



**BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET
CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION**

ISSUE 3

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Issue 3: Is the retention of the general extent of the Green Belt justified?

10.1 *Responses and subsequent discussion on this sub-matter should not repeat matters most appropriately addressed under Issue 1 (overall provision) or concerns about delivery within the urban area to be addressed in the context of the spatial areas.*

1.1 Whilst it is always possible for an Authority to decide to retain existing Green Belt boundaries (since this complies with the advice in PPG2) the key issue in this case is why the independently derived estimates of housing need no longer represent very special circumstances. In view of the latest information on the household projections (see response to Issue 1 and Appendix 1 Demographic and Housing Paper (using the Chelmer Model) and the lack of sustainable development opportunities outside the Green Belt, and the uncertainty about the delivery of brownfield sites, Pegasus Planning Group considers that there is a strong need to relax the Green Belt in certain strategic locations and accept that very special circumstances continue to apply.

1.2 The need to review the Green Belt was originally identified in the South West as long ago as 1994 in the first RPG10. Paragraph 4.11 stated that:

“There are three areas of green belt in the South West – around Bristol and Bath and Cheltenham/Gloucester Development plans should continue to pursue policies aimed at preventing inappropriate development in the green belts. The need to provide additional development consistent with the principle of reducing the need to travel set out in PPG13, may require some reappraisal of the current configuration of green belts, especially where detailed boundaries have yet to be justified.”

1.3 RPG 10 produced in 2001, (and currently the RSS until the Orders are produced to implement the Localism Act) also refers to the need to critically review the Green Belt in the Bristol/BANES area and this was to have been undertaken through the review of the Avon Structure Plan. Policy SS4 states that Green Belts should continue to fulfil the purposes in PPG2. However, as a key element of the future planning of the region, local authorities when preparing their development plans should:

- *“....critically review the Green Belt to examine whether boundary alterations are needed to allow for long term sustainable development needs.*

- *Remove land from the Green Belt for development if, on balance, this would provide the most sustainable solution for accommodating future development requirements;*
- *Include additional land within the Green Belt where clearly necessary for the purposes set out in PPG2”*

1.4 The concern at that time was that some growth from the Principal Urban Areas e.g. Bath, Bristol was “leaping” the Green Belt to nearby commuter towns, leading to less sustainable patterns of development and travel. The RPG stated that the need to ensure that future patterns of development are more sustainable means that the boundaries of these Green Belts should be reviewed in the next round of Structure Plans.

Policy SS 8: The Bristol Area

Local authorities, developers, infrastructure and transport providers and other agencies should work together to achieve the following for the Bristol area:

.....

- **balanced provision of additional housing, employment, social and recreational facilities within the urban area or as planned urban extensions;**
- **integrated public transport facilities within Bristol and linking the city with nearby urban areas;**
- **an enhanced economic base by providing for the full range of growth generated by the city and its hinterland and an element of inward investment;**

.....

- **a review of the Green Belt in accordance with Policy SS 4;**
- **investment in programmes for economic, physical and social regeneration, with an emphasis on encouraging development in the more disadvantaged areas, including south Bristol.”**

1.5 The Avon Structure Plan¹ was adopted in September 2002 and a number of its policies are saved². It was prepared in accordance with RPG10 (1994). It should be noted that although it was approved after the later RPG in 2011 most of the policies in the Structure Plan had previously been agreed for adoption. The Structure Plan states in paragraph 2.17 that the full implications of the 2001 RPG10 would be addressed in the next review of the Structure Plan. It went on to say that the main

¹ CD3/1 Joint Replacement Structure Plan (2002)

² CD3/2 Joint Replacement Structure Plan Saved Policies Schedule

principles of the Structure Plan's locational strategy generally conformed to the new guidance.

