

Statement for the Woking Site Allocations Development Plan Document Examination

Matter 3

Prepared For
**Byfleet, West Byfleet and
Pyrford Residents Association**

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We enclose representations to Matter 3 of the Woking Borough Site Allocations DPD Examination on behalf of our client the Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents Association. **Same comment as with Matter 5. In this matter we are aware that the Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents' Association are liaising with West Byfleet Neighbourhood Forum (in particular GB10) and Byfleet Residents Neighbourhood Forum (in particular GB4 and GB5).**
- 1.2 We have limited our response to the key issues of relevance to our client.
- 1.3 The Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents Association is a very active group of local residents who care for the Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford area of Woking Borough. Their membership is around 2,600 households, and they have been in existence for over 90 years. Any local resident is welcome to join and the Association is independent of any political party. They seek, and listen to, the views and concerns of local residents and take action in support. The Association has its own website (<https://the-residents.org>) and publishes three newsletters a year.
- 1.4 The particular concern of our client is the proposed allocation of the land around West Hall in West Byfleet, which is given the reference GB10. Our assessment of this allocation is that it is unsound and should be removed from the Plan.
- 1.5 The additional concerns of our client relate to the 'safeguarded land' at GB4 and GB5. We consider that it is unnecessary and inappropriate for the DPD to 'safeguard' Green Belt land in this way as this does not conform with the Core Strategy. These proposals should therefore be deleted.



2 MATTER 3: IS THE SADPD'S APPROACH TO ALLOCATIONS AND SAFEGUARDED LAND IN THE GREEN BELT JUSTIFIED AND CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY?

ISSUE (I) DOES THE WOKING GREEN BELT REVIEW PROVIDE A ROBUST EVIDENCE BASE TO SUPPORT THE POLICIES AND ALLOCATIONS OF THE SADPD?

Questions:

1. Does the Green Belt Review's focus on land 'parcels' provide a sufficiently fine-grained assessment of the GB?
2. Does the methodology of the Green Belt Review place appropriate emphasis on the permanence and purposes of the GB?
4. Does the Green Belt Review's objective of identifying suitable, deliverable sites for 550 homes over the plan period provide an appropriate basis for assessment?

Response

Question 1

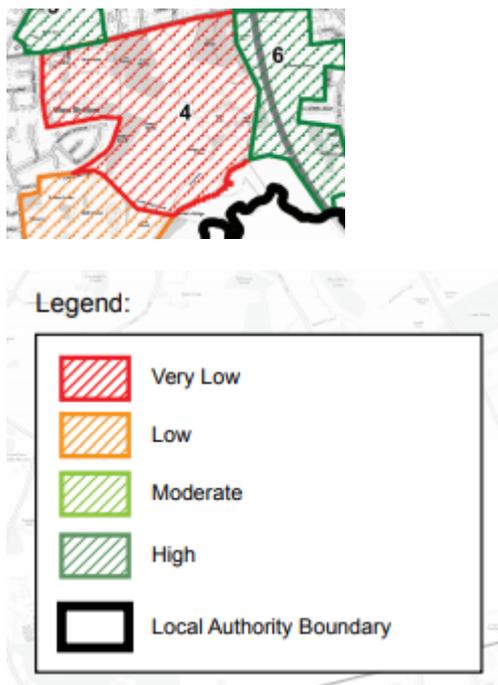
- 2.1 No, the focus on large parcels of land does not provide a sufficiently fine-grained assessment. Whilst this is a common approach to reviews of the Green Belt, using a large area can give an outcome which is too generalised and does not sufficiently assess or justify the sites which are to be allocated.

Questions 2 and 4

- 2.2 No, the methodology of the Green Belt Review does not place appropriate emphasis on the permanence and purposes of the Green Belt. Firstly, the essential characteristics of the Green Belt are its permanence and openness (para 133 of the NPPF 2019). The NPPF also sets out, at para 134, the five purposes of the Green Belt.
- 2.3 The NPPF is clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances (para 136) and should have regard to the intended permanence of the boundary in the longer term.
- 2.4 Our specific concerns relate to site GB10 (land at West Hall) as well as the proposed safeguarded areas at GB4 and GB5.



