

Chapter 4
Green Belt and Rural Area Beyond the Green
Belt

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4.1 Green Belt

4.1.1 The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

4.1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, paragraph 80) sets out the five main purposes of the Green Belt:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

4.2 Local Context

4.2.1 Hertfordshire County Council first designated the south of the County as Green Belt as part of the Hertfordshire County Development Plan, published in 1951 and approved by the Minister of Housing and Local Government in December 1958, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1947.

4.2.2 The extent of the Green Belt in East Herts was originally limited to a small area south of Hertford and Ware. However the 1979 County Structure Plan extended the area of Green Belt northwards along the A1 to Stevenage and beyond, and along the M11 to the southern limits of Bishop's Stortford.

4.2.3 The 1986 County Structure Plan Review included the extension of the Green Belt to surround Bishop's Stortford, with the inner Green Belt boundaries being defined through the East Herts Local Plan Review, adopted in 1993.

4.2.4 The broad extent of the Green Belt was carried forward in the 2007 East Herts Local Plan and as such contains the settlements of Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware, together with several villages.

4.3 Exceptional Circumstances

4.3.1 The NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries can only be amended in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of a Local Plan (paragraph 83). There is no definition in the NPPF of what constitutes exceptional circumstances, as this will vary for each locality.

- 4.3.2** In East Herts there is a combination of factors that exist locally that together constitute the exceptional circumstances that require the Council to amend its Green Belt boundaries. This includes the high level of housing need, including affordable homes, exacerbated by a significant backlog of unmet need, and the lack of suitable alternative locations to the north of the District.
- 4.3.3** Chapter 3 (The Development Strategy) therefore sets out that the challenging level of housing need cannot be met in a sustainable way without undertaking a carefully planned review of the Green Belt. As such approximately 6% of the District's Green Belt has been removed in order to help meet a significant proportion of the housing need, both within this Plan period and beyond. The revised Green Belt boundary is shown on the Policies Map.

4.4 Planning Applications in the Green Belt

- 4.4.1** When considering any planning application for development, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt is by definition harmful and should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 4.4.2** There are however some uses that are appropriate in the Green Belt and these are listed in paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF.

4.5 Neighbourhood Planning

- 4.5.1** Hertford Heath, Stanstead Abbots & St Margarets, and Watton-at-Stone are identified as Group 1 Villages (see Chapter 10 Villages). These villages are inset from the Green Belt and therefore development beyond the existing built up area of the village can only come forward by amendment of the Green Belt boundary (other than the exceptions listed in paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF).
- 4.5.2** As these villages are considered to be sustainable locations for development, these villages will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate to amend their Green Belt boundary through the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan, to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits.

Policy GBR1 Green Belt

- I. Planning applications within the Green Belt, as defined on the Policies Map, will be considered in line with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- II. The villages of Hertford Heath, Stanstead Abbots & St Margarets, and Watton-at-Stone will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate to amend their Green Belt boundary through the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits.

4.6 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

- 4.6.1 The Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt covers approximately the northern two-thirds of the District and contains the settlement of Buntingford, together with a number of villages. East Herts has a long tradition of seeking to restrain development within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. This has ensured the protection of the smaller rural settlements in the District, as well as the wider area of countryside.
- 4.6.2 In order to continue to preserve the special character of the District's rural area, and to direct development towards the most sustainable locations, it is considered appropriate that a policy of restraint should continue in this location.

4.7 Planning Applications in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

- 4.7.1 When considering planning applications in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt development will only be permitted where there is no material harm to the character or amenity of the environment.

Policy GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

I. Within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, as defined on the Policies Map, the construction of new buildings will be considered inappropriate. Exceptions to this include:

- (a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- (b) the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, including equine development in accordance with CFLR6 (Equine Development), and for cemeteries;
- (c) new employment generating uses where they are appropriately and sustainably located, in accordance with Policy ED2 (Rural Economy);

(d) extensions and alterations to buildings, dwellings, residential outbuildings or extensions to existing outbuildings, and works within residential curtilages provided that development does not result in an unacceptable impact on the rural character and appearance of the site and its surroundings;

(e) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

(f) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact than the existing development on the rural character and appearance of the site and its surroundings;

(g) rural exception housing in accordance with Policy HOU4 (Rural Exception Affordable Housing Sites);

(h) the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with Policy HOU9 (Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople);

(i) development identified in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

II. Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Rural Area Beyond Green Belt. These are:

(a) mineral extraction;

(b) engineering operations;

(c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a location in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt;

(d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction in accordance with Policy ED2 (Rural Economy); and

(e) development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order in accordance with Policy DPS6 (Neighbourhood Planning).