- 1.6 The policy towards Green Belt is set out in "saved" Policy 16. The Structure Plan states that in paragraph 2.21 that it will be for the next Structure Plan Review to address the implications of RPG10 2001, which places more emphasis on the need to review the Green Belt boundaries and to remove land from the Green Belt.
- 1.7 With the introduction of the Regional Spatial Strategies as a result of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act – the strategic review of the Green Belt became the responsibility of the South West Regional Assembly and was undertaken by the West of England Partnership Joint Study Area (Section 4(4) authorities) as part of the evidence base for the emerging RS.
- 1.8 More recently the Proposed Changes by the Secretary of State, which was based on the 2004 household projections (17,000 households for Bath and North East Somerset), identified the need for new urban extensions in the Green Belt to accommodate future development needs relating to Bath and Bristol. In order for these cities to fulfil their economic potential the most sustainable solution was to provide for urban extension to the cities, including six locations that had been the subject of a review of the Green Belt. These proposals were subject to full SEAs. In order to address these exceptional circumstances the RSS made changes to the general extent of the Green Belt by removing the designation from the areas required to accommodate the proposed urban extensions.
- 1.9 In the consultation on the Spatial Options for the ensuing Core Strategy (produced in October 2009) BANES included a New Neighbourhood at South East Bristol which included land at Whitchurch as well as some relaxations around Bath. Thus up until December 2010 the Council was considering urban extensions in the Green Belt. The Council's evidence base including the Sustainability Assessment undertaken at the time (CD4/A5) supports the consideration of this area and its removal from the Green Belt. The consultation on the Spatial Options provided the opportunity to comment on the proposed locations for urban extensions.
- 1.10 In December 2010 the Council changed its approach on the basis of the Council's evidence base rather than the regional housing figures (Cabinet Report 2nd December 2010).

10.2 *If I were to find the plan unsound in relation to the overall scale of development planned or its delivery and that there was potential for additional development in the Green Belt, I would refer the matter back to the Council for further consideration. On the basis of the present planned hearings, I would not be in a position to impose a recommendation for a specific location in the Green Belt, not least because parties (both existing and possibly new) who support the plan and oppose development in the Green Belt would not have had a right to be heard.*

10.3 *I consider that there is considerable scope for the participants pursuing major alternative development sites in the Green Belt to produce succinct Statements of Common Ground with the Council (or with other parties) to help focus discussion at the hearings. These should not cover lengthy descriptive background, but highlight matters that will assist me in grappling with the complexity and diversity of material relating to these sites, with clear cross referencing to existing material (e.g. agree what evidence studies remain relevant for what types of proposals; what evidence is lacking; what are the critical areas of disagreement; and what would need to be done to overcome unsoundness if I were to conclude that some development opportunities should be explored in the Green Belt).*

The overall approach

10.4 *On the assumptions set out in the following 3 scenarios would there be any need/justification for development in the Green Belt; would any such scenario result in the exceptional circumstances necessary to change a Green Belt boundary (as required by PPG2); and, if so, does that mean that a change to the Green Belt is required to make the plan sound or only that such a change is an option to be balanced against any disadvantages?*

- that the overall scale of development proposed and its delivery is sound;*
- that the overall scale of development proposed is sound, but its delivery is uncertain and needs supplementing and/or a specific contingency needs to be identified;*
- that the overall scale of housing development is unjustified and should be significantly more.*

1.1 Pegasus Planning Group does not support the first scenario. However, if the Inspector concluded this, then very special circumstances would not exist to justify a Green Belt review.

1.2 In respect of the second scenario Pegasus believe that the delivery of sites is inherently uncertain and needs to be supplemented substantially; a contingency is inadequate to meet a shortfall of this scale. In such a situation exceptional circumstances could exist but this would depend upon the size of any potential housing shortfall as determined by the Inspector. The need for a potential release of Green Belt land would also depend upon whether the Inspector determines that there are other sources capable of making up any shortfall. We are not aware of any such sources hence our conclusion that delivery problems alone would make the plan unsound and necessitate a Green Belt review. There are no other options that have not been considered.

1.3 Pegasus Planning believe that the third scenario (involving inadequate dwelling numbers) could only lead to the Strategy being considered unsound. This would lead to the need for a Green Belt Review for the same reasons set out in the preceding paragraph i.e. there are no other alternative methods of increasing the allocations in a sustainable location.

1.4 According to the Draft NPPF July 2011, the appropriateness of the Green Belt should only be considered when a Local Plan is being prepared or reviewed. Local Planning authorities are then required to consider the permanence of the boundaries

at that time so that they are capable of enduring beyond the plan period. Consequently now is the time to undertake this exercise.

1.5 It is axiomatic that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities are also required to take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. By deliberately tailoring the housing numbers to a highly questionable employment strategy the Council has sought to avoid implementing the Green Belt Review which it previously undertook and found to be sustainable. In deciding to not implement the relaxation of the Green Belt the Council has:-

- (i) not properly assessed the consequence as to where unmet need will be met:
- (ii) not properly undertaken a sustainability assessment of the pattern of development and the failure to meet housing needs.

