

7. GREEN BELT

PART ONE POLICY

POLICY GBT1 - GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES
--

THERE WILL BE AN AREA OF GREEN BELT IN WIRRAL. ITS BOUNDARIES ARE AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP.

POLICY GBT1 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.1. The establishment of Green Belts around major cities has been promoted by the Government since the 1950's to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, safeguard the surrounding countryside from further encroachment, prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another, preserve the special character of historic towns and to assist in urban regeneration. Of these, the Green Belt in Wirral supports all except the preservation of the character of historic towns.
- 7.2 The present boundaries of the Green Belt in Wirral as proposed in the Merseyside Structure Plan, were established in December 1983. The justification remains as valid now as it was then, in that it supports the main UDP themes of:
- concentrating development and investment within the existing urban areas; and
 - improving the quality of the environment in the most blighted areas whilst protecting the environment elsewhere in the Borough.
- 7.3 Recently there has been great pressure for urban development in Wirral's areas of countryside. A Green Belt has been considered, since the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt, as essential to ensure that the countryside is protected from urban sprawl, and that settlements retain their individual identity.
- 7.4 Strategic Guidance for Merseyside restated the importance of Green Belt in Merseyside and concluded that there is no need for a general review but that the preparation of UDPs provides the opportunity to give precision to the detailed boundaries of the Green Belt where those have not yet been clearly defined.

Proposal GB1 - Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary

1. **The area of the M53 Corridor from Leasowe Road in the north, through Bidston Moss, and south to the A552 Woodchurch Road interchange, as shown on the Proposals Map, shall be included within the Green Belt.**

2. Land to the west of Elm Road in Irby, as shown on the Proposals Map, shall be included within the Green Belt.
3. The area of residential development at Poulton Green Close in Poulton/ Spital, as shown on the Proposals Map, shall be excluded from the Green Belt.

PROPOSAL GB1 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

1. M53 CORRIDOR

- 7.5 Strategic Guidance referred to the need to give precision to the detailed boundaries of the Green Belt where those have not yet been clearly defined. This is also echoed in PPG2 - Green Belts (1995), which refers to the need to ensure that the definition of detailed boundaries is completed. In Wirral, the only area where boundaries were not set by the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan was in the M53 Corridor and Bidston Hill. Strategic Guidance therefore provides the justification for the exceptional circumstances required to alter the adopted Green Belt boundary by its extension into the M53 Corridor.
- 7.6 The area known as the M53 Corridor was identified in the Merseyside Structure Plan as an important break between the built-up areas of eastern and central Wirral, to be treated as if it were Green Belt. Merseyside County Council identified the Corridor as a priority area for landscape renewal requiring treatment within the Structure Plan period. Because of its condition the Corridor was not included in the Green Belt, pending an appraisal of the wider needs of the area and a scheme for landscape renewal.
- 7.7 The most recent Government advice is that landscape quality is immaterial in assessing the possible Green Belt function of an area of land. Given this and the Inspector's view at the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan Inquiry that the Corridor performed a separation function between the urban areas, extension of the Green Belt into the Corridor area has now been proposed.
- 7.8 The Corridor separates the various townships in the centre of the Borough including Moreton, Upton, Woodchurch and Leasowe from those in the eastern half, such as Bidston, Beechwood and Noctorum. This separation function has not diminished, and the UDP provides the opportunity to give long-term protection to the area. This follows the consideration of the area's wider requirements for new development.
- 7.9 Only limited areas of the Corridor are suitable for development without affecting its function in separating the eastern and central townships. The principal areas are the sites at Noctorum Way in Noctorum (Proposal HS1/1), to the north of Claremount School in Moreton (Proposal HS1/3) and to the east of Fender Farm in Moreton (Proposal HS1/6) which are allocated for residential development. Other areas are constrained by the presence of the Bidston-Wrexham railway line and the M53 Motorway which hinder local

access across them, have poor ground conditions, are in areas liable to flooding or are Sites of Biological Importance.

2. ELM ROAD, IRBY

- 7.10 The Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan of December 1983 showed the boundary of the Green Belt to the south west of Elm Road, Irby as following the line of a stream, tributary of the Arrowe Brook. This stream has been part culverted and its line to the south west of Elm Road is now less distinct. The Green Belt boundary now follows the western edge of Elm Road.

