

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

General Considerations

The M53 Corridor (General Case)

OBJECTIONS: 047/7 Bryant Homes Ltd 061/1 Mulberry Properties (Noctorum) Ltd^{1*}
062/4 Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd*
081/12 House Builders Federation 097/1 Sable Ltd*

[* these Objections also contain representations that more specific sites should be omitted from the proposed Green Belt; the representations are considered on pages 128-131, 132-135 and 136-137 of this report respectively]

Summary of Objections

- 7.1 Major additions to the Green Belt in the Wirral cannot be justified by the guidance in PPG11 *Strategic Planning Guidance for Merseyside* which states that the preparation of UDPs provides the opportunity to give precision to detailed boundaries of the Green Belt². The aim 'to provide firm boundaries which will ensure the permanence of the Green Belt' gives greater support to Green Belt deletions than additions, given the lack of any 'safeguarded land' for development needs beyond the Plan period. There should be no major extensions to the Green Belt (047/7). Boundaries should be drawn to take account of longer term development needs, and there is no evidence that this has been done in the UDP (081/12).
- 7.2 The Merseyside Structure Plan did not establish that the Green Belt should be extended into the M53 Corridor ('the Corridor'), and proposals for definition of Green Belt in the Corridor were deleted from the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan.
- 7.3 The proposed Green Belt includes significant areas of built development and areas where there is proposed development. The credibility of the proposed Green Belt in policy terms is therefore prejudiced.
- 7.4 Existing policies have been effective in keeping the Corridor substantially free from development and open in character, and other policies can continue to perform this function. It is not necessary to designate the Corridor as Green Belt in order to achieve these purposes.

¹ The Council submit that Objections 061/1 and 062/4 argue only that the boundaries of the proposed Green Belt in the Corridor are inappropriately drawn, and that evidence that the principle of Green Belt designation in the Corridor is wrong is not related to any 'duly made' Objection made by these Objectors. However, Objection 097/1 deals with principle, and I have therefore decided to consider the evidence of all 3 Objectors as contributing to this matter.

² PPG11, paragraph 8. this guidance has been superseded by RPG 13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*.

7.5 Even if the principle of the designation of the M53 Corridor as Green Belt is accepted, the Green Belt has been drawn too tightly in the Corridor. Insufficient account has been taken of the need to provide for development requirements both in the Plan period and beyond.

Assessment and Conclusions

General Considerations

7.6 The M53 Green Belt designation is the largest and most strategically significant amendment to the Green Belt proposed in the UDP, although the Council contend that this does not amount to a 'major extension' of the Green Belt. It is dealt with below. Elsewhere in this report I deal with individual Objections which request deletions from the approved Green Belt³. With one minor exception⁴ I recommend that land remain in the Green Belt. Without exception I conclude that land should not be removed from the Green Belt to be safeguarded for future development needs, as sufficient land for housing needs can be found outside the Green Belt. This is not to rule out further consideration being given to Green Belt boundaries and to the safeguarding of land in the context of a future strategic regional review of the Green Belt⁵.

Development Plan Context

7.7 Reference was made to the M53 corridor in the 1980 Merseyside Structure Plan⁶. The Corridor is described in the Plan as 'an important break between the built up areas of eastern and central Wirral'. This to my mind established the Corridor as an area of land which clearly fulfils one of the purposes of the Green Belt set out in PPG2 *Green Belts*⁷, namely that of preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another. The Corridor is also referred as a priority area for landscape renewal to be the subject of a detailed study. Structure Plan Policy 11.12 effectively established, until the outcome of that study was known, a presumption against 'inappropriate' development in the Corridor broadly similar to that applying to the Green Belt in PPG2⁸.

³ See pages 138 to 175, 178 to 182 and 185 of this report.

⁴ See page 156 of this report.

⁵ Such a review is anticipated in RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*, paragraph 3.10.

⁶ Paragraph 11.11 of the Written Statement (CD049)

⁷ PPG2, paragraph 1.4.

⁸ PPG2, paragraphs 3.1 and 3.4.

7.8 The circumstances in which further policy developments awaited completion of a study bore some comparison with Marshside/Crossens Marsh in Southport⁹, although I find that the relevance of that land to a Green Belt purpose is not so clear from the text of the Structure Plan Written Statement. The Structure Plan Key Diagram identified both the M53 corridor and Marshside/Crossens Marsh as areas where special policies were to be applied pending the completion of detailed local studies.

7.9 The Inspector's report on Objections to the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP) indicates that the general theme of Objections relating to the Corridor was its effectiveness in separating the urban areas of east and west Wirral¹⁰. The Inspector recorded that there was general agreement amongst the parties to the Green Belt Inquiry that the Corridor needed special treatment and eventual firm protection, and that he could not see any great difficulty in the eventual adoption of appropriate Green Belt boundaries. However, such action could only flow from a proper study and appreciation of the area as a whole which would make provision for all the needs of the local population¹¹.

7.10 Much of the Corridor is identified on the UDP Proposals Map as a 'Road Corridor subject to Environmental Improvement', the subject of Proposal LA4 and for which Policy LA3 sets the criteria that are to be applied to proposals within such an area¹². The UDP Written Statement explains the main aims and objectives to be applied within the Corridor, and this includes reference to the Corridor's Green Belt function¹³. Whilst no specific study of the Corridor such as might be regarded to be the logical outcome of the needs identified in the Structure Plan and MGBLP has been put forward in evidence, I take the proposals and policies of the UDP relating to landscape renewal to be an expression of what the general theme of landscape renewal should be. In my view it provides some basis for further identifying the role and extent of the Green Belt in the Corridor.

Present Policy Guidance

7.11 PPG2 advises that the *general extent* of Green Belts has been fixed through the approval of Structure Plans¹⁴. The Corridor was featured in the Green Belt Chapter of the Structure Plan, but its inclusion in the statutory Green Belt was 'held over' for further study.

⁹ Structure Plan Written Statement, paragraph 11.13 and Policy 11.14

¹⁰ Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan Inspector's Report, paragraph 6.56, page 75 (CD081)

¹¹ Inspector's Report, paragraphs 6.61, 6.63 (page 76).

¹² Proposal LA4 - Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal; Policy LA3 - Priorities for Areas Requiring Landscape Renewal.

¹³ UDP Written Statement, paragraph 14.20 (page 159).

¹⁴ PPG2, paragraph 2.3.

The PPG refers to the fact that in some areas detailed boundaries (to the Green Belt) have yet to be defined¹⁵. It seems to me that the principle of the Green Belt role the Corridor could play was acknowledged in the MGBLP, having been developed from the 'separation' purpose identified in the Structure Plan.

7.12 RPG13 makes it clear that any general review of the Green Belt should be carried out in a Regional context and that any changes to the Green Belt in advance of that event would require very strong justification¹⁶. The need to maintain clear separation between the built up areas of Woodchurch and Noctorum/Beechwood remains in my perception as important a policy objective as it has been in recent years; Green Belt control is in my view the most appropriate way of achieving that objective, and this provides the very strong justification for establishing a Green Belt in the M53 corridor, even though the guidance which provided scope for the clarification of Green Belt boundaries in Merseyside UDPs has now been withdrawn¹⁷. The alternative Urban Open Land Policy suggested in Objection 97/1 would not in my view maintain the separation function of the Corridor as effectively as Green Belt designation.

7.13 The Green Belt Inspector considered that in defining the extent of the Green Belt in this area, the needs of the local population should be given full consideration. Such an exercise should have regard to the general permanency of Green Belts and the need to avoid later reviews of the boundary that could have been avoided. As the end of the UDP Plan period is 2001 the development needs of the area both up to and beyond 2001 should be fully taken into account, and this suggests to me establishing a Green Belt in the boundary that will reasonably perform the function of separation without the boundaries being too tightly drawn. The Objections to the designation of individual sites as part of the Green Belt will therefore be considered in the light of this general conclusion.

7.14 I therefore support as being generally consistent with national guidance the Council's proposals to designate land in the M53 corridor as Green Belt, subject to consideration of the definition of the boundary in relation to specific sites (dealt with elsewhere in this report).

Inspector's Recommendation

7.15 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP so far as the principle of extending the Green Belt up the M53 Corridor is concerned, subject to the consideration of the detailed boundary of the Green Belt in relation to specific Objection sites¹⁸.

¹⁵ PPG2, paragraph 2.4.

¹⁶ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

¹⁷ See paragraph 8 of PPG11 *Strategic Guidance for Merseyside*, now replaced by RPG13.

¹⁸ See pages 124 to 137 of this report.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

Bidston Hill and Bidston Village

OBJECTIONS: 044/3, 044/4 The Vyner Estate 097/1 Sable Ltd 117/1 Mr I Ross

Summary of Objections

- 7.16 It is inappropriate to apply Green Belt policies to Bidston Hill, an urban open space adjoined on three sides by extensive built up areas. The proposed designation will not fulfil any of the purposes of Green Belts laid down in PPG2 *Green Belts*. No exceptional circumstances exist to justify it. Other policies and proposals in the UDP all restrict the amount and type of development which may be permitted there¹ (097/1).
- 7.17 Proposal GB1/3 should omit the extension of the Green Belt to land at Ivy Farm and Yew Tree Farm, Bidston and that land should become part of a 'Primarily Residential Area'. Land in Lennox Lane should be allocated for housing development to provide flexibility in meeting the Strategic Guidance housing requirements. These areas do not form part of the adjoining open areas. A more logical Green Belt boundary would be that based on the UDP Draft for Public Consultation². That now proposed does not follow Government guidance, as it cannot endure beyond the present Plan period and takes no account of longer term development needs. It should be amended as shown on the Plan attached to Objections 044/3 and 044/4.
- 7.18 The inclusion of Bidston Village in the Green Belt goes against the guidance in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.9 of PPG2. There are no exceptional circumstances to warrant its inclusion. The village's character has been misrepresented in paragraph 7.12 of the Reasoned Justification, and recent development has meant that the village has lost all connection with rurality in functional or visual terms. The village can be adequately protected by other UDP policies, particularly CH4³. It is unnecessary to add Green Belt control to this level of protection. The references in the Merseyside Structure Plan and Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan to the Green Belt status of the M53 corridor should not be taken to include Bidston Village (117/1).

¹ These include Proposal LA2 (Areas of Special Landscape Value), Proposal NC6 (Sites of Biological Importance), Proposal NC10 (Sites of Local Importance for Earth Science) and Policy TL11 (Development at Countryside Recreation Sites).

² CD052. The Pre-deposit Draft Proposals Map shows the proposed Green Belt as not extending westwards of Lennox Lane or Eleanor Road into Bidston Village.

³ Bidston Village Conservation Area. The policy lists the principal planning objectives for the Conservation Area, and as amended by ALT/HERITAGE/006 (CD056, p 134), seeks to retain the primarily rural land uses within certain specified areas including Ivy Farm, Yew Tree Farm and land at the junction of Lennox Lane and Bidston Village Road.

Assessment and Conclusions

Bidston Hill

7.19 The Merseyside County Structure Plan (1980) did not show Bidston Hill either as within the Green Belt or within the area where special policies would be applied pending completion of detailed local studies⁴. Neither was Bidston Hill included within the Green Belt in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan⁵. The possible inclusion of Bidston Hill was considered in the Inspector's report on Objections to the Local Plan⁶. The Inspector recognised that Bidston Hill was an important local feature which, if it could be seen as part of the main run of the Green Belt, could be justifiably included in the Green Belt. However, he concluded that because of its detachment at the narrow northern neck, Bidston Hill must be seen as a major urban open space; its retention and protection were safeguarded by other policies. The Inspector did acknowledge that the matter could be reconsidered when the Green Belt boundary was considered further in relation to the detailed studies envisaged for Bidston and the M53 corridor.

