



Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-002-2014/15

Date of meeting: 23 June 2014

Portfolio:	Planning
Subject:	Green Belt Review – Updated Methodology
Responsible Officer:	Anna Cronin (01992 564119)
Democratic Services Officer:	Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Cabinet agree the updated and comprehensive approach to Green Belt review, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, in order to inform the Local Plan.

Executive Summary:

This report seeks agreement to an updated approach to undertaking a Green Belt review in the district, following on from that agreed by Local Plan Cabinet Committee in September 2012, in the light of the outcomes of recent Examinations into local plans, and emerging good practice and wider experience in carrying out the Duty to Co-operate.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

In September 2012 the Local Plan Cabinet Committee agreed to carry out an assessment of the purposes of including land in Green Belt in the district, to inform the preparation of the new Local Plan. The methodology agreed considered the purposes of the Green Belt, as identified in National Planning Policy Guidance, and was to be applied to “all the potential areas for growth put forward in the Community Choices consultation (Issues and Options) and any additional areas considered to be reasonable that may be submitted during the consultation period” ((report reference LPC-004-2012/13 para 9).

Since that date the outcomes of local plan and core strategy examinations in public indicate that Inspectors expect a comprehensive review of the Green Belt to be undertaken before the release of Green Belt is considered.

Therefore this revised methodology reflects the need for a comprehensive Green Belt Review of the District, considering the contribution each area makes to the nationally identified purposes of the Green Belt.

Emerging national experience of the duty to co-operate indicates that Green Belt is a cross-boundary issue in which it is important to involve adjoining authorities when any review is contemplated. The updated approach therefore identifies a number of bodies who will be invited to engage in the review, through appropriate mechanisms.

Other Options for Action:

To not agree an updated approach and comprehensive assessment. This would risk the work carried out being found unsound by an Inspector, prejudicing the Local Plan as a whole.

Report:

1. The review will consist of a high-level review of all Green Belt land across the District to identify the contribution of the Green Belt towards national Green Belt purposes as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This will identify both the primary functions of the Green Belt, which deliver the national purposes, and identify areas of Green Belt land which are considered to contribute least towards national purposes. The latter land will be subject to further assessment by the Council in the context of wider issues not covered by this study, but that must be considered in preparing a Local Plan. The outcome of this review will therefore provide only one piece of evidence amongst a variety of other considerations that must be taken into account before deciding on any changes to Green Belt boundaries. Such issues include development needs, infrastructure capacity, the availability and viability of land for development, sustainability issues and the establishment of long term defensible boundaries to the Green Belt.

2. There is no nationally prescribed methodology for undertaking a Green Belt Review. However there have been a number of recent (since 2012) Local Plan Examinations in Public (EiPs) which provide insight into the approach the Planning Inspectorate expects when a local planning authority undertakes a Green Belt review. An example of this is the Dacorum Core Strategy EiP whereby the Inspector clearly expected a comprehensive review of the Green Belt to be undertaken by the Council before the release of Green Belt.

3. In order to assess the Green Belt land against the NPPF purposes, a set of questions for each purpose have been developed as used in the previous methodology. These will be included in a survey pro-forma for each land parcel to record the findings of the assessments, with questions answered with a 'Yes', 'No' or 'Partial' with comments provided where appropriate. The completion of the pro-forma will be undertaken in a consistent and structured manner through desk-based analysis using GIS and relevant evidence studies as well as site visits where necessary in order to provide consistent results. Each feature of the parcel will be assessed in relation to the assessment criteria which contribute to Green Belt purposes as described below.

4. Following the assessment, values will be attributed to the contribution which the individual land parcel makes toward Green Belt purposes. In all or some instances there may be particular areas of the parcel that perform distinctively differently to other areas of the parcel. Where this is the case the review will explain this and "sub sections" of the parcel could emerge where justified to reflect such distinct differences. There will be no weighting applied to the different purposes of the Green Belt as the NPPF does not prioritise the purposes. The assessment will judge the value of the Green belt on the basis of a high, medium or low level of contribution to Green Belt purpose. The results will be mapped with a "traffic light" system.

5. The review will also identify where development could lead to cross boundary issues with neighbouring local authorities, and it is proposed to invite a number of

“Duty to Co-operate” bodies identified in the updated methodology to engage in the process.

Resource Implications:

It is proposed that the work be carried out by the Forward Planning Team. It is intended to bring an update report on the Local Plan budget, and a forward look, to Cabinet in the near future.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Local planning authorities are required to identify a rolling five year land supply to support growth. The assessment will assist in achieving this supply, and in identifying defensible green belt boundaries for the foreseeable future.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The delivery of a Local Plan, informed by a robust evidence base, will contribute to safer, cleaner, greener objectives by planning for sustainable development.

Consultation Undertaken:

Advance notification of this report has been published in the Members’ Bulletin and comment invited.

The methodology will be circulated to Duty to Co-operate bodies identified within the methodology.

Background Papers:

- Report to Local Plan Cabinet Committee September 2012 (LPC-004-2012/13)
- National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
- Inspector’s Reports on Examinations in Public of recent Local Plans and Core Strategies
- EFDC Green Belt Review Methodology (draft) (2014)

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management:

As the District is 92% within the Metropolitan Green Belt, a well-informed approach to Green Belt review is important to underpin the new Local Plan, without which the District will be increasingly reliant on national planning policy as set out in the NPPF.