3. POULTON GREEN CLOSE

- 7.11 The only major development allowed in the Green Belt since 1983, contrary to generally accepted policy, has been that for thirty-one dwellings at Poulton Green Close off Poulton Royd Drive in Poulton/ Spital. Planning permission for the site was granted following a Public Inquiry in August 1986 and the dwellings were completed in August 1988. The land does not now perform a Green Belt function.

Policy GB2 - Guidelines for Development in the Green Belt

Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development and such development will not be approved except in very special circumstances. Planning permission will not be granted for development in the Green Belt unless it is for the purposes of:

- (i) **agriculture and forestry;**
- (ii) **essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;**
- (iii) **the limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings, subject to Policy GB4 and Policy GB5;**
- (iv) **the limited infilling in existing villages, subject to Policy GB6, including limited affordable housing subject to local community needs;**
- (v) **the limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites identified under Proposal GB9;**

Such appropriate development shall not damage the visual amenities of the Green Belt by virtue of its siting, materials or design.

POLICY GB2 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.12. Development acceptable within the Green Belt has long been restricted to that appropriate to a rural as opposed to an urban area. Furthermore, there is a general presumption against inappropriate development within the Green

Belt. This view was introduced in 1955, and has remained through the latest Government guidance, and in Strategic Guidance for Merseyside.

- 7.13 Whilst the range of development is often restrictive, to prevent unnecessary and intrusive development, the latest advice from Government allows for a positive role in providing access to open countryside for the urban population.
- 7.14 With diversification of the rural economy, as agricultural support policies change, more land in Wirral may become available for non-agricultural uses, such as sport or recreation. Such uses should be appropriate in the Green Belt, preserve its openness and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 7.15 Many statutory undertakers' installations are long established in the Green Belt and operational restraints may require that development has to occur on or around their existing sites. If development by statutory undertakers is proposed, it will be necessary for them to prove that the proposal cannot be accommodated outside the Green Belt.

Policy GB3 - Re-Use of Buildings in the Green Belt

The conversion or change of use of buildings in the Green Belt will be permitted, provided that:

- (i) the proposal does not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it;**
- (ii) the proposal does not involve extensive external storage, extensive hardstanding, vehicle parking, intrusive boundary walling, fencing, or introduce intrusive domestic elements, particularly by the creation of a residential curtilage;**
- (iii) the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;**
- (iv) the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings;**
- (v) the proposed use can be adequately serviced in terms of access;**
- (vi) the proposed use will not in itself, or through likely traffic generation, have a detrimental effect on the appearance or quiet enjoyment of the surrounding area.**

When granting consent for the non-agricultural re-use of an agricultural building in the Green Belt, the Local Planning Authority may impose a condition withdrawing permitted development rights for new agricultural development where it is necessary to prevent the proliferation of agricultural buildings.

If the existing building is a tenanted agricultural building the Local Planning Authority will take into consideration the contribution of the building to the viability of local agriculture.

If the existing building has a detrimental impact on the landscape in terms of visual amenity, the Local Planning Authority will, in connection with any proposed structural changes, impose conditions to secure an improvement in the external appearance of the building.

POLICY GB3 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.16 The re-use of buildings in the Green Belt is given particular importance in view of recent changes in agriculture, which have led farmers to consider diversifying from their original farming practices.
- 7.17 Certain buildings in the Green Belt, such as barns, may no longer be required for their original purpose, but may be suitable for conversion to provide small-scale accommodation for business use, tourist activities such as interpretative centres, craft centres or individual residences.
- 7.18 The best way of preserving the true character of an agricultural building is to keep it in its original use. In determining whether buildings in the Green Belt are no longer required for their former use, the Local Planning Authority will consider any relevant change in the circumstances of the buildings which the owner considers makes them inappropriate for agricultural use. In particular, the Local Planning Authority will carefully consider proposals for the re-use of buildings within the Green Belt erected under permitted development rights for agriculture. If such a proposal is received, the Local Planning Authority may impose a condition on the permission withdrawing these rights for new farm buildings in respect of that particular unit or holding.
- 7.19 If the buildings can no longer be used for agriculture, then a use that does the least damage to their physical fabric and surroundings is the most appropriate. Very often this will be a non-residential use, as this often allows for fewer changes to the fabric of the building and avoids the domestic appearance of gardens and washing lines associated with residential conversions. Even so, appropriate re-uses should minimise demands for additional infrastructure, for example for roads and sewerage. Further guidance on conversion is contained in Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 15.