7.20 The UDP Proposals Map shows the proposed Green Belt at Bidston Hill connected to the 'main run' of the extended Green Belt in the M53 corridor at its northern end, through the grounds of Bidston Hall and undeveloped land adjoining Boundary Road, across Bidston Village Road and a school site and across the grassed area adjoining the A553 Hoylake Road. The Green Belt here connects through a fairly narrow gap of open land with the land south of Bidston Station⁷ and the remainder of the north end of the M53 corridor. Whilst this connecting link of Green Belt is clearly more than just a nominal link, it does not to my mind change the fundamental relationship between Bidston Hill and the M53 corridor to any significant extent from that identified by the Green Belt Inspector, especially in view of the conclusions I reach below about the status of Bidston Village in Green Belt terms.

7.21 I recognise that within the area shown as Green Belt there are several residential plots which might not be appropriate to any alternative designation as Urban Greenspace. However, I note that the Proposals Map places these areas within the Area of Special Landscape Value, wherein under Policy LA1⁸ there is considerable protection for landscape features such as woodlands, hedges and trees and the requirement for the effect of development proposals on the appearance of the area or on important views into or out of the area to be scrutinised.

⁴ Merseyside Structure Plan, Key Diagram and Policy 11.12 (CD049, p 99).

⁵ CD048. The Local Plan's Written Statement included an Appendix which reprinted the relevant policies of the Structure Plan, including 11.12.

⁶ Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan *Report of the Inspector on objections and representations to the Plan* (CD081, p 76-77 (Site 18E)).

⁷ I consider the suitability of this land for inclusion in the Green Belt on page 136-137 of this report.

⁸ Policy LA1 - Protection for Areas of Special Landscape Value, as proposed to be amended by ALT/LANDSCAPE/003 (CD056, p 184).

7.22 RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* advises that if local authorities seek to change Green Belt boundaries in advance of a strategic review, this would require very strong justification⁹, and PPG2 refers to the need for exceptional circumstances to be shown before such a change were made¹⁰. In these and all the other foregoing circumstances I do not consider that the case for designating Bidston Hill as Green Belt is convincingly made. In my view the Green Belt designation should not extend to Bidston Hill. I suggest that in the alternative, consideration be given to designating those parts of Bidston Hill to which the public have access, the grounds of Bidston Hall and the land between Boundary Road and Hoylake Road, as Urban Greenspace under Proposal GR2.

Bidston Village

7.23 The Council's decision to change the designation of most of the land in Bidston Village from 'white land' to Green Belt appears to have been influenced by representations received from several local bodies¹¹. The reasons advanced included the Village's role in separating adjoining urban areas, its affinity with the openness of Bidston Hill, its rural character and the support Green Belt designation would give to the protection of open spaces within the Village.

7.24 On my visits to the Village I gained the clear impression that traces of a rural character remain and the built environment of the Village is different from the urban areas immediately to the north and south. However, such is the extent and disposition of buildings that it seems to me that the Village does not serve any real separation function as would be achieved by open land. Accordingly I am doubtful as to whether the village could be said to fulfil any of the Green Belt functions mentioned in PPG2¹². So whatever strengthening of control over new development Green Belt designation might achieve, its designation without any clear identification with one or more Green Belt purpose would be inappropriate.

7.25 In any event, Policy CH4¹³ appears to me to pay considerable attention to the characteristics of the village which justify its status as a Conservation Area. These include the visual separation of the village from adjoining modern housing, the character, scale and setting of agricultural development, the retention of tree belts and the protection of specified spaces, including those at Ivy Farm, Yew Tree Farm and at the junction of Lennox Lane and Bidston Village Road. Even if the designation of the Village as part of the extended Green Belt were

⁹ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

¹⁰ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

¹¹ See *UDP Report of Consultation Responses* (CD054, representations OR00311, OR00366 and OR00491, pp 69-72).

¹² PPG2, paragraph 1.4.

¹³ Policy CH4 - Bidston Village Conservation Area, as amended by ALT/HERITAGE/006 and ALT/HERITAGE/007 (CD056, pp 134 & 135).

regarded as supporting the Green Belt designation of Bidston Hill, my conclusions on Bidston Hill above do not support the inclusion of Bidston Village in the Green Belt.

7.26 I do not therefore consider that the designation of Bidston Village as part of the Green Belt is either necessary, or justified in terms of national guidance. In my view that part of the village west of Lennox Lane/Eleanor Road should be designated as 'Primarily Residential Area'. However, consideration should also be given to the designation of the open land between Lennox Lane, Village Road and the southern boundary of the Bidston Tesco Superstore as Urban Greenspace, in view of the apparent open space value of that land. The prominence and degree of openness of that land does not in my view support any suggestion that part of the land should be allocated for housing purposes.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.27 I recommend that the UDP be modified:

- (a) by the deletion of the proposed Green Belt designation from Bidston Hill and Bidston Village, as far north as the roundabout at the junction of Hoylake Road and Bidston Link Road;
- (b) by consideration of the designation of the grounds of Bidston Hall, those parts of Bidston Hill to which the public have access, the land between Boundary Road and Hoylake Road and the open land between Lennox Lane and the southern boundary of the Tesco Superstore, as Urban Greenspace;
- (c) by the inclusion of Bidston Village to the west of Lennox Lane and Eleanor Road in the 'Primarily Residential Area' designation.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT -
Land at the former Old Birkonians Rugby Ground, Noctorum

OBJECTIONS: 061/1, 061/3, 061/5 Mulberry Properties (Noctorum) Ltd
102/1, 102/2 Mainbranch Pension Fund 109/1, 109/2 Mr K I B Bell
110/1, 110/2 Mainbranch Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.28 The Green Belt has been drawn too tightly in the M53 corridor, with insufficient provision for development needs during the UDP Plan period and beyond. The railway provides a defensible Green belt boundary in the Noctorum area. The Objection site should not therefore be included in the Green Belt, as it fulfils no significant Green Belt purpose and is urban in character with development on three sides. The site would better meet housing requirements. The housing allocation of the site was included in the UDP's Draft for Public Consultation¹ and then deleted as such for no good planning reason. The site has had a history of vandalism and nuisance since its use as a rugby club was discontinued.

Assessment and Conclusions

The UDP History of the Objection Site

- 7.29 The Consultation Draft of the UDP allocated the Objection site for housing purposes, the largest such allocation in that version of the Plan. The draft Written Statement indicated that whilst much of the M53 corridor was to be included within the Green Belt as a separation between Birkenhead and Upton, certain sites could be allocated for development without compromising the separation function². The Objection site was identified as one such site.

- 7.30 Representations on the Draft UDP were considered by the Council. The Report of Consultation Responses records 4 sets of representations, only one of which expressed objection to the principle of housing development on the site³. A report to the Council's Unitary Development Plan Panel on 12 July 1993⁴ relating to Housing and Green Belt matters anticipated that if the number of sites allocated for housing to satisfy the UDP's residual housing requirement were reduced and more reliance placed upon small and windfall sites, it was to be

¹ CD052, page 33 and Proposals Map - Site HS3/1 (estimated yield 250 units).

² CD052, paragraph 5.19, page 32.

³ CD054, pages 40-41.

⁴ See inquiry document 61/P/2, page 43.

expected that the UDP would be challenged. A decision was nevertheless taken at that meeting to delete the Objection site as a housing allocation and to place the site in the Green belt.

7.31 A report to the Planning Committee on 23 September 1993⁵ dealt with the Objection site specifically and considered representations made on behalf of the prospective developers. The report drew attention to the developer's offer of community benefits which could be secured as part of an appropriate agreement associated with a housing development, and expressed the view that if the site were put into the Green Belt undue pressure would be put on the Council's general defence of their proposals for the Green Belt in this area. The Committee however decided not to change its decision to delete the housing allocation and put the site into the Green Belt. The Council's evidence suggests that local representations on earlier planning applications expressing the view that the site should remain as open space were influential in that decision⁶.

The Green Belt Issue

7.32 I conclude elsewhere⁷ that there is a case for the extension of the Green Belt up the M53 corridor enough to perform the minimum Green Belt function of separating the urban areas of Beechwood/Noctorum and Woodchurch/Upton/Moreton. The question arises therefore as to whether it is necessary to include the Objection site in the Green Belt for this purpose. I also assess whether there is an alternative case for safeguarding the Objection site outside the Green Belt for possible future development needs, if the site is not to be allocated for housing.

7.33 From my tour of the Noctorum area I am in no doubt that the Objection site makes an important contribution to the open character Noctorum Way. The Inspector who considered Objections to the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan described the M53 corridor as an important rural lung separating two urban areas⁸. However it does not necessarily follow that the Objection site is essential to the separation function. The site does not directly abut the M53, as there is a high embankment carrying the Wrexham to Bidston Railway Line which forms the western boundary of the site and an additional strip of land between the embankment and the motorway, as well as a wider swathe of open land on the Woodchurch side.

7.34 When driving along the M53 I was conscious of the general openness of Noctorum Way. Even so, the embankment which is the nearest major feature to the motorway on its eastern side, considerably diminishes that impression of openness. If much of the Objection site on this eastern side of the embankment were developed for housing, only part of the development would be visible from the motorway. In these circumstances I consider that a general sense of openness would remain, especially if the site were developed along the lines

⁵ Inquiry document 61/P/2, pages 48-50.

⁶ See Council proof WMBC/P/25, paragraphs 4.11 and 4.12.

⁷ See pages 120-123 of this report.

⁸ Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan Inspector's report (CD081), paragraph 6.61.

shown on the submitted illustrative layouts⁹, which show landscaped open space adjoining Noctorum Way.

7.35 The Council list criteria to be used in the definition of the Green Belt boundary in the M53 corridor, in the Green Belt Core Proof¹⁰. These include preserving the special character of the corridor by retaining the predominant openness of the remaining open land, preventing any further loss of open land to urban uses, retaining optimum separation between the existing urban areas by extending the Green Belt to the edge of the urban areas (especially where the remaining open corridor is already restricted) and minimising any additional urban intrusion.

7.36 My conclusions about the land requirement for the recommended increase in the UDP new dwellings requirement challenge some of these suppositions¹¹. The conclusion that only the minimum area necessary to fulfil the key purpose of separation should be designated as Green Belt, can be viewed as contrary to the objective of preventing *any* further loss of open land. Retaining the open character of the corridor is an important objective. Yet it seems to me that between Woodchurch and Noctorum that open character is predominantly urban in tone. A well designed housing development on the Objection site with carefully landscaped and laid out open space would not in my view threaten that character; it could enhance it.

7.37 I also recognise that the concept of a 'minimum' Green Belt is inconsistent with retaining *optimum* separation. Whilst that objective seems worthy when viewed in isolation, the need as I see it for more land to be identified for housing to satisfy an increased new dwelling requirement renders that an unrealistic goal. I accept that the corridor is restricted in this area, but it is still clearly defined by the railway embankment which forms an effective visual barrier between the immediate environs of the motorway and the Objection site. In these circumstances development of the Objection site would further restrict the open corridor but not in my view in such a way as significantly to weaken its function of separating the adjoining urban areas.

7.38 As for urban intrusion, I accept that urban development appears as a hard framework to the motorway corridor at this point. However, I have concluded that housing on the Objection site need not be intrusive. Residents may appreciate the openness of the Objection site, making use of it for casual activities such as dog walking. Whilst I accept that for them the open character of Noctorum Way would change, it would be replaced by a more structured environment including dwellings, trees, footpaths and more defined open space.

⁹ Proof of evidence 61/P/2, pages 128 and 129.

¹⁰ CD5, paragraph 5.25 (pages 33 and 34).

¹¹ See pages 26 to 35 of this report.