- 2.5 The Green Belt review describes the Green Belt as a ‘strategic planning tool which is used to restrict development around and between Towns and Cities’. This is an inaccurate description of the Green Belt, which does not properly express the fundamental aims of and purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF.
- 2.6 Our assessment is that the methodology of the Green Belt is flawed as it does not give sufficient weight to the outcomes of the contribution of each parcel to Green Belt purposes. This assessment should have been the starting point for gauging whether there are any areas that are suitable for release. Then areas which were assessed as potentially suitable for Green Belt release should have been assessed further through SA/SEA work. Instead, the approach has become muddled, and site GB10, which makes a strong contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt has been proposed for future release on the grounds of ‘sustainability’.
- 2.7 West Hall is included within Parcel 4. In terms of landscape character and sensitivity, the area is summarised as having ‘high landscape sensitivity to change, except the Broadoaks site which is very well contained and lies within the settlement envelope’. The Parcel also has ‘critical importance’ to two Green Belt purposes.
- 2.8 Parcel 4 was assessed as having critical importance in terms of meeting purposes 1 and 3 and major importance in terms of meeting purpose 2. Parcel 4 is described in the GBBR as having ‘*strong containing landscape features provide clear definition between urban edge and attractive countryside*’. The site provides ‘*separation between edge of town and M25/Byfleet*’. It therefore fulfils the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy which is to prevent urban sprawl. Development beyond the existing edge is likely to be perceived as encroachment into countryside with a strong, attractive character with boundaries beyond the parcel unlikely to provide the same containment as existing. The site’s landscape and character sensitivity was assessed in the Green Belt Review (Table 3.12) as having little or no capacity for change.
- 2.9 For ease of reference we enclose a map showing the outcomes of the GB review below, together with the map legend. This is from figure 5 of the Green Belt review – Suitability for Removal from Green Belt.



- 2.10 This shows that the suitability of Parcel 4 for release from the GB is ‘very low’ (the lowest suitability). This outcome means that the proposed allocation of site GB10 is not effective, justified nor consistent with national policy.
- 2.11 Despite this conclusion, the land was recommended for further investigation on the basis of sustainability. Para 3.5.21 of the Green Belt boundary review states that ‘Parcel 4 is particularly sensitive in landscape terms, but this has been weighed against its very high potential to deliver sustainable development...any development here will need to be sensitively designed to create a strong landscape edge to the settlement’.
- 2.12 We are also concerned that the boundaries of the site are not strong enough to be described as permanent and this is accepted within the Green Belt study which states (para 4.3.6) that “...new Green Belt boundaries could be defined along existing features although some are relatively weak and would require reinforcement along the south-west and south-east” (our emphasis).
- 2.13 The approach of the Council to the allocation of Parcel 4 is not consistent with national policy in this regard as the NPPF is clear that new boundaries should be permanent.
- 2.14 In response to Question 4, the Green Belt assessment has clearly been driven by a perceived requirement to identify sites for 550 dwellings for release from the Green Belt, due to the interpretation of the strategy set by the Core Strategy. Policy CS10 of the adopted Core



Strategy (Housing Provision and Distribution) sets out where houses are proposed to be developed. This includes Green Belt site/s to be released for 550 dwellings. The policy makes clear that this is an indicative number of dwellings.

- 2.15 Additionally, one of the purposes of the study is also to identify land that could be safeguarded for future Green Belt release. This is set out within the study at para 1.1.1 (Purpose).
- 2.16 This gives the impression of a lack of objectivity as the Green Belt study had a clear aim to identify sites for 550 dwellings (and the additional safeguarded land). The assessment should instead have been carried out independently to draw conclusions about whether any areas of the Green Belt within Woking are appropriate for release from the Green Belt and allocation for future development.
- 2.17 It appears that this requirement to identify a site for 550 dwellings has directly led to the identification of GB10 for development. The release of the site is contrary to the outcomes of the Green Belt review which identifies that it contributes strongly to two of the four relevant Green Belt purposes.

ISSUE (II) DO THE SADPD'S GB ALLOCATIONS AND POLICIES ACCORD WITH NATIONAL POLICIES AND GUIDANCE, AND DO EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES EXIST SUFFICIENT TO JUSTIFY THE ALTERATION OF THE GB'S BOUNDARIES?