Policy GB4 - Replacement of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt

The replacement of existing dwellings in the Green Belt will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- (i) the dwelling is not in an isolated or visually prominent location in the countryside;**
- (ii) there is direct vehicular access to the dwelling;**

- (iii) the replacement dwelling is not more than 15% larger than the dwelling it replaces or larger than the existing dwelling plus any remaining permitted development allowance for extension;
- (iv) the curtilage of the replacement dwelling should be the same as or wholly contained within the curtilage of the existing dwelling.

The Local Planning Authority will remove permitted development rights for further extensions when granting permission for a replacement dwelling which is materially larger than the existing dwelling.

Where the replacement dwelling's location in the curtilage would result in a lesser impact in the Green Belt than that of the existing dwelling, the Local Planning Authority will require the replacement dwelling to be positioned accordingly. In other cases the Local Planning Authority will require the replacement dwelling to be located in the same place as the existing dwelling.

POLICY GB4 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.20 In order to retain the open appearance of the Green Belt, it is important to prevent replacement dwellings being materially larger than the original dwelling. In addition, the Local Planning Authority is concerned not to prolong the existence of isolated and prominent housing development which may be counter to the objectives of sustainability in its demands for improved servicing.

Policy GB5 - Extension of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt

The extension of existing dwellings in the Green Belt will be permitted, provided that the floorspace of the resultant dwelling is no more than 50% larger than that of the habitable floorspace of the original dwelling, and subject also to the enlarged dwelling not having a harmful visual impact on its surroundings.

POLICY GB5 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.21 The limited extension of existing dwellings should not harm the open appearance of the Green Belt, especially if the extension is in keeping with the original dwelling. In assessing such proposals, the Local Planning Authority will be concerned to avoid any disproportionate extensions to the original dwelling. In addition, the Local Planning Authority will consider any proposed building with a volume greater than 10.0 cubic metres and within 5.0 metres of the existing building as an extension of the dwelling.

Policy GB6 - Development in Infill Villages in the Green Belt

Within the villages listed in Proposal GB7, new development will be permitted on infill sites, defined as development filling a small gap within the defined built-up envelope of the village, subject to the proposal complying with Policy HS4.

POLICY GB6 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.22 Many of Wirral's villages are within the Green Belt in which new development is not normally appropriate. However, such villages may contain suitable sites for infill development which would not have an adverse effect on the character of the village or on the open character of the Green Belt. Where the Green Belt currently washes over a village the Local Planning Authority may define a boundary within which such development would be acceptable.
- 7.23 The character of the rural villages is often maintained by their Conservation Area status. It is important that any proposals for new development respect this status and can preserve or enhance the Conservation Area in accordance with the relevant policy in Section 11 of the UDP.

Proposal GB7 - Infill Villages in the Green Belt

The following villages are shown on the Proposals Map as villages within which new infill development will be subject to Policy GB6:

1. Barnston Village (outside the Conservation Area)
2. Eastham Village (outside the Conservation Area)
3. Thornton Hough
4. Raby Village
5. Storeton Village

PROPOSAL GB7 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.24 The villages listed in Proposal GB7 and shown on the Proposals Map are those within which the Local Planning Authority consider that limited infill development may be considered. They are larger villages, with good public transport accessibility and some local shops. Limited new infill development in these villages will not compromise the purposes of Green Belt. Subject to adequate design, infill development should not have an adverse effect on the character of the villages.

Policy GB8 - Guidelines for Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt

Within the Major Developed Sites listed in Proposal GB9, infilling and redevelopment of existing buildings will be permitted subject to the new development satisfying the following criteria:

- (i) it shall have no greater impact than that existing on the open appearance of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it, and where possible have less;
- (ii) it should contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts;
- (iii) the height of the new development should not exceed the height of the existing buildings;

- (iv) it should not occupy a larger area of the site than the existing buildings, but an exception may be made where a reduced building height over a larger footprint would benefit visual amenity;
- (v) infilling should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site;

Any proposals for redevelopment, whether partial or full, should be considered in the context of comprehensive long-term plans for the whole of the site. These plans should include an agreed footprint for the site. The Local Planning Authority may impose a condition on a permission which ensures the demolition of buildings which are not to be retained as new buildings are erected.

All proposals for infilling and redevelopment will be considered in the light of their effect on the visual amenities of the Green Belt and on the traffic and travel implications of the development, including the possible adverse impact of new road infrastructure. The acceptability of a new use for a major developed site will also depend on its having no detrimental effect on local facilities such as schools and health care facilities.