7.39 Even if the Objection site could not be described as truly an urban site, its fringe urban location, proximity to local schools, shops and developing transport facilities¹² satisfies the strategic objectives for the location of housing development to support the general aim of reducing reliance on the car¹³. All these factors contribute to my conclusion that the arguments for retaining the Objection site as open land and making it a part of the M53 Green Belt corridor are outweighed by the site not being essential to the separation function of the Green Belt in this area, together with the contribution the site could make towards satisfying the Borough's future housing needs whilst retaining some land for open space purposes.

Allocation for Housing, or Safeguarding

7.40 I have considered whether the site could alternatively be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and appear as 'safeguarded land' within the meaning of PPG2¹⁴. However, I record elsewhere that allocation of the site is a necessary part of satisfying the UDP's increased new dwelling requirement¹⁵. Safeguarding the site would not therefore achieve that end. There was no challenge to the estimate made on behalf of Objector (061) that the site could reasonably accommodate 250 units. Whilst this would imply a rate of annual rate of construction of about 80 units if development did not commence until 1998, I consider that this yield should be included in the listing of the site under Proposal HS1, as the site is sufficiently large to permit a mix of accommodation to be built concurrently if the demand warranted it.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.41 I recommend that the UDP be modified:

- (a) by the exclusion of the Objection site from the proposed Green Belt and the realignment of the boundary of the Green Belt on the Proposals Map along the railway embankment which adjoins the western boundary of the Objection site;
- (b) by the allocation of the Objection site for housing purposes under Proposal HS1 with an estimated yield of 250 units;
- (c) by the review of Paragraphs 7.5 to 7.9 of the Written Statement to reflect these changes.

¹² There appears to be a good network of local bus services; although the prospect of a new railway station at Noctorum, discussed on pages 294-296 of this report is not certain, there is provision in the UDP for land to be made available for a new station to the south at Woodchurch Road, Prenton (Proposal TR1(b)/5), and the electrification of this part of the Wrexham to Bidston railway line is being investigated.

¹³ As set out in paragraphs 1.7, 1.8 and 3.2 of PPG13 *Transport*.

¹⁴ PPG2, paragraph 2.12 refers to instances where land between the urban area and the Green Belt 'which may be required to satisfy longer-term development needs' may be safeguarded.

¹⁵ See page 26 of this report.

*Part II: Proposal GB1 - Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary
 Proposal HS1 - Land Allocated for Residential Development
 (Proposal LA4 and Policies WAT1 and WA1)
 Land at Fender Farm, Moreton*

**PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
PROPOSAL LA4 - AREAS REQUIRING LANDSCAPE RENEWAL
POLICY WAT1 - FLUVIAL AND TIDAL FLOODING
POLICY WA1 - DEVELOPMENT AND FLOOD RISK
Land at Fender Farm, Moreton**

OBJECTIONS: 062/4, 062/10, 062/11, 062/12 Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.42 The Objection site should be removed from the proposed Green Belt and instead allocated for residential purposes under Proposal HS1. The site makes no contribution to Green Belt objectives nor to the UDP objectives for the M53 corridor. Its development would constitute rounding off of the urban area and would help to improve the balance and range of housing provision in the UDP. Accordingly the site should not be within the area which is subject to Proposals LA4, WAT1 and WA1.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.43 The Objection site forms part of a large flat area of land west of the M53 motorway and south of Fender Lane. As well as lying in the proposed extension of the Green belt, this area is also shown on the UDP Proposals Map as part of a Road Corridor subject to Environmental Improvement and part of an Area for Landscape Enhancement under Proposal LA4. The southern portion of the site shown on the map which accompanied the duly made Objection 062/11 falls within the washland area for the River Fender, the subject of Policies WAT1 and WA1. However, the Objector has subsequently made it clear that the site which was requested for allocation for housing purposes is the northern part of the site as shown on the plan Document MRC1¹. The issue as to whether the revised Objection site should be subject to Policies WAT1 and WA1 does not therefore arise. A subsequent change published by the Council² does not affect this position.

7.44 I conclude elsewhere³ that there is a case for the extension of the Green Belt up the M53 corridor sufficient to perform the minimum function of a Green Belt in separating the urban areas of Beechwood/Noctorum and Woodchurch/Upton/Moreton. The first question is therefore whether it is necessary to include the Objection site in the Green Belt to fulfil this purpose. I then consider whether there are any other reasons why the Objection site should not be allocated

¹ This is part of Inquiry Document 62/P/2.

² ALT/WATER/010 (CD056, page 293 and following).

³ See pages 120-123 of this report.

for housing purposes, having regard to my conclusion⁴ that there is a need to increase the UDP new dwellings requirement and to find further land to satisfy that requirement. This assessment will include consideration as to the effect of losing the existing main use of the Objection site for the keeping and grazing of horses.

The Green Belt Issue

7.45 Because the Objection site is part of the open land which extends from the Stavordale Road housing area up to the embankment of the motorway, and from the motorway eastwards to the Beechwood Estate, it does contribute to the function that this land performs of separating the two urban areas. Despite the presence of a recognisable peripheral earth bund the Objection site is not easily distinguishable from the open land to the east, but the motorway corridor is wide at this point, extending to almost 1000 metres at its widest point. The site directly abuts housing development to the west and to some degree therefore the development of the site for housing could be regarded as 'rounding off'. Between the eastern boundary of the Objection site and the motorway embankment there is a distance of about 300 metres. In my view the exclusion of the Objection site from the proposed Green Belt would still leave a corridor of open land of sufficient width effectively to perform the Green Belt function of separating the built-up areas of Moreton and Beechwood. I therefore conclude that in these terms the Objection site is not essential to the establishment of a Green Belt in this part of the M53 corridor.

7.46 The Council list criteria to be used in the definition of the Green Belt boundary in the M53 corridor, in the Green Belt Core Proof⁵. These include preserving the special character of the corridor by retaining the predominant openness of the remaining open land, preventing any further loss of open land to urban uses, retaining optimum separation between the existing urban areas by extending the Green Belt to the edge of the urban areas (especially where the remaining open corridor is already restricted) and minimising any additional urban intrusion.

7.47 I accept that the development of the Objection site for housing would depart to some extent from these principles. However, the site is already partially occupied by buildings and although its more extensive development would reduce the open character of this north-west corner of the open land area, in my view the predominant openness of the corridor as a whole would remain. Open land would be lost to urban uses, but it seems to me that the principles of not conceding *any* loss of open land and my approach of retaining sufficient land to allow a degree of flexibility when deciding how future development needs are to be accommodated are irreconcilable.

7.48 In these circumstances I favour retaining the element of flexibility, at least until a general review of the Green Belt is carried out in the light of further studies into the housing requirement. It also follows that the approach I suggest is not compatible with the criteria of

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁵ CD5, paragraph 5.25 (pages 33 and 34).

maintaining *optimum* separation between the urban areas if that means generally extending the proposed Green Belt right up to the edge of the existing urban areas.

Allocation for Housing: Other Considerations

7.49 Having decided that an effective Green Belt can be established in this part of the M53 corridor without including the Objection site in the Green Belt, there are very few other arguments in evidence to suggest that the Objection site should not be allocated for housing purposes. Indeed, the proximity of the site to local schools, shops and good transport facilities⁶ satisfies the strategic objectives for the location of housing development to support the general aim of reducing reliance on the car⁷.

7.50 It seems to me that the value to the community of the present use of the land for the keeping of horses is not a decisive issue. I accept that some investment has gone into the present enterprise on the site and that its users benefit from the facility. Yet no compelling reason has been advanced as to why such a use could not be re-established elsewhere in the Fender Valley if the Objection site were no longer available for that purpose.

7.51 National planning guidance relating to recreation asks planning authorities to consider the scope for encouraging recreational facilities on the urban fringe⁸. The popularity of horse keeping and riding, and the opportunities such activity can provide in employment and land use terms, is also recognised⁹. However the guidance is not specific in terms of any assessment of social value in comparison with other land uses such as housing, and the social value of the present use of the site does not in my view in planning terms outweigh the benefits which could accrue from the development of the site for housing purposes.

7.52 The Council dispute the Objector's submission that the Objection site bears many similarities to the proposed housing site to the north at Claremont, Reeds Lane, Leasowe¹⁰. I accept that the Leasowe site is flanked on its north and south sides by substantial buildings and in that in this respect it is slightly less prominent in relation to the surrounding open land than the Objection site. The Objection site also projects marginally more to the east. However in terms of their relationship to the motorway corridor generally and their proximity to Fender Lane I consider that the two sites have much in common. I do not therefore regard such

⁶ The site immediately adjoins a principal bus route and is within 400-500 metres of Leasowe Railway Station, from which a frequent electric train service is available to Birkenhead and Liverpool.

⁷ As set out in paragraphs 1.7, 1.8 and 3.2 of PPG13 *Transport*.

⁸ See PPG17 *Sport and Recreation*, paragraph 32.

⁹ PPG7 (1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, paragraph 3.13.

¹⁰ This site is allocated for housing purposes under Proposal HS1/2 with a similar yield to that identified for the Objection site. Outline planning permission has now been granted for such a development.

differences as there are between the sites as mitigating against the allocation of the Objection site for housing.

7.53 I have considered whether the Objection site could alternatively be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and appear as 'safeguarded land' within the meaning of PPG2¹¹. However, I conclude elsewhere that allocation of the site is a necessary part of satisfying the UDP's increased new dwelling requirement¹². Safeguarding the site would not therefore achieve that end. There was no challenge to the estimate made on behalf of the Objector that the site could accommodate 150 units. I consider that this yield could reasonably be achieved within the Plan period, and it should therefore be included in the listing of the site under Proposal HS1. It follows that if the objection site is to be allocated for housing development, it should not be shown as within the area subject to Policy LA4.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.54 I recommend that the UDP be modified:

- (a) by the exclusion of the Objection site from the proposed Green Belt and the realignment of the Green Belt boundary on the Proposals Map along the southern and eastern boundaries of the Objection site;
- (b) by the exclusion of the Objection site from the area shown on the Proposals Map as an Area for Landscape Enhancement;
- (c) by the allocation of the Objection site for housing purposes under Proposal HS1 with an estimated yield of 150 units;
- (d) by the review of Paragraphs 7.5 to 7.9 of the Written Statement to reflect these changes,

but that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 062/11.

¹¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.12 refers to instances where land between the urban area and the Green Belt 'which may be required to satisfy longer-term development needs' may be safeguarded.

¹² See page 26 of this report.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land to the south of Bidston Station

OBJECTION: 097/1 Sable Ltd¹

Summary of Objection

7.55 The Objection site should be excluded from the proposed Green Belt. It has potential for meeting future urban needs. It is on the 'urban side' of Bidston Station, outside the area shown as road corridor on the Proposals Map, and recognised as suitable for a 'park and ride' facility. Development of the site would tidy up and round off a rather fragmented piece of land. The site could attract strategic and sustainable development, and offer facilities of benefit to the deprived housing areas nearby.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.56 The Secretary of State in determining in 1989 an appeal by the Objector against the refusal of planning permission for development of the Objection site for retail purposes concluded that the future of the site, which occupied a key point in the existing open corridor, would be best determined in the context of proposals for the M53 corridor put forward in the UDP². I conclude elsewhere in this report³ that a convincing case has been made in general terms for the extension of the Green Belt along the M53 corridor. Consideration of this part of Objection 097/1 therefore turns on whether or not the Objection site should be a part of that extended Green Belt.

7.57 The Objection site does not form part of the area shown on the UDP Proposals Map as 'Road Corridor subject to Environmental Improvement'. That area appears to be largely based upon the 'Priority Area for Landscape Renewal' shown on the Merseyside Structure Plan Key Diagram. However the Objection site can be clearly identified in the Structure Plan as falling within the 'area where special policies will be applied pending completion of detailed local studies'⁴. It is also within the area identified on the UDP Proposals Map as requiring landscape enhancement⁵. In these terms I consider that it does form an integral part of the general M53 corridor.