Questions:

1. To what extent can it be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist sufficient to alter GB boundaries as proposed?
2. Have reasonable alternatives to the release of GB sites been adequately explored, and have all reasonable options for meeting the Core Strategy's requirements been fully examined ?
3. Has the spatial distribution of the SADPD's GB allocations and safeguarded sites taken into account the need to promote sustainable patterns of development ?



4. Does the SADPD demonstrate that GB boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period and define boundaries clearly using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent ?

7. Do the allocations contain appropriate provisions to mitigate adverse effects to landscape character where this has been highlighted as an issue in the Green Belt Review?

2.18 Our response to this issue relates to questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7.

2.19 Our assessment is firstly that exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated to justify the release of Green Belt land. This DPD is basically a reasonably short term plan which delivers the strategy of the Woking Core Strategy. However, given the time that has elapsed since the adoption of the Core Strategy, some matters have moved on, and monitoring now shows that there is no longer a requirement for Green Belt release in order to achieve the numbers set out in the Core Strategy.

2.20 The Council published a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in 2017, with an update in October 2018, that demonstrates that the combination of housing completions, sites with planning permission and sites with potential for residential development (excluding any Green Belt sites) will deliver 4,996 net additional homes between the start of 2010/11 and the end of 2027/28 (see Appendix A). This is a surplus of 32 against the total housing requirement (4,964 homes) across the same period.

2.21 Furthermore, the Council has recently published a Housing Land Supply Position Statement (2019) that demonstrates that there are sufficient deliverable sites for 2,913 net additional dwellings during the five-year period from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This represents 9.0 years' worth of deliverable housing sites and factors in historic undersupply (82 homes) and a 5% buffer (see Appendix B) The Council has therefore identified sufficient deliverable sites to meet the Council's housing requirement until the end of the plan period, i.e. 2,539 homes net additional homes between 2019/20 and 2026/27.



- 2.22 Additionally, the outcomes of the Government's Housing Delivery Test (HDT) from 2018, show that Woking is over-delivering and based on the three year period from 2015-2018, has delivered 153% of its housing need.
- 2.23 This high housing delivery and very healthy land supply position means that the exceptional circumstances for altering the Green Belt boundaries required by paragraphs 136 and 137 of the NPPF simply do not exist. As the Council can demonstrate a 9 year supply of deliverable housing sites there is already enough housing identified to cover the entire plan period. The Plan is therefore unsound in this regard.
- 2.24 Additionally, our assessment is that all reasonable alternatives to the release of Green Belt sites have not been properly explored. We are particularly concerned about the exclusion of the Woking Football Club site, which would deliver nearly 1,000 dwellings on a non-Green Belt site.
- 2.25 The redevelopment plans for the football club are in the public domain and it should be included as an allocation within the Plan. This would be an obvious reasonable alternative to developing in the Green Belt and the exclusion is not justified.
- 2.26 Officers proposed that the football club be allocated in the Regulation 19 version of the DPD and included a policy approach for the allocation (policy UA45). However, a Council meeting in October 2018 removed the site. The Council minutes do not give any planning reason for the removal of these numbers from the Plan.
- 2.27 Our assessment of this important issue is that the Council has therefore not properly and fully explored all non-Green Belt options for accommodating development. If the Plan can meet the housing needs to 2027 without releasing Green Belt, then there is no justification for releasing Green Belt sites. This means that the Plan is unsound as it is not justified and does accord with national policy as set out within the NPPF.
- 2.28 In terms of question 3 regarding sustainable development, in the case of GB10, this has been used as the overriding factor for the proposed future release of the site from the Green Belt.
- 2.29 As we have set out above, the Green Belt study itself questions the robustness and permanence of the proposed boundary of GB10. Again, the DPD is unsound as it does not meet the requirements of para 139 (f) of the NPPF which states that new Green Belt



boundaries must be defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

- 2.30 In terms of landscape, the Green Belt assessment concludes that parcel 4 (which contains site GB10) is particularly sensitive in landscape terms. Whilst policy GB10 refers to the need to design a proposal with a strong landscape edge and significant Green Infrastructure, no specific details of what is required are given.

ISSUE (III) ARE THE GB HOUSING ALLOCATIONS DELIVERABLE OR DEVELOPABLE?

