

Topic Paper 4 – Revision to the Green Belt Boundary

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Planning Policy Guidance 2 (PPG2): Green Belts, outlines the overarching approach to development in the Green Belt. Existing Green Belt boundaries which have been defined should be protected and maintained, unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated as detailed within paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7.
- 1.2. The Green Belt in Rochford District is recognised for its importance in maintaining the open, rural character of the area, and preventing the coalescence of settlements. This designation has assisted in urban regeneration in the District by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, and the Council have been successful in maintaining a defensible Green Belt boundary.
- 1.3. However, the Core Strategy Submission Document proposes that a small proportion of the District's Green Belt be allocated for development. The Core Strategy Submission Document recognises that there is a need to redraw the existing Green Belt boundary, which results from a thorough examination of local housing need and the future supply of sustainable and deliverable land for development, as well as an Employment Land Study (2008). The East of England Plan previously provided the justification for the quantum of development, which in turn necessitated the allocation of Green Belt land for development. However, subsequent to the submission of the Core Strategy for examination, the Secretary of State has revoked Regional Strategies, including the East of England Plan. Consequently, it is necessary to look at whether there are still exceptional circumstances that justify altering the Green Belt boundary and this paper addresses this issue.

2. Exceptional Circumstances

- 2.1 As noted above, PPG2 requires that exceptional circumstances be demonstrated if the Green Belt boundary is to be altered. This section of the topic paper considers whether there are exceptional circumstances which warrant the allocation of land for residential uses, and the allocation of land for employment uses.

The Allocation of Land for Residential Uses

- 2.2. In the case of Rochford District there is a recognised local housing need, a shortage of developable land to meet these housing needs

outside of the Green Belt, and a persistent shortage of affordable housing.

- 2.3. Notwithstanding the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies and their associated housing targets, the District still has a local housing need as detailed within Topic Paper 3. This is based on evidence informing the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2008 and 2010).
- 2.4. Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing, requires Local Planning Authorities to demonstrate a deliverable five-year housing land supply and a continuous delivery of housing for a 15 year period from the date of adoption of Local Development Documents.
- 2.5. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (2008) identifies the available supply of land through the allocation of appropriate non-Green Belt sites for development. The SHLAA (2008) evidences the inherent shortage of sustainable and deliverable housing land outside of the Green Belt within the District, compared with the need.
- 2.6. Consequently there remains a pressing need to reallocate a small amount of Green Belt land in light of the lack of alternative non-Green Belt sites identified. Indeed the reallocation of land will be managed through the Allocations Development Plan Document to ensure that around 99% of the District's Green Belt will remain as such.

The Allocation of Land for Employment Uses

- 2.7. A number of existing employment sites have been identified through the Employment Land Study (2008) as generally being poorly located for their current uses, "bad neighbours" to the surrounding land uses, particularly residential, and / or more appropriately utilised for alternative uses (see 'Recommendation for Existing Sites' page 69-71). The Core Strategy Submission Document has set out the strategy for addressing such sites.
- 2.8. This affords the opportunity to relocate these existing "bad neighbour" employment sites, which have been identified in the most sustainable and viable locations, and provide for the District's housing need within the existing urban area to ensure that the minimum amount of Green Belt necessary is allocated for residential uses. Not all existing previously developed land, however, is appropriate to be reallocated for residential uses.
- 2.9. Alongside projected housing need, additional employment land should be provided to promote the local balance between the population and local employment opportunities. As such with the reallocation of

appropriate “bad neighbour” employment sites, additional employment land will need to be allocated to accommodate both displaced and future businesses. The Employment Land Study (2008) in particular identified that the current quantum of employment land is required, and as such any loss through reallocation for residential uses should be compensated for (see paragraph 7.11). Furthermore, a need for an additional 2.2 hectares of office space was identified (see paragraph 7.15), and the Core Strategy Submission Document identifies land to the west of Rayleigh, to the south of London Road as being the most sustainable location. The Core Strategy Submission Document also seeks to deliver the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy (2009).

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 Notwithstanding the revocation of the East of England Plan, there is still a need for development in the District. Having regard to the availability of land for development outside of the Green Belt (as identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) this need cannot be accommodated without a small proportion of Green Belt land being allocated for development. For the reasons set out within this paper, there are exceptional circumstances within the District to merit a revision to the existing Green Belt boundary in order to reallocate the minimum amount of land necessary to meet this identified need during the plan period.