¹ Other parts of this Objection, relating to the general case for establishing a Green belt in the M53 corridor, to Bidston Hill and to Bidston Village, are considered elsewhere in this report, on pages 120-123 and 124-127.

² Secretary of State's decision letter and Inspector's report on Appeal ref. APP/4325/A/89/112344, (CD085).

³ See page 120-123 of this report.

⁴ Merseyside Structure Plan, Key Diagram and Policy 11.12 (CD049 p 99), referred to by the Council as a 'quasi Green Belt policy'.

⁵ Under Proposal LA4/1 (Areas requiring Landscape Renewal - the M53 Corridor and Bidston Moss).

7.58 The Objection site is prominently located immediately to the north of the School Lane, Bidston urban housing area, and from this housing area the open corridor of land extends northwards across Bidston Station, the M53 motorway, playing fields and the Bidston Golf Course to the southern outskirts of the large housing area of Leasowe. Although the site does not extend up to the motorway and is bounded by the embankment of the northern end of the Wrexham to Bidston railway line and by Bidston Station itself, I am satisfied that in visual terms it makes an important contribution to the openness of the corridor. Whilst the width of the corridor is 700 metres or more in this area, it seems to me that any substantial development on the Objection site would considerably erode the openness of the landscape as perceived from the Church Lane area and by persons viewing the site from the railway or the approaches to Bidston Station, from the A553 Fender Lane and from the Bidston Link Road.

7.59 Beyond the submission that the Objection site could accommodate development which might benefit local residents, no specific land use is identified by the Objector for the site. Whilst the Inspector in the 1989 appeal concluded that some types of building might not be incompatible with the site's predominant openness, it seems to me that to exclude the site from the Green Belt could encourage forms of development which could not reasonably be resisted but which would detract from the open character of the area. Works for the establishment of a major 'park and ride' facility adjoining Bidston Station would under the UDP proposals fall within the proposed Green Belt, but no evidence has been presented which would show that such development would be contrary to the purposes and objectives of the Green Belt⁶.

7.60 The Inspector in the 1989 appeal concluded that the Objection site ought not to be built upon otherwise than in the context of proposals which maintained its predominant openness as part of the M53 corridor⁷. The Objector favours the adoption of an Urban Open Land Policy for the corridor and for land north of Bidston Village⁸. Although the suggested policy contains criteria relating to landscape renewal and appropriateness in terms of the character of the area, it seems to me that it would be possible to promote development on the Objection site which met those criteria and yet significantly reduced the openness to which the Objection site contributes. I do not therefore consider that such a policy is an adequate alternative to the inclusion of the Objection site within the Green Belt and the application of the appropriate Green Belt policies to any proposals for the site.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.61 I recommend that so far as the Objection site is concerned, no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 097/1.

⁶ As expressed in PPG2 *Green Belts*, paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6.

⁷ Inspector's Report (CD085), paragraph 113.

⁸ As set out on page 25 of the inquiry proof prepared for Objection 97/1 (Document 97/P/1).

**PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land to the west of Birch Road and Ryecroft Road, Meols**

OBJECTIONS: 066/2, 066/5 Ideal Homes Ltd (Persimmon Homes)
 213/1, 213/2 Ianglen Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.62 The Objection site should be deleted from the Green Belt and allocated for residential purposes. It was accepted in the Inspector's report into Objections to the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP)¹ that the site was suitable for residential development but that there was no need at that time for it to be released to accommodate the housing requirements in the Merseyside Structure Plan. However there is now a deficiency of housing land within the Meols/Hoylake Area and within the Borough generally.
- 7.63 The land has no potential for agriculture and is not of ecological value nor landscape merit. It makes no special contribution to the Green Belt; neither would its development create any pressure for the release of land elsewhere in the Green Belt. Indeed, the allocation would ease pressure for development elsewhere in the Meols, Hoylake and West Kirby area. The development of the site would accord with guidance in PPG13 *Transport* because of its relationship to public transport routes (especially the railway). The site is within walking distance of local shops.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.64 PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². PPG11 *Strategic Guidance for Merseyside* published in 1988 emphasised that there was no need for a general review of the Merseyside Green Belt, but the preparation of UDP's provided the opportunity to give precision to the detailed boundaries of the Green Belt, *where those had not yet been clearly defined*³. These circumstances do not apply to the Meols area where firm boundaries were established in the MGBLP. PPG2 also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt⁴.

¹ CD081, paragraphs 6.35-6.36 (page 71).

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG11, paragraph 8.

⁴ PPG2, paragraph 8.

7.65 The replacement for PPG11, RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁵.

7.66 There is therefore in my view no case in policy terms for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁶. It is common ground between the Council and the Objector that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.67 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. I accept that the UDP makes no provision by way of allocations for housing development in this part of the Borough; however it seems to me that in the light of the Plan's central theme of urban regeneration it is not surprising that most housing allocations should be in the eastern urban area. The Council's housing land supply schedules also suggest that there are a reasonable number of potential opportunities in the west of the Borough for housing development by way of 'committed' sites, other identified sites and windfall⁷. I do not therefore regard the case for more local housing provision as so strong as to justify taking land out of the Green Belt.

7.68 I accept that most if not all the circumstances favouring the development of the Objection site summarised in the MGBLP Inspector's report⁸ still exist. However, that Inspector, and also the Inspector who had earlier considered a planning appeal for the development of the site⁹, saw good reason why the Green Belt boundary had been drawn along the West Kirby railway line, to permit the rural area to flow up to and encircle pockets of existing development. In my view the Objection site still makes that contribution, although I

⁵ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁶ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁷ See Housing Core Proof CD5, Appendices E and F.

⁸ CD081, paragraphs 6.35 and 6.36, page 71.

⁹ See Secretary of State's decision letter on that appeal, especially paragraph 2 (Appendix 1 of Inquiry Document 66/P/4).

agree that its development whilst extending the urban area might not result in *unrestricted* sprawl.

7.69 I accept that the Objection site is of no special landscape value and although it has some ecological interest, this would not be sufficient to justify its not being developed for housing. It is also clear that the site is of little present use for agriculture. Although of potential Grade 2 quality, the site would need considerable work doing to it to make it fit for such a use. However the description which has been given to the land as derelict is from my site inspection somewhat overstated. Even if the land could be so described, national guidance makes it clear that this is not a good reason for removing it from the Green Belt¹⁰. That development of the Objection site for housing would be consistent with the principles of sustainable development in terms of its proximity to local shops and good bus and rail services¹¹, supporting a major objective of PPG13 to increase the choice of means of travel and reduce reliance on the car. However, there are other Green Belt sites which appear to have the same potential. These advantages do not therefore in my view justify the release of the Objection site from the Green Belt.

7.70 I note that existing enclaves of housing south of the railway line at Meols are rather irregular in their outline form, and that there are pockets of open land adjoining Birkenhead Road which could be said to form an integral part of the residential area. Land north of Fornalls Green Lane would be 'sandwiched' between housing areas if the Objection site were developed as suggested. I therefore consider that the development of the Objection site for housing could lead to ad hoc proposals for other Green Belt land to be developed to the south of the railway line.

7.71 I note that until 1980 the Objection site was allocated for residential development on the draft Hoylake Town Map. However owing to the age and status of that plan this is an aspect of the site's history to which I should attach very little weight. In summary therefore I conclude that there are no special reasons why the Objection site should be removed from the approved Green Belt and allocated for housing purposes. This and my conclusion on the general housing case give me in the terms of RPG13 no strong justification for recommending that the UDP should be modified as advocated by the Objector.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.72 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 066/2 & 5.

¹⁰ PPG2, paragraphs 1.6, 1.7 and 2.6.

¹¹ As set out in paragraphs 1.7, 3.2 and 3.3 of PPG13. The Objection site is close to the main A553 Birkenhead Road which supports a regular bus services and to Meols Station, which adjoins the local shops and provides a frequent electric train service to Birkenhead, Liverpool and West Kirby.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land at Vineyard Farm, Poulton/Spital

OBJECTIONS: 066/3, 066/6 Ideal Homes Ltd (Persimmon Homes)

Summary of Objections

- 7.73 The Objection site should be deleted from the Green Belt and allocated for residential purposes. It was accepted in the Inspector's Report into Objections to the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP) that there was a need to strike a balance between the need to provide land for housebuilding and the need to maintain a gap between Poulton and Bromborough, there being at that time no need to release more land for housing¹.
- 7.74 There is a deficiency of housing land within the Bromborough/Bebington area and in the Borough generally, because not enough land can be made available within the urban area or otherwise outside the Green belt. The site would have adequate access and its development would maximise the use of local community facilities and infrastructure. This would provide more housing in a part of the Borough where jobs are being created; it is important that growth is not frustrated by a lack of homes for those wishing to take up new job opportunities. The land is of no recreational or exceptional landscape value. Although it is good quality land, its loss would not materially disrupt farming in the area and the loss must be set against the need to provide for further residential development, a point accepted by the MGBLP Inspector.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.75 PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt³. RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. It records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

¹ CD081, page 68.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG2, paragraph 8.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

7.76 There is therefore in my view no policy case for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt in the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁵. A key objective of the UDP's central urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason. Furthermore, development of the Objection site for housing might retard the development of suitable 'brownfield' sites such as part of the Levers Factory Site at Bebington, which would be against the theme of urban regeneration.

7.77 Further to this general conclusion I have considered whether there are any special reasons for the release of the Objection site from the Green Belt. There was no dispute that in connection with the judgement made by the MGBLP Inspector as to the merits of including the Objection site in the Green Belt, there has been no material change on the ground since 1983. The site remains in my view of countryside character, albeit on the edge of an urban area. The contribution that the Objection site makes to the Green Belt functions of separation, checking the unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas and assisting in preventing encroachment on the countryside is to my mind as relevant now as it was when the MGBLP was adopted.

7.78 There are significant constraints upon westerly or southerly expansion of the Bebington/Bromborough urban area - a 'vulnerable' band of Green Belt south of Eastham and land of ecological or wildlife value along the Dibbinsdale Brook and at Raby Mere. However, in the absence of an overriding need for land to be taken from the Green Belt to satisfy housing requirements, I see little force in the argument that because of constraints elsewhere, the Objection site should be developed instead.

7.79 It was argued that apart from the Objection site there would be few opportunities for new executive housing development in Bromborough and Bebington due to the limited provision in housing allocations in the UDP; in consequence the development of 'flagship' employment sites might suffer. I note that the scant coverage of housing allocations in this part of the Borough is partly compensated for in the yield from sites shown in the land supply schedules⁶. There has also been a steady, if not spectacular, supply of new dwellings in Bebington, Bromborough, Eastham, Poulton-Spital and Raby in recent years⁷. Public transport links in the area appear to be good, enabling many employees to live further away from their work without experiencing undue inconvenience or seriously worsening peak hour congestion on local roads. I do not therefore regard the 'local need' case as outweighing the general Green Belt and housing land supply considerations.

⁵ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁶ See especially Appendix F of CD4, which contains the Lever Factory site.

⁷ See Appendix G of Inquiry Document WMBC/P/22.

7.80 I have considered evidence from the Objector's agricultural adviser about the effect that the loss of the Objection site to agriculture might have on the economy of the remainder of Vineyard and Lancelyn Farms and associated land, together with the Council's response. There is no dispute that most of the holding falls within 'the best and most versatile' category (the land is mainly ALC Grade 2 or 3a)⁸. National guidance advises local planning authorities to take account of agricultural land quality when formulating their development plans. Considerable weight should be given to protecting the best and most versatile land from development⁹. RPG13 reflects this approach¹⁰, as does the UDP itself¹¹.

7.81 Even if I were to conclude that the loss of the Objection site would not depress the economy of the farm enterprise to such an extent as to prejudice its viability, such circumstances would not in my view justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt, given my general conclusions above. I accept that satisfactory access arrangements could be made to the site if it were to be developed, that infrastructure is available and that there would also be more demand for local services and community facilities. However in summary I conclude that none of the site specific matters raised on behalf of the Objector outweighs my general conclusion that the Objection site should not be allocated for housing but should remain in the approved Green Belt.

