



Report to the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: **18 December 2018**

Report of: **Claire Upton-Brown Assistant Director City Development**

Subject: **Consideration of Green Belt Designation**

SUMMARY

The report sets out the background to Green Belt, the impact of Green Belt designation and potential alternatives. The report concludes that proper consideration of whether there is a case to seek Green Belt designation will be informed by the Duty to Co-operate work. This report was considered by the Joint Committee on the 04 December 2018.

RECOMMENDATION

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee NOTES that the Joint Committee **AGREED** that the rationale and justification for an appropriate Green Belt designation be included as a core part of any joint work taken forward under the Duty to Co-operate initiative.

INTRODUCTION

1. At the Joint Committee meeting it was agreed that the PUSH Planning Officer Group should bring a full report back to the Joint Committee, in light of the presentation by CPRE, to advise whether there is any justification for considering a Green Belt across the PUSH area.

BACKGROUND

2. The birth of Green Belts came in the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. The purpose of Green Belts is to:
 - a. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
 - b. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
 - c. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - d. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
 - e. To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

A later government circular in 1955 encouraged all local authorities to establish a Green Belt - some did but many did not.

3. Guidance is provided within the NPPF on how authorities should deal with development in the Green Belt, acknowledging that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. It should be noted that Green Belt is a land use policy designation not a protection for high quality landscapes.

Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access to these areas

- a. to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation
 - b. to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity
 - c. encourage the redevelopment of damaged and derelict land
4. The NPPF sets out that Green Belt should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example, when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. Any proposal for new Green Belt should be set out in strategic policies which should
 - a. Demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate
 - b. Set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary
 5. Policy for a new Green Belt need to show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development. It would need to demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with strategic policies for adjoining areas and show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.

6. When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. The boundary needs to be consistent with the development plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development and not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open. It may be necessary to identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the green Belt in order to meet longer term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period. Further there is a need to demonstrate that the Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period. Green Belt boundaries need to be defined clearly using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent i.e. therefore at least 80 years.
7. Whilst Green Belt designation remains within the armoury of possible planning policy there is no evidence to suggest that it has any central government support. The direction of travel is in the other direction as illustrated below.

Implication of Green Belt designation

The designation of a Green Belt does not prevent development happening but when considering planning applications local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Lack of a 5 year housing supply can amount to very special circumstances.

Once established Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or update of plans. Before releasing Green Belt land the authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies and whether it makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land and optimises density. Further this need to have been informed by discussions within neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development as demonstrated through a Statement of Common Ground.

Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development plans should set out ways in which the impact of removing Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remained Green Belt land.

There are some recent examples of Green Belt release Guildford has proposed significant release in its new Local Plan to meet objectively assessed needs including unmet need from neighbouring authorities. Other authorities have promoted the release of Green Belt the most significant is Coventry City Council in its recently adopted Local Plan which releases 51% of Green Belt to deliver 7,000 homes.

Alternatives to Green Belt

There are alternative approaches to Green Belts that whilst having less planning status provide spatial landscape areas between settlements. Alternative to Green Belt

include landscape designation such as Strategic Gaps, local Green gaps or wedges and local landscape protection policies. Land ownership ultimately is the most effective mechanism to prevent development within an area. These can be supported by local landscape policies and there are already some good examples across the PUSH area.

CONCLUSION

Establishing a Green Belt in South Hampshire could only be supported through meeting a challenging policy test. Once established Green Belt does not completely protect land in the long term.

The NPPF sets out that Green Belt should only be established in exceptional circumstances, of example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. Any proposal for new Green Belt should be set out in strategic policies which should

- a. Demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate
- b. Set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary

At the current time, there is not the strategic position and this would be needed to promote a Green Belt in South Hampshire. Whether there is a reason to promote designation of a Green Belt is a matter that needs to be and will be considered as part of the work under the Duty to Co-operate.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee NOTES that the Joint Committee AGREED that the rationale and justification for an appropriate Green Belt designation be included as a core part of any joint work taken forward under the Duty to Co-operate initiative.

Background Papers:

CPRE presentation to Joint Committee June 2018
Presentation by LDA to PUSH POG

Reference Papers:

None

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact:
Claire Upton-Brown Assistant Director of City Development
T: 02392834200
E: claire.upton-brown@portsmouthcc.gov.uk