



Document Reference
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East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Policy LP4 – Green Belt

November 2017

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1. Introduction and Policy Context

Introduction

- 1.1 East Cambridgeshire District Council is reviewing its Local Plan, which was last adopted in April 2015. The new Local Plan, which is hoped to be adopted in early 2018, will provide a framework for development in the district until 2036 and beyond.
- 1.2 This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for policy LP4 (of the Proposed Submission Local Plan, November 2017), which relates to the Green Belt within East Cambridgeshire district.

National policy

- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was introduced in 2014 which offers 'live' government guidance.
- 1.4 Paragraphs 79 to 92 of the NPPF are relevant to this policy and includes:
 - *Paragraph 83 – “Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan”.*
 - *Paragraph 87 “As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.*
 - *Paragraph 88 “When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘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.*
- 1.5 The NPPG provides no specific substantial additional guidance on planning in relation to the Green Belt.
- 1.6 The above NPPF policy guidance has been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan as a whole, and policy LP4 in particular.

2 East Cambridgeshire Context in Relation to Policy LP4

- 2.1 The Cambridge Green Belt was established in 1965, and includes approximately 1,910 hectares of East Cambridgeshire around the villages of Bottisham, Lode and Swaffham Bulbeck. The purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt are to: Preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact dynamic city with a thriving historic centre; maintain and enhance the quality of Cambridge’s setting; and prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city.

- 2.2 The boundaries of the Green Belt in East Cambridgeshire were subject to minor changes in the Core Strategy (2009) and again in the Local Plan (2015) to remove anomalies and release a small area of land on the edge of Bottisham. These changes were informed by the Council's Green Belt Assessment (2005).

3 Local Plan Policy: Preliminary Draft

- 3.1 The Preliminary Draft Local Plan (February 2016) contained a policy entitled "Green Belt". A limited number of representations were made on the policy, and in summary the key issues raised for the policy were:
- Support for the policy and the approach not to release any Green Belt land.
 - Policy LP4 should be amended to say that development on sites that have been allocated out of Greenbelt land should be undertaken with conditions to ensure that high quality design is utilised to protect the amenity of land impacted adversely by the development.
 - Comments suggesting a thorough Green Belt boundary review is needed, especially around Bottisham.
- 3.2 The suggested rewording of the policy was not been accepted, as the policy covers all the Green Belt, not land which has been released from it. Other policies in the plan can address the issues raised.
- 3.3 We did not take forward the suggestion to undertake a comprehensive review of the Green Belt boundary. As discussed above, paragraph 83 of the NPPF suggests that this should only be altered in "exception circumstances". As sufficient land outside the Green Belt is available to meet the development needs of East Cambridgeshire, there is no justification to undertake a suggested review for this Local Plan.
- 3.4 One minor change was made to the Policy, in order to make a direct cross reference to the Policies Map which denotes the Green Belt boundary.

4 Local Plan Policy: Further Draft

- 4.1 The wording of the policy and supporting text in the Further Draft version of the Local Plan was unchanged from the Preliminary Draft, except for one minor element whereby a direct cross reference was included to the Policies Map which denotes the Green Belt boundary. The Further Draft was published for consultation in January – February 2017.
- 4.2 Various, but limited, number of comments were received during the Further Draft consultation, either supporting the policy or expressing concern over certain aspects of the policy. In summary, the key issues raised for the policy were:
- Various detailed suggestions to improve clarity of policy wording, including the purpose of the green belt;
 - The policy should address a process for returning undeveloped allocations to the green belt;
 - A Green Belt Review should be undertaken; Bottisham is a good location for growth.
 - Concern that the policy is not in conformity with the NPPF, as not all reasonable alternatives have been considered during the SA/SEA process; SA scoring is incorrect for a number of topics
 - Various comments broadly supporting the policy

- 4.3 Some suggested amendments to the policy have been accepted. First, in the bullet points relating to circumstances whereby development is accepted in the Green Belt, an additional bullet point has been added to make it clear that permissions in the Green Belt that do not proceed will not mean any weight being given to alternative proposals for that site.
- 4.4 Second, a new paragraph has been added at the end, which gives 'advance' warning for any future Local Plan review, that if any land in the Green Belt is released in such a review, then such land will only be released for the purpose it is released for, and if that purpose does not happen, then the land will revert back to Green Belt.
- 4.5 In addition, the suggested amendments to the supporting text, relating to the purpose of the Green Belt, have been made as requested. Paragraph 3.9.2 has been amended to read: "...a compact, dynamic city..."
- 4.6 As at the previous draft stages, we did not taken forward the suggestion to undertake a comprehensive review of the Green Belt boundary. As discussed above, paragraph 83 of the NPPF suggests that this should only be altered in "exceptional circumstances". As sufficient land outside the Green Belt is available to meet the development needs of East Cambridgeshire, there is no justification to undertake a suggested review for this Local Plan.

5 Alternative Reasonable Options

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been considered for this policy. (Option 1 is the preferred policy approach which has been included in the Proposed Submission Local Plan.)
- 5.2 **Option 2:** No policy, and rely on national policy for this subject area.
- 5.3 Both options broadly provide equal benefits. However, it is necessary to include a Green Belt policy in the Local Plan in order to:
- provide the framework for the subsequent inclusion of the Green Belt on the Policies Map (and the Policies Map can only illustrate geographically the development plan, so a lack of policy could put into question a Green Belt identified on the Policies Map);
 - provide local clarity and policy on any sites or development permitted in the Green Belt;
 - provide some local policy in relation to development sites adjacent to the Green Belt, and
 - more generally to provide guidance for local residents who may not be familiar with the national policy.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This Evidence Report demonstrates the rationale for the policy as contained in the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan (November 2017). It is hoped this helps demonstrate how we have responded to comments received during the consultation stages, as well as how the latest evidence and national guidance has been taken into account.