Inspector's Conclusion

7.82 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 066/3 and 066/6.

⁸ PPG7 (1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, Annex B, paragraph B2.

⁹ PPG7 (1997), paragraphs 2.17 and 2.18.

¹⁰ RPG13, paragraph 5.25.

¹¹ Policies AGR1 (The Protection of Agriculture) and AG2 (The Protection of the Best Quality Land) both seek to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from harmful development.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land west of Blakeley Road, Raby

OBJECTIONS: 066/1, 066/4 Ideal Homes Ltd (Persimmon Homes)

Summary of Objections

- 7.83 The Objection site should be deleted from the Green Belt and allocated for residential purposes. The site is not attached to any farm unit and although of Grade 3a quality, its development would not affect the viability of any agricultural holding nor put any adjoining land at risk. The land is not in recreational use, is of no ecological value and does not lie within an Area of Special Landscape Value.
- 7.84 There is a deficiency of housing land within the Bromborough/Bebington area and in the Borough, and insufficient land for such purposes is available within the urban area or otherwise outside the Green Belt. Development of the Objection site would provide more housing where jobs are being created; it is important that growth is not frustrated by a lack of homes for seeking jobs. The site is accessible by public transport. The development would not lead to pressure on the Green Belt elsewhere on the western fringe of Bromborough, as such land is protected because of its ecological value.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.85 PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG emphasises that firm boundaries ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* follows the same approach. The RPG observes that Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' in the interests of urban regeneration. It records that there is no evidence that Green Belts need to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of housing land work. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.86 There is therefore in my view no policy reason to release the Objection site from the approved Green Belt. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. A key objective of the UDP's urban regeneration theme is that housing land should first be sought in the urban areas, then in other areas outside

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

the Green Belt, and only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason. Furthermore, development of the Objection site for housing might retard the development of suitable 'brownfield' sites, which would be against the theme of urban regeneration.

7.87 I have considered whether there are any special reasons for the release of the Objection site from the Green Belt. There are significant constraints upon westerly or southerly expansion of Bromborough - a sensitive band of Green Belt south of Eastham and land of ecological value along the Dibbinsdale Brook and at Raby Mere. However, in the absence of overriding need for land to be taken from the Green Belt for housing, I see little force in the argument that because of constraints elsewhere, the Objection site should be developed instead. That the development of the site would not in such circumstances act as a precedent for the development of other sites on the outskirts of the built up area does not in my view advance the argument.

7.88 It was put to me that apart from the Objection site there would be few opportunities for new executive housing development in Bromborough due to the limited provision in housing allocations in the UDP; in consequence the development of 'flagship' employment sites might suffer. I note that the scant coverage of housing allocations in this part of the Borough is partly compensated for in the yield from sites shown in the land supply schedules⁵. There has also been a steady, if not spectacular, supply of new dwellings in this part of the Borough in recent years⁶. Public transport links in the area appear to be good, enabling many employees to live further away from their work without experiencing undue inconvenience or seriously worsening peak hour congestion on local roads. I do not therefore regard the 'local need' case as outweighing the general Green Belt and housing land supply considerations.

7.89 I accept that although the Objection site is Grade 3a agricultural land, its loss to development would be unlikely to prejudice any agricultural enterprise. The site contains a pleasant group of trees, but is of no recognised ecological or recreational value. Yet the site clearly continues to serve the Green Belt purposes of preventing the outward expansion of the Bromborough urban area into the countryside. Whilst the site is reasonably accessible to public transport facilities, this could be said of other urban fringe sites. There are therefore no special reasons in my view why the Objection site should be taken out of the Green Belt and allocated for housing, given my general conclusions on the Green Belt and housing issues.

Inspector's recommendation

7.90 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 066/1 and 066/4.

⁵ See especially Appendix F of CD4, which contains the Lever Factory site.

⁶ See Appendix G of Inquiry Document WMBC/P/22.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land off Pump Lane, Greasby

OBJECTIONS: 214/1, 214/2 Simpson Curtis (Trustees of Land off Pump Lane, Greasby)

Summary of Objections

- 7.91 The Objection site should be deleted from the Green Belt and allocated for housing. An appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the development of the site was dismissed because the land supply did not justify its development at that time, although permission was granted in respect of adjoining land¹. An Objection to the inclusion of the Objection site and adjoining land in the Green Belt defined by the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP) failed because that there was no overriding need to release land for housing; however the Inspector considered that the Objection site's development would not undermine Green Belt purposes, nor close the gap between Greasby and West Kirby, or with Saughall Massey².
- 7.92 There is now a deficiency in housing land not only within the Borough generally but within North West Wirral. That deficiency cannot be met on urban land or on other land outside the approved Green Belt. The Objection site is of Grade 3b agricultural quality, and not therefore 'the best and most versatile' land. The site is attached to the built-up area and development would be well related to the existing infrastructure.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.93 The Objection site's Green Belt status was confirmed in the MGBLP. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that Green Belt boundaries defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally³. The PPG states that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt⁴. RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts need to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated. In the meantime, local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁵.

¹ See Secretary of State's decision letter dated 30 June 1976 - Appendix A to Council proof WMBC/P/34.

² *Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan - Report of the Inspector on objections and representations to the Plan* - (CD081), Site 12E, paragraphs 6.90-6.91, page 80.

³ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

⁴ PPG2, paragraph 8.

⁵ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

7.94 There is therefore in my view no policy case for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁶. The thrust of the UDP's urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report in the Borough's urban areas or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.95 As to whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt, although an agricultural objection to the development of the site is unlikely, this is not so compelling as to justify its release. I accept that the substantial belt of countryside between Greasby and Meols would not be significantly diminished if the Objection site were developed. However the Inspector's Report on the MGBLP noted that the northern and eastern parts of Site 12E would substantially reduce the gap between the main part of Greasby and Saughall Massey to the north⁷. Although the present Objection site is significantly smaller than the 27 hectare site which was the subject of the MGBLP Objection, I consider that its development would represent a considerable advance of the built-up area towards Saughall Massey with its semi-rural setting and the urban area immediately to the east of that village.

7.96 Development of the Objection site would also partially enclose Green Belt land between the south-eastern boundary of the site and the main urban area; I note that no Objection was put in to the Green Belt status of that land in the Deposit version of the UDP. In my view the development of the Objection site would in these circumstances appear as a rather awkward extension of the built-up area into the countryside; it would change the character of the open land to the east, materially compromising the Green Belt status and function of that land.

7.97 I have considered the Objector's suggestion that the Objection site could be released from the Green belt and 'safeguarded' for future development. However in circumstances where I have concluded that the increased housing land requirement which I have recommended is capable of being satisfied without removing land from the approved Green Belt, its removal for safeguarding purposes would be no more justified. In summary therefore I consider that there are no special reasons for releasing the Objection site from the Green Belt which would outweigh the general objection to such a course of action, already discussed.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.98 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 214/1 and 214/2.

⁶ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁷ Inspector's Report (CD081), paragraph 6.90, page 80.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
(POLICY GBT1 - GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES)
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land at China Plate Farm, Newton

OBJECTIONS: 125/1, 125/2 Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.99 There is a need to exclude land from the adopted Green Belt and to allocate it for housing, to meet housing needs in the Plan period and beyond. The principle of such a course of action is accepted by strategic guidance provided that development requirements cannot be met on land within the urban area or currently outside the Green Belt. The Objection site does not make a significant contribution to Green Belt objectives, and its allocation for housing would improve the balance and range of housing opportunities provided for by the UDP. There are no significant constraints on the site which would prevent its development within the Plan period.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.100 The 19.3 hectare Objection site was included in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt and was retained in the Green Belt defined by the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. An Objection to the inclusion of part of the site in the Green Belt was considered at that time (Site 6E), the Inspector concluding that there was no case at that time to identify further land for development, and that the Green Belt boundary drawn in the Local Plan was clear and well-defined¹. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt³.

7.101 RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* which has generally replaced the 1988 PPG11 *Strategic Guidance for Merseyside* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG

¹ Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan Inspector's Report, paragraph 6.43, page 72 (CD081).

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG2, paragraph 8.

stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

7.102 There is therefore in my view no case in policy terms for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁵. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself, an approach which the Objector does not dispute. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.103 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. As to the contribution made by the Objection site to Green Belt objectives, I accept that the band of Green Belt which separates Newton from Meols to the north is relatively wide. However, the site together with land to the north and east is agricultural and rural in character, a state of affairs which does not appear to have changed since 1983. In my view it contributes quite clearly to the Green Belt purposes of checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment by development.

7.104 Besides, the development of the site would not serve the cause of urban regeneration in circumstances where I am satisfied that the UDP's increased housing requirement can be met without removing land from the approved Green Belt. Part of the site carries the agricultural land classification of 3a, amongst the 'best and most versatile' land which generally should not be developed before land of lesser quality has been developed⁶. Whilst I accept that the Objection site is large enough to accommodate a range of housing types neither this nor any other matter raised affects my conclusion that there are no special reasons why the Objection site should be taken out of the Green Belt and allocated for housing.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.105 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 125/1 and 125/2.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁵ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁶ See PPG7 (1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, paragraph 2.18 and Annex B.

**PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
(POLICY GBT1 - GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES)
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land at Diamond Farm, Saughall Massey**

OBJECTIONS: 062/1, 062/5 Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.106 The Objection site fulfils no Green Belt purpose and should not be in the Green Belt. It has well defined outer boundaries. The allocation and development of the site for housing would help to meet identifiable housing needs and demands, and would round off the existing and proposed development in the area. There are no significant constraints upon the land which would prevent its being developed in the UDP Plan period; its removal from the Green Belt would be consistent with Strategic Guidance which does not prevent land being excluded from the Green Belt in specified circumstances.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.107 There were no objections to the Objection site being included in the Green belt defined by the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* published in 1996 does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts need to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.108 There is therefore in my view no policy case at present for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's urban regeneration theme is that housing land should first be sought in the urban areas, next in

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or from recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.109 However the Objection site does have some attributes which favour development for housing. It is necessary to determine whether these outweigh the general objection to the removal of the site from the Green Belt. I accept that much of the site is adjoined by existing housing, and it might not be too difficult to integrate new housing on the site with that existing, especially if land were reserved for open space purposes as suggested on the Objector's plan⁵. The site is fairly convenient for bus services, shops and community facilities. It would be possible to provide a range of housing on the site and to redraw the Green belt boundary to a clear boundary. Access would appear feasible and the open space arrangements would complement those already existing along the Arrowe Brook. There could be benefits for habitats and for cycling and footpath provision.

7.110 The Objection site is of the 'best and most versatile' agricultural land (Grade 3a). I accept however that nearby urban development may impose some limitations upon its agricultural use. The site may not fulfil all the purposes of Green Belts set out in PPG2⁶, but it does serve to support the urban regeneration strategy and gives Saughall Massey village a semi-rural setting, although I accept that the development envisaged might not offend objectives of the Saughall Massey Conservation Area referred to by the Objector⁷. I therefore recognise that the site possesses material benefits so far as its housing potential is concerned. However the Objector accepts that the site should be released for housing only if a need exists⁸. These favourable factors are not in my view so compelling as to justify the release of land from the approved Green Belt in circumstances where I have concluded that the housing land supply position in the Borough does not justify such strong action in advance of a strategic review of the Green Belt.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.111 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 062/1 and 062/5.

⁵ See plan forming Appendix MCP2 to the Objector's further written representations, Document 62/W/1.

⁶ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

⁷ These objectives are set out in UDP Policy CH17 (Saughall Massey Conservation Area).