POLICY GB8 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.25 Wirral's Green Belt includes a number of major developed sites, whose continuation in use safeguards a number of jobs and important community facilities. The Borough's major hospitals at Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge are in the Green Belt as is one of the Wirral Metropolitan College's complexes at Carlett Park. Over the lifetime of the UDP, these sites may require new buildings or infilling between existing buildings. In the case of Clatterbridge Hospital, a redevelopment programme has already led to the release of a large area at the south and east of the complex.
- 7.26 It is important that infilling and redevelopment has no greater impact on the Green Belt than the existing development. The calculation and recording of an agreed aggregate ground floor area for the existing buildings should be determined between the Local Planning Authority and the landowner. This site footprint excludes temporary buildings, open spaces with direct external access between the wings of a building and areas of hardstanding. Any new development should normally respect this footprint in location and total area, although in some circumstances an alternative location will have less impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.27 The hospital sites in the Green Belt require care in the choice of future uses if they are partially redeveloped. Uses which have minimal traffic generation, particularly of heavy goods vehicles and which do not introduce noise, vibration, fumes, smoke, smell or dust are to be preferred.
- 7.28 The redevelopment of major sites can have a positive role in providing access to the open countryside and opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation for

the urban population, can retain and enhance attractive landscapes and the use of land for agriculture and forestry, and can improve damaged and derelict land around towns and secure nature conservation interests.

Proposal GB9 - Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt

The following sites are shown on the Proposals Map as Major Developed Sites within which new development will be subject to Policy GB8:

1. **Arrowe Park Hospital**
2. **Clatterbridge Hospital**
3. **Thingwall Hospital**
4. **Wirral Metropolitan College - Carlett Park Campus**
5. **Pensby Schools**

PROPOSAL GB9 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.29 Proposal GB9 identifies the sites in Wirral which will be considered as Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt. Development within the areas designated on the Proposals Map will be regulated in accordance with Policy GB8.

Policy GB10 - Key Workers Dwellings in the Green Belt

Where an appropriate development in the Green Belt requires a key worker to live close by and accommodation is unlikely to be available in an existing settlement or building in the vicinity, permission will be granted for an individual dwelling subject to:

- (i) the need for the new dwelling being proved to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, (supported by a report from an agricultural development consultancy in the case of an agricultural worker's dwelling);
- (ii) a suitable occupancy condition; and
- (iii) the dwelling's siting, design and materials being appropriate to its place in the surrounding landscape.

POLICY GB10 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.30 It is necessary to prevent the proliferation of new dwellings in the Green Belt and, as a general rule, an applicant for a new dwelling must demonstrate that there is a real need to live in the Green Belt by virtue of the nature of the employment. If the dwelling is for agricultural purposes then the application should be supported by evidence of need from an agricultural development consultancy.
- 7.31 Wherever possible, new dwellings which have a proven need to be in the Green Belt should be built within an existing settlement or other group of

buildings. If either of these is not possible, then the new dwelling should be within the curtilage of the source of employment, preferably adjacent to existing groups of buildings.

- 7.32 The recent availability of dwellings for sale or rent in nearby settlements will be taken into account in determining the likely need for new key worker dwellings.

Policy GB11 - Removal of Agricultural Occupancy Conditions

An application to remove an agricultural occupancy condition imposed on a key worker dwelling will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- (i) evidence being shown of unsuccessful attempts to let or sell the dwelling at a rent or value reflecting the existence of the occupancy condition, such attempts to include advertisement for a substantial period in agricultural and other appropriate trade journals as well as other general property pages;**
- (ii) the occupancy condition being shown to be inappropriate due to changes in agricultural, horticultural or forestry practice.**

POLICY GB11 - REASONED JUSTIFICATION

- 7.33 In recent years the occupancy of much new housing development in the Green Belt has been restricted to those working in agriculture, horticulture or forestry. As agriculture changes and as the original key worker may retire or move out of agriculture, it sometimes becomes necessary to consider the removal of such restrictive conditions.
- 7.34 The Local Planning Authority wish to avoid a proliferation of new dwellings in the Green Belt and will wish to see genuine efforts to dispose of the dwelling to someone locally employed in agriculture, horticulture or forestry. It is suggested that advertisement in known specialist journals for a period of twelve months will allow suitable buyers to be identified. Very often such potential buyers will be less able to compete with open market buyers, and the selective marketing of the dwelling can retain affordable housing for agricultural workers.