Questions:

1. Are the policy requirements related to the GB allocations informed by evidence of affordable housing need, infrastructure requirements, the inclusion of local and national standards and a proportionate assessment of viability?
- 3 For GB allocations scheduled later in the plan period, are these in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged?
- 4 Policy GB10 of the SADPD relates to a site that is within a Mineral Safeguarding Area¹. The reasoned justification to Policy GB10 indicates that borehole testing of the site would be necessary, which may then lead to the full investigation of whether any reserves could be worked prior to any development that could sterilise those reserves. How have the implications of this informed the phasing and delivery assumptions of GB10?
- 5 How has the 14.8ha figure for residential development on the GB10 site been arrived at, and does the figure include the proposed traveller pitch provision?

Response

- 2.31 The policy requirements set out within policy GB10 are considerable. Firstly the policy requires 50% affordable housing. The evidence base to support this policy requirement dates
-



back to 2010 and, given its age, simply cannot be relied upon to justify viability. This should have been updated to inform the detailed policy requirements of the DPD.

- 2.32 In terms of the infrastructure requirements, we have assessed the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) from 2018. We do not consider that this is a robust document which can be relied upon for policy development. It is vague and not properly supported by robust funding calculations and information regarding sources of funding. The 'estimated costs' are frequently blank and the funding sources not known. It reads more like a wish list than an IDP.
- 2.33 The policy requirements in GB10 require the developer of the site to carry out much of the work to inform the infrastructure provision required to deliver the site. This is flawed as infrastructure requirements should be assessed holistically to provide the evidence that the DPD is deliverable as a whole. The delivery requirements of the sites cannot be considered in isolation.
- 2.34 Many elements of the necessary infrastructure provision have cross-boundary or Borough implications.
- 2.35 There is therefore not the evidence that GB10 can be viably developed later in the Plan period as the infrastructure requirements are considerable and currently unknown.
- 2.36 GB10 also lies within a Minerals Safeguarding Area (MSA). This gives additional uncertainty about the deliverability of the site. The NPPF sets out, at para 206 that "Local planning authorities should not normally permit other development proposals in Mineral Safeguarding Areas if it might constrain potential future use for mineral working".
- 2.37 The DPD recognises the MSA within policy GB10, but leaves the responsibility to investigate this to the developer, who will need to carry out a Minerals Assessment and potentially prior working of any resource before the site is developed for residential purposes. This is an element of further uncertainty regarding whether or not the site can come forward. Given that the site is not proposed for release until the outcomes of housing monitoring require this, then there would be a considerable delay whilst the necessary investigations were carried out to justify development within the MSA.



2.38 Currently, there is no clarity as to whether the site can be delivered at all. The Council should have carried out the necessary investigations before including the site as an allocation. The implications of the MSA have not properly been taken into account and the policy is unsound as it is not effective or justified in this regard.

2.39 In terms of the area proposed for development of the site (14.8 hectares), we are unclear how this has been calculated or whether it includes the area for Traveller pitches.

ISSUE (IV) ARE THE SADP'S POLICIES RELATING TO TRAVELLER SITES CONSISTENT WITH THE CORE STRATEGY, NATIONAL POLICIES AND GUIDANCE?

2.40 We have assessed that the allocation of part of proposal site GB10 for a Traveller site is not justified. The timing sets out that the area proposed for these pitches will be removed from the Green Belt immediately following the adoption of the DPD. This is inconsistent with the timing for the delivery of GB10 as a whole – which will not be released from the Green Belt unless monitoring shows that this is required.

2.41 The allocation of Traveller sites within the Green Belt is only appropriate in exceptional circumstances. The Core Strategy sets out that a sequential test is required to deliver Traveller sites, with sites in the urban area most preferable, followed by sites on the edge of the urban area. We cannot see any evidence that the Council has followed this sequential test through to the DPD, but that instead, the Council has included Traveller pitches on proposed allocations, without any evidence to support this distribution.

2.42 Whilst the Council has stated that the development of Traveller sites in urban areas is unlikely to be viable, this is not supported by any evidence that we can find.

ISSUE (VII) DOES THE SADPD'S APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDED LAND ACCORD WITH THE FRAMEWORK?

Questions:

1. Is it necessary for the SADPD to identify areas of safeguarded land?
2. To what extent is the amount of safeguarded land included in the SADPD justified?



3. Does the SADPD make the status of the safeguarded land it identifies clear, in accordance with paragraph 139(d) of the Framework?
4. To what extent does the identification of safeguarded land demonstrate that GB boundaries would not have to be altered at the end of the plan period?