⁸ Document 62/W/1, paragraph 4.5.1.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
(POLICY GBT1 - GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES)
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land to the South of West Kirby Road, Saughall Massey

OBJECTION: 019/1 to 019/3 Mr J Robinson

COUNTER-OBJECTION: 019/A Mr J Robinson*

(* Although this Counter-objection refers to Policy GB7, it is manifestly an Objection which advocates the development of this Objection site for housing purposes, and is therefore dealt with here).

Summary of Objections

- 7.112 The Objection site should be removed from the Green Belt to enable it to be developed by the erection of four bungalows. The land will be severed from adjoining agricultural land by the Saughall Massey Bypass and in consequence will no longer be suitable for agriculture. Sites such as this on the edge of built-up areas are prone to unsightly dumping and structures. The suggested development could be designed to conform with the principles of the Saughall Massey Conservation Area.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.113 There were no Objections to the inclusion of the Objection site in the Green Belt defined by the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.114 There is therefore in my view no general case for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

Part II: *Proposal GB1 - Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary*
 (Policy GBT1 - Green Belt Boundaries)
 Proposal HS1 - Land Allocated for Residential Development
 Land to the South of West Kirby Road, Saughall Massey

new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that housing land should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or from recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the Green Belt for this reason.

7.115 As to whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt, I accept that the site will be severed from land to the south when the Bypass is built. The site is not classified as 'the best and most versatile' agricultural land. Farmland which is not being put to productive use can sometime be susceptible to tipping or unsightly structures or activity. However that is not a good reason for excluding the land from the Green Belt in circumstances in which PPG2 advises that the landscape quality is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a Green Belt *or to its continued protection*⁵.

7.116 I saw that the edge-of-village Objection site is and will continue to be visually prominent. Development here could not in my view be regarded as 'infill', and so the provisions of Policy GB6⁶, even if they applied to Saughall Massey, would be irrelevant. I am in no doubt that the land fulfils several of the purposes of the Green Belt set out in PPG2⁷, notably in preventing the built-up area to the east from sprawling out into the central rural belt of countryside which separates the urban areas in eastern and western Wirral, and encouraging the fuller use of urban development sites on which the strategy of urban regeneration is so reliant. I doubt whether the development of the Objection site for housing would be capable of satisfying UDP objectives for the Saughall Massey Conservation Area which include preserving the rural setting, scale and character of the old village core and preserving a compact settlement form which is separate and distinct from the modern, built up areas nearby⁸. In all these circumstances I find the Objector's case for removing the land from the Green Belt not justified.

Inspector's Recommendations

7.117 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 019/1 to 019/3 or Counter-objection 019/A.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁵ PPG2, paragraph 1.7.

⁶ Policy GB6 (ALT/GREEN BELT/007 (CD056, page 54)) lays down criteria for development in infill villages listed in Proposal GB7 (Infill Villages in the Green Belt - ALT/GREEN BELT/008 (CD056, page 55)).

⁷ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

⁸ Policy CH17 - Saughall Massey Conservation Area.

Part II: *Proposal GB1 - Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary*
 Proposal HS1 - Land Allocated for Residential Development
 Land to the south-west of Elm Road, Irby
 Land to the east of Harrock Wood, Irby/Thingwall

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
POLICY HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT -

- (1) Land to the south-west of Elm Road, Irby
(2) and (3) Land to the East of Harrock Wood, Irby/Thingwall

OBJECTIONS: 010/1, 092/1 to 092/4 Mr A Royle

Summary of Objections

- 7.118 (Objection Site 1, 010/1) - the Green Belt boundary should be amended to run along a hedge which defines a field boundary, turning northwards on a line conforming to the rear garden boundary line of 2 to 8 (evens) Elm Road. This would be a more logical Green Belt boundary, as the existing boundary follows a drainage ditch which has now been replaced by underground field drains. The boundary change would eliminate a potential dumping ground and would enable consideration to be given to planning permission for a dwelling on land owned by the Objector immediately adjacent to the Objection site.
- 7.119 (Objection Sites 2 and 3, 092/1 to 092/4) - the Objection sites should be excluded from the Green Belt and made available for housing or other development. There is a need for more land for housing in Wirral within the middle price range. There is also a shortage of land in Wirral for open space activities requiring a larger amount of, or larger, ancillary buildings. The Objection sites are within an enclave of Green Belt almost surrounded by housing development. Their removal from the Green Belt would have no adverse effect on the principles of the Green Belt or the separation of townships, nor be detrimental to the remaining Green Belt.

Assessment and Conclusions

General and Policy Considerations

7.120 PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.121 There is therefore in my view no general policy case for the release of the Objection sites from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. It is however necessary to determine whether there are any special reasons why the sites should be released from the Green Belt in the light of the detailed representations made by the Objector.

1: Land to the south-west of Elm Road, Irby

7.122 There was no objection to the inclusion of Objection Site 1 in the Green Belt as defined by the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. However, the site was not included in the original West Cheshire Green Belt, being shown as within a Primarily Residential Area on the submitted Heswall Town Map. On the evidence before me I have no reason to suppose that the 1983 boundary along the drainage ditch was unclear. However, there is some merit in my view in the Objector's submission that, because of the change in the drainage arrangements, the boundary has become less distinct.

7.123 The Council maintain that if there is to be an alteration to the boundary, it should instead be brought further to the north up to the boundary of 8 Elm Road, that is, the Green Belt should be extended slightly. However, there are fairly recently erected dwellings immediately to the east of the Objection site. The site and other land immediately to the south of 8 Elm Road does not have the appearance of the adjoining Green Belt agricultural land and is bounded by a fairly well defined field boundary with hedge and trees. In my view therefore the Objection site more characteristically falls within the 'Primarily Residential Area' than into the Green Belt, and I consider that the Green Belt boundary should be redrawn along the southern and western boundaries of the Objection site. This conclusion should not however be taken as any indication as to whether planning permission would be granted for an additional dwelling to the south of 8 Elm Road; any such proposal should be considered on its merits, having regard to national guidance and the relevant policies of the UDP.

2 and 3: Land to the east of Harrock Wood, Irby/Thingwall

7.124 Objection Site 2 lies immediately to the south of Objection Site 1, and is also part of the larger Objection Site 3. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

*Part II: Proposal GB1 - Amendments to the Green Belt Boundary
 Proposal HS1 - Land Allocated for Residential Development
 Land to the south-west of Elm Road, Irby
 Land to the east of Harrock Wood, Irby/Thingwall*

recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. This land supply includes sites which in my view would be suitable for 'middle range' housing. I therefore consider that there is no case for the Objection sites to be released from the approved Green Belt for housing land supply reasons.

7.125 Objection Sites 2 and 3 are adjoined by existing housing areas to the north and east, but I would not describe them as being an 'enclave' of Green Belt land. Harrock Wood is as much part of the Green Belt as the Objection sites, and with them forms a significant portion of the open land which separates the substantial built up areas of Thingwall and Irby and which in my view is clearly of countryside character. I do not therefore agree with the Objector's view that the Objection sites serve no Green Belt purpose⁵. Although limited forms of 'appropriate' development may be permitted in the Green Belt, any need for rurally based land uses such as are mentioned by the Objector is not in my view a justification for identifying the Objection sites as suitable for the erection of the substantial buildings mentioned by the Objector. In these circumstances there is no justification in my view for Objection Sites 2 and 3 to be removed from the Green Belt.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.126 I recommend:

(a) that so far as Objection 010/1 is concerned, the UDP be modified by an amendment to the boundary of the Green Belt to run along the southern and western boundaries of Objection Site 1, and that this Objection Site be shown as lying within the 'Primarily Residential Area';

(b) that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 092/1 to 092/4.

⁵ The five Green Belt purposes referred to in paragraph 1.5 of PPG2 include checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another, and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

**PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land at Crosshill Reservoir/Lower Thingwall Lane, Thingwall**

OBJECTION: 082/4, 082/12 North West Water Ltd

Summary of Objection

- 7.127 The Objection site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for residential development, to provide for development needs towards the end of the UDP Plan period and beyond. Given the extent of the existing Green Belt and the proposed extension to it these needs may not be adequately provided for, and the Green Belt could therefore come under great pressure before the end of the Plan period.
- 7.128 The site adjoins a major residential area with schools and other facilities and its proposed development would support the objectives of sustainable development. The land contains existing structures and is not strictly a greenfield site. A revised Green Belt boundary drawn along Barnston Road would be logical, and defensible in the long term. If allocation for housing is not pursued, the site should nevertheless be excluded from the Green Belt to facilitate its development beyond the Plan period.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.129 The Objection site was defined in the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan as being within the Green Belt. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.130 There is therefore in my view no policy justification for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt in order to supplement the Borough's general housing land supply or even as 'safeguarded' land to satisfy housing needs beyond the end of the Plan period.

7.131 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. Although the land does contain some operational structures, these do not detract from its predominantly open character which contributes to the larger area of open countryside to the east of Thingwall and Pensby. Although the nearby village of Barnston is not inset into the Green Belt it contains some satellite enclaves of housing which already reduce the openness of the local Green Belt landscape. The development of the Objection site for housing would to my mind make the identities and village form of Thingwall and of Barnston far less distinct or separate. This would I believe detract from two of the functions which the Green Belt performs in this area⁵, namely preventing the unrestricted sprawl of urban areas and protecting the countryside from further encroachment by development.

7.132 I accept that the site is relatively close to schools and other local facilities in Thingwall and Pensby and is served by bus services to Heswall Town Centre and to other parts of the Wirral. However, it is not near a railway station and is no better located in terms of these local factors than many sites on the edge of existing settlements in the Wirral. Whilst Barnston Road would provide a firm Green Belt boundary I do not see that this justifies an amendment to the boundary in circumstances where the existing boundary is itself clearly defined at the edge of the built-up area of Thingwall. I therefore conclude that the allocation of the Objection site for housing is not justified, and even if the site were not so allocated, that there is no good case for removal of the site from the Green Belt under the present circumstances.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.133 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 082/4 and 082/12.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁵ With reference to the Green Belt functions listed in paragraph 1.5 of PPG2.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land west of the New Chester Road, (A41), Eastham

OBJECTIONS: 099/1, 099/2 Shelbourne Partnership

Summary of Objections

- 7.134 The Objection site should be removed from the Green belt and allocated for housing development. The UDP's declared land supply relies too much on the improvement of unfit dwellings and the expectation that many people will be content to live in inner city locations. It would be better to have a more varied land supply including land such as the Objection site in an area of demand for housing and where the development would support economic development.
- 7.135 Such an amendment to the Green Belt would not amount to a general review. The Objection site is surrounded by major roads or buildings and is not in the open countryside. The land is not of as high agricultural value as the Council maintain, and has been subject to trespass and vandalism. The triangle of land of which the Objection site forms a part also contains a nursery, a private house and a *Little Chef* restaurant and a motel. An adjoining wood owned by the Objector could be transferred to public ownership, be made available for public use and act as a barrier to further development.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.136 The Objection site was included in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt, and there was no objection to its being retained in the Green Belt in the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt².

7.137 RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

7.138 There is therefore in my view no policy case for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. In the section of this report dealing with the new dwelling requirement I counsel against an over-optimistic reliance on housing improvement programmes when determining housing availability.⁵ However, I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. In these circumstances and in particular having regard to the urban regeneration theme, I consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the Green Belt for housing land supply reasons.

7.139 I have considered whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. There are some buildings on the land between the Pickmere Drive housing and the A41/M53 motorway, but this does not seem to be a good argument for increasing the area covered by buildings in the relatively narrow and strategically important band of Green Belt separating the urban areas of Eastham and Little Sutton⁶. The Council confirm that the current assessment of this land is as Grades 2 or 3a. This falls within the definition of 'best and most versatile'⁷, the protection of which should be afforded considerable weight⁸. The Objector maintains that vandalism and trespass has precluded the effective use of the Objection site for agriculture in recent years. However in my view this is not a convincing reason for removing the land from the Green Belt in circumstances in which PPG2 advises that Green Belt boundaries should not be changed merely because land has become derelict⁹.