Bath

10.5 *Is there the potential to accommodate additional housing in the Green Belt adjoining Bath (either at the scale of urban extensions proposed in the Spatial Options Consultation 2009 (CD5/4) or as smaller extensions, such as assessed by the Council in September 2011 - CD4/A17 Annex K) without serious conflict with the overall purpose of the Green Belt here and national policy objectives/legal requirements, such as the setting of the WHS, AONBs and their setting, Ancient Monuments and their setting, and the Special Area of Conservation?*

1.1 Pegasus Planning Group on behalf of Robert Hitchins Ltd have no comments on this question.

Adjoining Bristol

10.6 *Is there the potential to accommodate additional housing in the Green Belt adjoining the Bristol City boundary (either at the scale of urban extensions proposed in the Spatial Options Consultation 2009 or as smaller extensions as assessed by the Council in September 2011 - CD4/A17 Annex K) without serious conflict with the overall purpose of the Green Belt here and national policy objectives/legal requirements and deliverable in relation to integration with development over the City boundary?*

1.1 Pegasus Planning Group considers that there is scope to accommodate additional housing in the Green Belt adjoining the Bristol City boundary either as a small scale urban extension or as part of a larger urban extension should this be necessary.

1.2 Bristol is a major driver of the regional economy. The objective is to create a better balance between homes and jobs in order to reduce the need to travel. The RSS stated that in order to fulfil Bristol's economic potential the provision of new homes cannot be met within the existing urban areas. The most sustainable solution is to provide from major urban extensions to the SSCTs, including six locations that have been subject to a review of the Green Belt.

1.3 One of the urban extensions lies to the south east of Bristol (within both Bristol City Council area and BANES). The area identified for this purpose extends from the Whitchurch area, through Stockwood Vale and then northwards to Hicks Gate.

1.4 Policy HMA 1:West of England HMA states:

“..... Provision for sustainable housing growth will comprise:

- **9,500 new homes at Area of Search 1B (of which 8,000 within Bath and North East Somerset and 1,500 in Bristol.).....**

Bristol and Bath Green Belt

The general extent of the Bristol and Bath Green Belt will be maintained subject to the following alterations:.....

- **Removal of the Green Belt to accommodate urban extensions at Areas of Search 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1F and 1G.”**

1.5 The Area of Search 1B relates specifically to the Whitchurch area as can be seen from an extract of the Key Diagram.

1.6 The Draft Regional Strategy stated that the general extent of the Green Belt would be maintained subject to alterations to enable the Areas of Search for urban

extensions to be brought forward through the preparation of Core Strategies. Where the general extent of the Green Belt is amended, precise boundaries are intended to be identified in Local Development Frameworks.

- 1.7 Despite the impending abolition of the RS we believe that there are still strong grounds for allowing some relaxations of the Green Belt boundaries. The evidence base underpinning the RS for the scale of growth then proposed is still relevant and further supported by the more recent 2008 and 2010-based household projections. The relaxation of the Green Belt boundary is needed to alleviate this deficit, and in order to deal with inadequacies in the supply of land within Bristol to meet predicted housing needs. Small sites will also help meet 5 Year land supply deficits based on the likely delays to urban sites. The need for revisions to Green Belt boundaries comes about because all the major urban areas within BANES are already heavily constrained by this designation, thereby limiting the opportunities for achieving sustainable development; moreover the designation of the whole of Bath as a World Heritage Site brings with it major problems in bringing forward redevelopment sites within the urban area.
- 1.8 The area of south east Bristol was included in the Core Strategy Spatial Options despite the housing figures being reduced from those included in the Draft RSS (CD3/7). Two district wide locational strategy options were included in the Council's original Spatial Options consultation; the options were based on the result of the work that the Council had undertaken together with discussions with other service providers and comments raised during the consultation on the Core Strategy launch.
- 1.9 Land at Whitchurch was included in an Area of Search as part of the urban extension of south east Bristol. In its appraisal of the Area of Search, the Stockwood Vale area was excluded as an area for development as the area was regarded as important in the local landscape. The area also performed a strategic Green Belt role so it was regarded by the Council as unsuitable for development. The area around Hicks Gate was also discounted and the reasons for this are set out in paragraph 5.14 of the Spatial Options Consultation Document.
- 1.10 In terms of the area around Whitchurch paragraph 5.23 of the Spatial Options Consultation Document continues stating that the area has the potential to be well integrated into the existing urban area of South East Bristol with access to a wide range of services and facilities supporting the needs of the new and existing communities. Development in this area would offer an opportunity to develop

around Whitchurch village. The consultation document stated that there are opportunities to extend existing and planned public transport services from Bristol into the Whitchurch area. It appears from the Council's own papers that doubt over this latter point (together with its location in the Green Belt) is the only reason why this area has now been removed from consideration (see Paragraph 5.27 CD 5/4).