Response

- 2.43 It is not necessary or appropriate for the SADPD to identify areas of safeguarded land. The SADPD is purely a daughter document to the Core Strategy. The role of the Core Strategy is to set out the strategic policies for the area. The Core Strategy does not set out a requirement for safeguarded land beyond the plan period, therefore the SADPD is not in conformity with the Core Strategy in this regard.
- 2.44 It is therefore inappropriate for the SADPD to seek to go beyond the strategic policies of the Core Strategy and the DPD is unsound in this regard. The time period of the Core Strategy clearly extends to 2027. The housing requirement post 2027 is not known. The DPD, which is not a strategic document, cannot go beyond this time period. If the Council wanted to take a longer term approach they should have prepared a comprehensive Local Plan, which would have been the correct mechanism to plan for housing requirements over a longer time period. The Council cannot seek to meet housing needs to 2040 via a Plan which must have an end date of 2027.
- 2.45 There is no justification for the extent of safeguarded land. Sites that are proposed for removal from the Green Belt and allocation, such as site GB10, are currently retained in the Green Belt until the outcomes of monitoring show that they are required to be released. The evidence set out in the Council's land supply position and from information about other urban sites that are likely to come forward, is that even the sites proposed for allocation in the Green Belt are not currently needed to meet the Council's housing requirement to 2027. It is unclear from the SADPD how the quantum of safeguarded land has been decided upon, or how many dwellings are being proposed. This is not a justified or effective approach.
- 2.46 In terms of the Green Belt review, one of the purposes of the study was to identify 40 hectares of safeguarded land. Again, this brings into question the objectivity of the study – the study sought, at the outset to identify safeguarded land so this has dictated the outcome of the study.



2.47 In terms of the NPPF, paragraph 139 (d) states that planning permission for the development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development. However, the SADPD cannot be updated in this way. Instead, a new Local Plan would need to be prepared, looking to the longer term. There is therefore no mechanism for releasing the safeguarded land through an update to the SADPD.



APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Table 7: Summary of the Woking Borough SHLAA 2017 (updated October 2018)

SHLAA period	Pre SHLAA 2010/11 – 2016/17	0 – 5 years 2017/18 – 2021/22	6 - 10 years 2022/23 – 2027/28	11 – 15 years 2028/29 – 2032/33 ¹⁷	
Source of supply/ potential					Total
Dwelling completions 2010/11 – 2016/17 ¹⁸	1,789	0	0	0	1,789
Units on sites under construction/ unimplemented planning permission ¹⁹	0	1,473	240	32	1,745
Sites with potential for residential development	0	181	1,313	1,034	2,528
Total	1,789	1,654	1,553	1,066	6,062
Core Strategy housing requirement (292 pa)	2,044	1,460	1,460	1,460	6,424
Surplus/ deficit against annual average requirement (excluding Green Belt)	-255	+194	+93	-394	-362
Broad location in the Green Belt ²⁰	0	0	550	395	945
Total including Green Belt²¹	1,789	1,654	2,103	1,461	7,007
Surplus/ deficit against annual average requirement (including Green Belt)	-255	+194	+643	+1	+583
Small sites delivery (estimate 40 pa) ²²	Counted in the figure above	0	0	200	200
Total including Green Belt and small sites	1,789	1,654	2,103	1,661	7,207
Surplus/ deficit against annual average requirement (including Green Belt and small sites)	-255	+194	+643	+201	+783



APPENDIX B

Table 2: Summary of five year housing land supply position in Woking Borough, 2019/20 to 2023/24 at 1 April 2019 (Housing Land Supply Position Statement, 2019)

Including Local Plan allocations without full planning permission	Years supply
Housing requirement (292 pa)	10.0
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82)	9.4
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82) + 5% flexibility allowance/buffer (14.6 pa)	9.0
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82) + illustrative 10% flexibility allowance/buffer (29.2 pa)	8.6
Excluding Local Plan allocations without full planning permission (illustrative purposes)	
Housing requirement (292 pa)	7.0
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82)	6.6
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82) + 5% flexibility allowance/buffer (14.6 pa)	6.3
Housing requirement (292 pa) + current under supply (82) + illustrative 10% flexibility allowance/buffer (29.2 pa)	6.0