7.140 I accept that infrastructure might be available for housing development but note that any improvement to Junction 5 of the M53 that might have strengthened the case for developing

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁵ See pages 23 and 24 of this report.

⁶ The extent of the Green Belt southwards towards Little Sutton is indicated on the Index Map for the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (part of CD048) relating to that land transferred in 1993 from the Wirral District to the Ellesmere Port and Neston District, and on the Proposals Map of the adopted Ellesmere Port and Neston Local Plan (Excluding Mersey Marshes) 1993 (CD045).

⁷ See Annex B to PPG7 (1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, paragraphs B1 and B2.

⁸ PPG7 (1997), paragraph 2.17.

⁹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6. Guidance on land management is contained in Annex A to the PPG.

the Objection site has been abandoned¹⁰. Examination of UDP Proposal HS1¹¹ and the Council's land supply schedules¹² indicates that the scope for substantial new housing development in this part of the Borough is limited. However, public transport links in the area appear to be good, enabling many employees to live further away from their work without experiencing undue inconvenience or seriously worsening peak hour congestion on local roads. I do not therefore consider that the development of the Objection site on Green Belt land is justified merely because it would provide homes for employees and thereby encourage economic growth. I conclude therefore that there are no special reasons which would alter my general conclusion that the Objection site should remain in the Green Belt and should not be allocated for housing purposes.

Inspector's Conclusion

7.141 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 099/1 and 099/2.

¹⁰ See the Council's published change ALT2/TRANSPORT/003 (CD057, Errata).

¹¹ Land Allocated for Residential Development.

¹² Appendices E and F to the Housing Core Proof (CD4), as supplemented by Appendix E to Council proof WMBC/P/22.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land to the North of Birkenhead Road, Meols

OBJECTION: 044/1, 044/2 The Vyner Estate

Summary of Objection

- 7.142 The Objection site should be deleted from the Green Belt and allocated for housing purposes. PPG2 *Green Belts* recognises the essential permanence of Green Belts. PPG11 *Strategic Guidance for Merseyside* does not rule out amendments to the Green Belt in Wirral. The Green Belt boundary in the Meols area has been drawn very tightly around the urban edge, so that there is very little unconstrained land to make provision for development within the Plan period and beyond.
- 7.143 The development of the Objection site for housing would represent a rounding off of the existing built development at Meols, and would not prejudice the objectives of Green Belt policy. The removal of such suitable land also accords with the long term Green Belt aims of maintaining a firm boundary. The unconstrained areas could come forward for development if and when required.

Assessment and Conclusions

- 7.144 The Objection site was included in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt. There was no objection to the site remaining in the Green Belt defined by the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt².
- 7.145 PPG11, which has now been generally replaced by RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*, did countenance circumstances in which the boundaries of the Merseyside Green Belt might be adjusted. However PPG11 referred to UDPs providing the opportunity to give precision to the detailed boundaries of the Green Belt *where they had not yet been clearly defined*³. Such circumstances do not arise in this part of Meols where it seems to me that there is a clear definition of the Green belt boundary around the housing areas south of the Liverpool to West Kirby Railway Line.
- 7.146 RPG13 does not change the basic approach adopted in PPG2. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts need to be

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ PPG11, paragraph 8.

changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. The RPG confirms that in the meantime, local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

7.147 There is therefore in my view no policy case for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁵. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.148 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. I accept that the Green Belt is drawn tightly around the built-up area in Meols, but that is no reason in my view to relax the boundaries in circumstances in which I have concluded that it is not necessary to release Green Belt land to ensure an adequate housing land supply. Although the site adjoins a substantial housing area north of Birkenhead Road, it is not of insignificant size and projects some distance to the east of the existing housing area, with open land to the north, east and south. I therefore do not accept that the development of the site could be justifiably regarded as 'rounding off'.

7.149 A change in Green Belt boundaries may be justified where land under consideration no longer fulfils a Green belt purpose. The Objection site continues to fulfil several of the purposes of the Green Belt listed in PPG2⁶, including those which seek to prevent the unrestricted sprawl of urban development and protect the countryside from encroachment by development. In all these circumstances I conclude that the case for removing the site from the Green Belt and allocating it for housing development is not justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.150 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 044/1 and 044/2.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁵ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁶ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land adjacent to Irby Hall, Irby

OBJECTION: 046/3, 046/4 Wimpey Homes

Summary of Objections

- 7.151 The Objection site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for housing purposes to meet the UDP's housing requirement and the need to ensure continuity of supply over a 5 year period, and to provide an adequate range and choice of sites for developers.
- 7.152 The site is bounded on three sides by existing residential development and is separated from the adjacent open land by a drainage ditch and hedgerows, which provide a distinct physical and visual boundary to the site. The site is therefore of limited value in terms of the five functions of the Green Belt defined in PPG2 *Green Belts*¹. Its removal from the Green Belt and development would not prejudice the integrity of the Green Belt separating Irby from Thurstaston, and would provide an enduring and defensible long term Green Belt boundary.
- 7.153 The land is well related to the established urban area and to existing infrastructure including district centre facilities. Its allocation for housing purposes would be a sensible extension to the existing residential area without encroachment into the open countryside. If not allocated the site should be safeguarded to meet development needs in the longer term.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.154 The Objection site was included in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt. There were no objections to its continued Green Belt status in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². The PPG also states that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt³. RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of work on housing land

¹ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG2, paragraph 8.

requirements. Meanwhile the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

7.155 There is therefore in my view no case in policy terms for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁵. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.156 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. As the Objector points out, there is housing development to the north of the site in South Drive and to the south in Penrhyd Road, whilst to the east lies Irby Hall and its associated buildings and a frontage development on both sides of Thurstaston Road. Whilst I accept that if the Objection site were excluded from the Green Belt the realigned boundary of the Green Belt along the drainage ditch to the west would be a reasonably well-defined one, it does not in my view follow that this makes the existing boundary indistinct.

7.157 I saw on my site inspection that despite the nearby housing the Objection site does serve to bring the countryside character of the surrounding area close to one end of Irby Village centre, and provides a semi-rural setting for Irby Hall, a Scheduled Monument (CH24/5). It seems to me that despite the proximity of housing the site does fulfil some of the Green Belt functions in PPG2, namely those of protecting the countryside from encroachment and assisting in urban regeneration. The presence of the Hall and a nearby pond of recognised biological importance (NC6/12) does not in itself rule out the principle of housing development on the Objection site, although any development would fall under the UDP to be considered against the criteria laid down in Policies CH24⁶ and NC5⁷. However, neither do these circumstances support a case for removing the land from the Green Belt.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁵ See pages 18-35 of this report.

⁶ Development affecting Sites of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Council have published a change to this policy, ALT/HERITAGE/028 CD056, page 156).

⁷ The Protection of Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation. The Council have published a change to this policy, ALT/NATURE/004 (CD056, page 173).

7.158 Whilst a sensitively designed housing development might be capable of integration with the adjoining housing areas this is not in my view a good reason for the removal of land from the Green Belt in circumstances where I have concluded that such action is not necessary in the present housing land supply situation. Additional housing might usefully support the wide range of services in the village shopping centre, but this also does not outweigh the general objection already referred to. It follows that given my conclusion that the land should not be removed from the Green Belt, the alternative proposition that it be safeguarded for future development is no more appropriate.

Inspector's recommendation

7.159 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 046/3 and 046/4.

**PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
POLICY HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land at Chester Road, Heswall**

OBJECTIONS: 046/1, 046/2 Wimpey Homes

Summary of Objections

- 7.160 The Objection site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for housing purposes to meet the UDP's housing requirement and the need to ensure continuity of supply over a 5 year period, and to provide an adequate range and choice of sites for developers.
- 7.161 The site is bounded on 3 sides by existing residential development and is separated from the adjacent expanse of open land by the railway line. The railway provides a distinct physical and visual boundary to the site because of changing ground levels and mature trees and hedgerows to the railway boundary. The land is of limited value in terms of the five Green Belt functions defined in PPG2 *Green Belts*¹, and its development would provide a defensible long term Green belt boundary and would not prejudice the integrity of the adjoining Green Belt between Heswall and Bebington.
- 7.162 The site is well related to the established urban area and to existing infrastructure, including Heswall Railway Station. Its allocation for housing would be a sensible extension to the existing housing area without encroachment on the open countryside. Alternatively the site should be identified as land to be safeguarded to meet development needs in the longer term.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.163 The Objection site was included in part in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt, the remainder of the site being shown as Public Open Space on the Heswall Town Map. There were no objections to the inclusion of the whole of the site in the Green Belt when it was defined by the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². The PPG also emphasises that firm boundaries help to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt³.

7.164 RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this fundamental approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for

¹ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG2, paragraph 8.

the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG states that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime planning authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

7.165 There is therefore in my view no case in policy terms for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁵. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to meet that increased requirement in terms of quantity. The sites identified by the Council and those additional sites I recommend for allocation would in my view provide an acceptable range and choice of sites for housebuilders. I therefore consider that there is no case at present for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason.

7.166 It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special or site specific reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. I do not accept that the site does not make any material contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in PPG2. Whilst there is adjoining housing development to the north, west and south the site is with an area of some 27.8 hectares of sufficient size to allow for the character of the open countryside to permeate more closely towards the centre of Heswall in this south-eastern sector of the town. Thus the site serves to limit an outward sprawl of development on this side of the town, as well as safeguarding this significant tongue of open land from encroachment and assisting in urban regeneration.

7.167 Although the railway is a firm feature this does not necessarily mean that the existing Green Belt boundary is indistinct. Indeed, Chester Road to the west, the well defined curtilages of residential and other plots to the north and a land drain and residential curtilage at the edge of a general housing area to the east seem to me to be clear boundaries. Whilst the development of the Objection site would I believe be capable of fairly easy integration with the adjoining developed areas, this does not justify its removal from the Green Belt in circumstances in which there is no overriding housing need for such land to be removed. The site is at least 800 metres from Heswall Station, so this does not seem to be so great an advantage as the Objector claims.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁵ See pages 18-35 of this report.

7.168 The UDP does not propose to allocate any new housing sites in the Heswall area. The Council's land supply schedules⁶ indicate that the supply of housing land otherwise identified in the Heswall area is fairly limited. Yet the UDP consciously seeks not only to concentrate development within urban areas, but also to minimise the use of previously undeveloped land and reduce the need to travel⁷. Until conclusions have been reached about future housing needs on a district-by-district basis following the further work requested of the North West Regional Association⁸, it is not unreasonable in my view for the Council to concentrate its new housing land supply in those parts of the Borough where land is available in the urban areas or otherwise outside the Green Belt, and where the objectives of urban regeneration can best be served.

7.169 I accept that as only 8.3 hectares of the Objection site falls into the category of 'the best and most versatile agricultural land'⁹, its value for agriculture would be unlikely to be a strong argument against housing development if all other factors favoured such development¹⁰. However, in my view neither this nor any of the other local or site-specific factors which might favour the development of the Objection site for housing is sufficiently strong to outweigh the general objection discussed earlier to the removal of the site from the Green belt. Given my conclusion that the land should not be removed from the Green Belt it follows that the proposition that it be safeguarded for future development is not appropriate alternative.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.170 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 046/1 and 046/2.

⁶ See Appendices E and F of the Council's Housing Core Proof (CD4).

⁷ UDP Written Statement, paragraph 6.15 (page 49).

⁸ See RPG13, paragraphs 3.10, 3.11 and 6.7.

⁹ That part of the site is classified as Grade 3a (see PPG7 (1997) *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*, Annex B, paragraphs B1 and B2).

¹⁰ This view is confirmed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in a letter to the Council's Director of Planning and Economic Development dated 21 December 1995 (Appendix A to Council proof WMBC/W/GRBL/40).

