

Green Belt boundary review – Assessment of the implications of Eric Pickles' MP statement on 6 October 2014

The Council published its Green Belt boundary review report in July 2014 and is yet to consider its recommendations to decide which site(s) it wishes to allocate in the Delivery Development Plan Document (DDP) to meet the developments needs of the area during the period of the Core Strategy and beyond. The Council has also published a statement assessing the implications of Nick Boles' letters and written statement published in March 2014. Both documents are on the Council's website (www.woking.gov.uk). These documents should be read in conjunction with this advice.

Since the publication of the Green Belt boundary review report, Eric Pickles MP has issued a statement on 6 October 2014 with the publication of updated National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) about how Local Authorities should use their local plan, drawing on protections in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to safeguard their local area against urban sprawl and protect the green lungs around towns and cities. This advice assesses whether in the light of Eric Pickles' latest statement and the publication of the updated NPPG the Council should continue with its adopted policy to release and allocate land in the Green Belt to meet future development needs during the period of the Core Strategy and beyond.

It is important to emphasise that both Eric Pickles' statement and the NPPG have not sought or intended to change national policy in any way. They also reiterate and emphasise what was said by Nick Boles in March 2014.

Officers are of the view that Eric Pickles' recent statement of 6 October 2014 and the revised NPPG should not have any material or significant implications on the plan-led approach taken in the Core Strategy to release Green Belt land for development, which the Delivery DDP will be seeking to deliver. This includes and in particular, the commitment to release Green Belt land to deliver about 550 new homes between 2022 and 2027 and to safeguard land to meet development needs between 2027 and 2040. The reasons for this advice are set out below:

The commitments to make provision for 292 dwellings per year and to release Green Belt land to meet housing need between 2022 and 2027 are already adopted policies of the Council set out in the Core Strategy. These have been examined by an Inspector of the Secretary of State against the requirements of the NPPF and have been judged to be reasonable and sound. There has not been a material change in national policy to justify a change in the Council's policies and the approach taken to deliver them.

Based on the above analysis, it is clear that the current statement and clarification by Eric Pickles has already been followed by the Council; in particular, it is clear that the Core Strategy already draws a distinction between assessing housing need and making provision to meet the need having taken into account all relevant constraints including the Green Belt.

The Council has strictly followed all necessary Government guidance by using the local plan process to both identify the principle of releasing Green Belt land and to allocate Green Belt land for development. Furthermore, the Core Strategy has robust policies to ensure the continuous protection of the Green Belt.

Members should note that a Delivery DPD that fails to allocate land in the Green Belt to meet housing needs over the period of the Core Strategy is likely to be found unsound, in particular, when the Secretary of State had recommended that a Green Belt boundary review should be carried out to inform the release of land to deliver 550 new homes between 2022 and 2027.

Delivery DPD

The Council is in the process of preparing its Delivery DPD which will allocate specific sites for various types of development. A Green Belt boundary review has been carried out to inform the DPD to ensure that any site that is released from the Green Belt for development does not compromise its overall purpose and integrity. It is expected that the DPD will be published for consultation between January and March 2015. An opportunity will therefore be given to everyone to comment on the Council's proposals for them to be taken into account before the document is submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. The Secretary of State will examine whether the approach taken by the Council meets national guidance. It is expected that the DPD will be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of 2015.

Conclusion

Based on the above assessment, there is nothing in the recent statement by Eric Pickles or the updated NPPG to change national policy which is followed in the Core Strategy or to indicate any change in the approach adopted towards the preparation of the Delivery DPD.