- 1.11 The Council accepted, subject to phasing and appropriate infrastructure, that there was capacity for around "3,500 dwellings at Whitchurch." Therefore, the principle of development in the area was clearly accepted by the Council in order to meet the housing needs of the growing population and the trend towards smaller household formation. Importantly, land off Stockwood Lane was identified in the Spatial Options Consultation as an area with some potential to accommodate development (Diagram 38: Environmental Capacity Assessment for land at Whitchurch CD5/4).
- 1.12 The development of land off Stockwood Lane is consistent with the long established strategy of focusing development at sustainable locations and the strategy for both BANES and Bristol set out in the statutory development plan i.e. the interim RSS. Furthermore the proposed development of land off Stockwood Lane, Whitchurch for up to 295 dwellings, whilst meeting the housing land supply shortfall, will not prejudice a larger scale urban extension should one be required in the long term.
- 1.13 In terms of the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Table 6A of the adopted Local Plan CD5/1 land at Whitchurch, south east Bristol, amending the inner boundary of the Green Belt to accommodate limited development, will not result in the unrestricted sprawl of Bristol.
- 1.14 Land at Whitchurch does not contribute to preventing the merging of Bristol, Keynsham, Saltford and Bath.
- 1.15 In terms of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment this would apply to any undeveloped land in the Green Belt.
- 1.16 Land at Whitchurch does not contribute to the purpose of preserving the setting and special character of Bath or Bristol
- 1.17 In terms of assisting in the urban regeneration of Bath and Bristol by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, the release of limited amount of land from the Green Belt at Whitchurch will not adversely impact on the recycling of derelict and other urban land within Bristol (or Bath). This land will also be needed

to meet established housing needs. The Spatial Options Core Strategy Consultation noted that:

“this area adjoins south Bristol which is a priority focus for comprehensive development and regeneration with development , including major land use change, to be focused around the Hartcliffe roundabout area and broadly covered by Knowle West, Hengrove Park, Inns Court, Imperial Park and the Hartcliffe campus. This area adjoins Stockwood, an area of Bristol which is one of the lowest levels of employment opportunities for a neighbourhood in Bristol and high levels of out-commuting to work, and an urban extension could help address this issue and provide local employment.”

- 1.18 Neither will the release of a limited amount of land from the Green Belt at Whitchurch will not adversely impact on the character, identity and setting of Whitchurch. The Council’s Urban Extension Environmental Capacity Appraisal (October 2006) identified areas around Whitchurch as having potential to accommodate development. This analysis was founded on an appraisal /analysis of landscape and visual aspects.
- 1.19 Up until December 2010 the area of south east Bristol was considered as a location in the Core Strategy. It was only excluded from the Core Strategy when the Council decided to re-assess the evidence base underpinning the Core Strategy in light of the Government’s announcement to abolish Regional Strategies (see BANES report to Council of 2nd December 2010).
- 1.20 More recently still it was included as one of the four locations for a contingency based on the fact that it was previously identified as an urban extension option (see Cabinet Report 13th September 2011 paragraph A1.14).

10.7 *Given that the adopted Bristol Core Strategy identifies Brislington (adjoining Hicks Gate) as a long term contingency for further housing development is the Core Strategy's silence in relation to development here sound (irrespective of any conclusions on the other issues)?*

1.1 No comments.

10.8 *If I were to conclude that there was a need for more housing development within B&NES to serve its needs, would development adjoining Bristol be an appropriate location? How compatible would it be the rest of the strategy?*

1.1 Pegasus Planning Group considers that development adjoining Bristol would be an appropriate location for more housing to meet development needs. Land at South East Bristol was one of the areas identified to accommodate future development needs in the RSS that could not be accommodated in Bristol City. This would be compatible with the rest of the strategy as it would not be in conflict with any development to the south west of Bristol or around Keynsham which were also promoted in the RSS to meet housing needs. Land in this location could meet the local needs of BANES in a sustainable location and/or some of the “spillover” needs not being met in the Bristol area.

Keynsham

10.9 *Is there the potential to accommodate additional housing in the Green Belt adjoining Keynsham, and if so of what scale, without serious conflict with the overall purpose of the Green Belt here and national policy objectives/legal requirements?*

1.1 Pegasus Planning Group on behalf of Robert Hitchins Ltd has no comments on Keynsham.