In A.63 it suggests that when carrying out a Green Belt review, local authorities should look first at land which surrounds a transport hub (not defined) and previously developed land. In A.64 the WP puts forward to possibility that neighbourhood plans could be a mechanism for defining new boundaries where a need to amend the existing ones has been established.

3. South Hampshire Context

- 3.1 Development in south Hampshire over the last fifty years been significant. Population has increased significantly and is set to continue growing see para 4.7 below.
- 3.2 Perhaps of greater significance is the location and scale of development which has taken place. Existing settlements such as Eastleigh Fareham Romsey, Totton Waterlooville have experienced substantial growth in addition to the development on the edge of Southampton. New communities have been developed including Valley Park, Chandler's Ford and Whiteley. The pattern of development and its impact on the area is illustrated on the map below. The areas of countryside between the settlements which plays such an important part in framing their character and identity has been significantly diminished.

South Hampshire 1950- 2001-2011



- 3.3 The pattern of development is set to continue as each local planning authority brings forward existing allocations for development, prepares new local plans for their areas and because of planning appeals. E.g. development between Havant and Emsworth, between Eastleigh and Southampton, Nursling and Southampton, north of Eastleigh and the new community of Welborne at Fareham.

4. Meeting the NPPF tests in south Hampshire

- 4.1 To achieve a Green Belt for south Hampshire the merits of such a significant and strategic a proposal need to set in the terms of the tests set out in the NPPF. If the case can be made then the prospect of seeking the support of the key local authorities to deliver via their local plans a green belt will be enhanced. The following paragraphs address the five tests of the NPPF

Why normal planning and development management policies are not adequate

- 4.2 The existing planning polices in adopted local plans whilst recognising the importance of maintaining the separation of settlements have not been sufficiently robust to prevent the loss of sites to development in existing local gaps either via permission by the LPAs or on appeal.
- 4.3 In the balancing act of decision making, the weight of decision favours the use of land for development rather than retention for retaining settlement character and pattern as framed by local plan policies unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. The designation of a Green Belt would introduce that test.
- 4.4 There is at present no formal strategic framework for informing where development should or should not be located having regard to the settlement pattern and identity the villages towns and two cities which make up south Hampshire.
- 4.5 The current planning regime/policies exercises very little control over the management of land leading to poor quality environment. A Green Belt designation together with a proactive land management approach could enhance the quality of the environment around the towns and cities of south Hampshire for the benefit of residents.

Major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of the measure necessary

- 4.6 The planning policy context of south Hampshire has changed significantly in recent years the cumulative impact of which is to increase pressure for development on a relatively small geographic area. The combination of various planning designations may well mean that the position in south Hampshire is unique in the United Kingdom The designations include;
- the creation of two national parks on the borders of the area; the New Forest National Park (2005) and the South Downs National Park (2009) whose objectives are to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and Promote public understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities.
 - The designation of the New Forest as a Special Area of Conservation(SAC) to the west of Southampton and the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) which is located in the heart of south Hampshire together with other international and national designations means that the area is significantly constrained with respect to where development can be located.
- 4.7 The pressure for development is significant. Local Authorities in South Hampshire are planning for 104,00 new homes 2011-2034 ref PUSH Spatial Position Statement (2014) a potential population increase of around 250,000 people. The recently (September 2017) published consultation by the Government on estimating the housing requirement that local authorities need to plan for may result in even higher levels of growth. The Solent LEP has ambitious plans to promote greater economic development in south Hampshire. it is looking to create an additional 16,000 jobs (2014-20) with investment in infrastructure to manage the growth.
- 4.8 The south Hampshire coast is at risk from flooding because of rising sea levels and requires major investment in defences to protect coastal communities further limiting the areas where development could take place.
- 4.9 The Localism Act 2011 introduced a Duty to Co-Operate upon local authorities. In short, the unmet housing needs of one authority should be addressed by provision in neighbouring authorities. New Forest District Council and the New Forest National Park Authority in their emerging plans are planning for significantly less housing than the need they have identified. This is likely to put even greater pressure on the countryside in neighbouring authorities around Southampton.

The consequences of the proposal for sustainable development

4.10 A Green Belt would be central to the development of a robust strategy for delivering sustainable development in south Hampshire. It would;

- retain the identity of settlements which is highly valued by residents
- establish areas where public access to green spaces could be actively promoted and managed for the benefit of residents of the urban conurbation which is south Hampshire
- complement and support initiative such as ecological networks to maintain biodiversity of south Hampshire
- support the continued regeneration of existing urban areas by retaining accessible green spaces close by
- support the economic development of south Hampshire by retaining and enhancing one of its key assets that is its high quality natural environment and landscape

Necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with the Local Plans for adjoining areas

- see above for the necessity for a Green belt
- the designation of a Green Belt would be part of a comprehensive approach the strategic planning of south Hampshire
- under the Duty to Co-operate local planning authorities are required to work collaboratively on strategic planning issues. The south Hampshire local authorities ref recognises the issue of settlement character and identity; PUSH Spatial Position Statement 2016 and PUSH GI Strategy 2017
- the reviews of local plans would provide a mechanism for including the proposed Green Belt into planning policy framework

How the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework

4.12 The focus of the NPPF is the delivery of sustainable development. It comprises three elements; economic; social and environmental. A Green Belt in the context of a wider strategy to guide development to the right places would support the three elements. It would support the health and wellbeing of residents of south Hampshire through the safe guarding for the long terms areas of green space accessible to the public which has well founded positive benefits for physical and mental health and well-being.

4.13 A Green Belt would be in step with a number of the core planning principles set out in para 17 of the NPPF including;

- planning should be a.... creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives
- take account of the different roles and character of different areas.....
- contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.....
allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value....
- manage patterns of growth.... and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable
- .. improve health social and cultural wellbeing for all...

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The pressure for further development to meet the needs of the residents of south Hampshire is recognised by the Hampshire CPRE. However, without a strong strategic planning framework there is a significant risk that the character of the area will experience long term and irreparable harm. A strategy which includes a Green Belt would provide a positive way forward.