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land at Wittering Lane and at Riverbank Road, Lower Heswall

OBJECTIONS: 040/3, 040/4, 040/7, 040/8 McDermotts (Meols) Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.171 The Objection sites should be deleted from the Green Belt, and their suitability for housing development recognised. Such development would do no material harm to the recreational, ecological, agricultural or coastal interests of the area and would help to meet a need for more land to be allocated to meet the UDP housing requirement. Housing development would also support urban regeneration.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.172 The Objection sites were included in the West Cheshire Green Belt in 1961 and there were no objections to their remaining in the Green Belt as defined by the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts need to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

7.173 There is therefore in my view no policy case for the release of the Objection sites from the approved Green Belt. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. In these circumstances it is difficult to see how the development of the Objection sites would support urban regeneration. I therefore

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

consider that there is no case at present for the Objection sites to be released from the approved Green Belt for this reason. It is however necessary to consider whether there are any special or site-specific reasons why the sites should be released.

Land at Wittering Lane, Lower Heswall

7.174 Apart from its Green Belt status, this site falls within the Coastal Zone identified on the UDP Proposals Map. UDP Policy CO2⁵ which relates to the undeveloped parts of the Coastal Zone does not list housing as a form of development which would be permitted in the Zone. I note that the Objector has not requested that the site be removed from the Coastal Zone. Although the Council confirm that there would be no objection in principle to the development of the site on ecological, landscape and agricultural grounds I see no need to question its inclusion in the Coastal Zone. The Green Belt in this area is clearly defined along the line of the Wirral Way footpath which also marks the edge of the main built-up area of Heswall. In these circumstances there are in my view no special or site specific reasons for taking the site out of the Green Belt which would outweigh the general objection to such a course of action expressed above.

Land at Riverside Road, Lower Heswall

7.175 This site also falls within the Coastal Zone, and my comments in the last paragraph relevant to that fact also apply here. The Green Belt boundary to the north of the site is again firmly aligned along the Wirral Way at the edge of the main built up area. Although the site is of no significant agricultural value and adjoins a small and isolated row of semi-detached houses, the site still makes a significant contribution to the generally flat open landscape which characterises this part of the undeveloped Coastal Zone. In these circumstances there are in my view no special or site specific reasons for taking the site out of the Green Belt which would outweigh the general objection referred to earlier.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.176 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 043/3, 4, 7 & 8.

⁵ Policy CO2 - Development within the Undeveloped Coastal Zone. The Council have published a change to this policy under ALT/COAST/003 (CD056, page 300).

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
PROPOSAL HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land at Fornalls Green Lane and at the Ridgeway, Meols

OBJECTIONS: 040/1, 040/2, 040/5, 040/6 McDermotts (Meols) Ltd

Summary of Objections

- 7.177 The Fornalls Green Lane land makes no substantial contribution to Green Belt objectives. More housing land is needed in the Borough and Meols/Hoylake area. Development of this site would have no impact upon the broad extent of the Green Belt; its release for housing would not create urban sprawl. The land may be of good agricultural quality, but its isolation and small size make it incapable of being farmed to full potential. The development would support urban regeneration. The site should therefore be excluded from the Green Belt and included within the Primarily Residential Area.
- 7.178 The small site at the Ridgeway adjoins an urban area and its development would use existing infrastructure. It is convenient for public transport and community facilities. Further housing land is needed in the area. The site does not make a significant contribution to the Green Belt, and it is clear from the layout of the Ridgeway that it was originally intended to extend onto this site. Such a development would create a more permanent and attractive boundary to the Green Belt. The development would support the UDP's Urban regeneration Strategy. The site should therefore be excluded from the Green Belt and allocated for residential purposes (040/2, 040/6).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.179 Both Objection sites have been in the Green Belt since 1961. There was no challenge to their Green Belt status in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally¹. The PPG states that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt². RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* maintains this approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future', to achieve urban regeneration. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts need to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans³.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² PPG2, paragraph 8.

³ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

7.180 Thus in my view there is no policy reason to release the Objection sites from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. I conclude elsewhere that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings⁴. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that housing land should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that land has been identified by the Council in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement. The release of the Objection sites for housing would not in my view support urban regeneration. Therefore there is no case at present for the sites to be released from the approved Green Belt on housing land need grounds.

7.181 As to whether there are any special reasons why the Objection sites should be taken out of the Green Belt, I accept that the release of the Fornalls Green Lane site for housing would have a relatively small impact on the Green Belt. However this could be said of many sites on the fringes of built up areas. The site contributes to the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preventing the outward spread of built up areas. The cumulative impact of the loss of sites such as this from the Green Belt could be substantial. The Fornalls Green Lane site could accommodate a small group of houses and it would be possible to retain a paddock area at the rear if the development took place along the frontage. I accept that the site is close to public transport and local shopping facilities and to that extent exhibits some of the qualities of 'sustainable' development in an area where new housing opportunities are mainly limited to infilling on non-allocated sites within built-up areas. However I do not consider that these advantages are so compelling as to outweigh the general objection to taking land out of the approved Green Belt other than as part of a general strategic review.

7.182 The sketch housing layout prepared for the development of the site at the Ridgeway could be regarded as a logical extension to the existing pattern of roads and houses in the area. However it could not be described as infilling or rounding off, as it would be a significant and visible extension to the built up area. The existing Green Belt boundary is aligned on a firm boundary, namely the ends of the gardens of a row of semi-detached houses on Bispham Drive. The site itself contributes to Green Belt purposes in that it marks the interface between open land forming part of a large tract of open countryside and housing development of moderate density. Whilst good accessibility to local facilities and transport services applies also to this site as well as the use of existing infrastructure, these advantages do not in my view outweigh the general objection expressed earlier. In all these circumstances I conclude that the Objector's case for the removal of these sites from the Green Belt and their being made available for housing development by designation or allocation, is not justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.183 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 040/1, 040/2, 040/5 and 040/6.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land at Harrington Avenue, Hoylake

OBJECTION: 018/1, 018/2 Miss A O'Hare

Summary of Objection

7.184 Nos 1-6 and 7-12 Harrington Avenue, and the land between these two groups of houses, should be removed from the Green Belt and the area designated as a 'Primarily Residential Area'.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.185 The Objector argues that the Green Belt boundary should be altered so as to run around and to the south of the subject dwellings, which form an entity with the Primarily Residential Area to the north. She maintains that apart from being a common sense approach this would enable consideration to be given to infill development between the two parts of the terrace, enabling an area of unsightly land to be improved and consideration given to more suitable access arrangements for the whole of the terrace.

7.186 The Green Belt boundary defined in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan follows the line of the Birkenhead-West Kirby Railway Line immediately north of the subject houses. Although Harrington Avenue is adjoined to the north of the railway by a Primarily Residential Area, the railway in my view is a firm feature which provides a clear basis for the Green Belt boundary. The Objector accepts that the guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts* that detailed Green Belt boundaries should be altered only if exceptional circumstances exist¹ applies to her Objection.

7.187 The Objector acknowledges that there has been no significant change on the ground since the Green Belt boundary was defined. In my view the need to create a basis for considering infill development between the two parts of the terrace does not amount to exceptional circumstances. A line of houses such as Harrington Avenue could not to my mind reasonably be designated an 'infill village' under UDP Proposal GB7². The occupiers of 1-12 Harrington Avenue have scope to alter or extend their houses under UDP Policy GB5³. I therefore conclude that no change to the boundary of the Green Belt is justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.188 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 018/1 and 018/2.

¹ PPG2, paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7.

² Proposal GB7 (First Alterations) - Infill Villages in the Green Belt (ALT/GREEN BELT/008 (CD056, page 55)).

³ Policy GB5 (First Alterations) - Extension of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt (ALT/GREEN BELT/006 (CD056, page 53)).

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
POLICY HS1 - LAND ALLOCATED FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT
Land to the South of Thingwall Road, Irby

OBJECTIONS: 090/5, 090/6, 090/8 Mr D I Maurice Jones

Summary of Objections

7.189 The Green Belt in Wirral is tightly drawn, and insufficient consideration has been given to the future needs and planning of villages such as Irby. A limited development of say, 60 to 70 dwellings on the Objection site would assist in maintaining Irby as a village with a viable service centre. Such a development which could offer accommodation for the elderly could be integrated with the remainder of the village. The development could be complemented by the provision of a small park for the residents. Although the development would require land to be taken out of the Green Belt, it would not harm the purposes of the Green Belt nor the open landscape on the south side of the village.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.190 The Objector does not question the *general* adequacy of the UDP housing provision. Rather, he seeks more housing in Irby to sustain the village in community and service terms. However, any evidence of local need has to be considered in the light of land around the village falling within the approved Green Belt defined in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans should be altered only exceptionally¹.

7.191 The Objector identifies vacant shop units in the village centre. However, I saw on my inspection no clear signs that this diverse group of shops and service outlets is in marked decline. It could be said of many villages that new housing would stimulate local trade. Whilst there is some merit in such an argument, in this case I see no clear evidence that such an approach is justified as 'exceptional circumstances'. Furthermore, the suggested development would in my view be seen as less than fully integral with the remainder of the built up area of the village, and would be a significant intrusion into the countryside of open character on the south side of the village. Such harm would not to my mind be outweighed by any advantages that such a development might have for Horrocks Wood, an outcome I am not in any event convinced would arise. I therefore conclude that the Objector's case for the removal of the Objection site from the Green Belt and its allocation for housing purposes is not justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.192 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 090/5 and 090/8.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Heswall Dales and the site of the former Cleaver Hospital, Heswall

OBJECTIONS: 080/19 Cheshire Wildlife Trust 127/7 Wirral Wildlife
215/6, 215/21 Wirral Green Belt Council

Summary of Objections

- 7.193 The Objection land ('the Dales') fulfils the purposes of the Green Belt as laid down in PPG2 *Green Belts*¹. The Dales have prevented Upper and Lower Heswall from merging. It has been the long standing intention of the Council to include the Dales within the Green Belt.
- 7.194 The Dales has a long history of development pressure and environmental attributes of the highest quality which merit the strongest protection. Its lowland heathland and dwarf maritime heath are widely recognised as having rare and valuable habitats. The Dales provides opportunities for outdoor recreation near to homes, and secures nature conservation interests. The inclusion of the Dales in the Green Belt would provide greater safeguards for the nature conservation interests.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.195 The boundaries of the Green Belt in the Heswall area were established in 1983 through the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP). The issue as to whether or not the Dales should be included in the Green Belt was considered at the Local Plan inquiry. The Inspector concluded that further consideration should be given to the inclusion of the Dales (including the open grounds of the Cleaver Hospital) in the Green Belt². The Merseyside County Council as plan making authority decided however not to incorporate this land into the Local Plan before its adoption. The Green Belt boundary then defined is the same as that now shown on the UDP Proposals Map.

7.196 PPG2 states that once detailed Green Belt boundaries have been defined they should be altered only exceptionally³. Detailed boundaries have been clearly established in the Heswall area and the fact that there may at one time have been an intention to give further consideration to the inclusion of the Dales in the Green Belt does not in my view itself amount to exceptional circumstances to justify changing the detailed boundaries in advance of any general review of the Green Belt. RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* envisages that such a

¹ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

² *Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan - Report of the Inspector on objections and representations to the Plan* (CD081), paragraphs 6.155 and 6.156 (page 91).

³ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

review may be some years ahead⁴. Events have since acted against the inclusion of the Dales in the Green Belt; the narrow neck of land at the northern end of the Dales has been further reduced in width by the development of part of the grounds of the former Cleaver Hospital site for housing, making most of the Dales almost detached from the neighbouring open countryside to the north.

7.197 Although the Dales with its heathland flora and varied topography has effectively prevented the merging of development in Upper and Lower Heswall I accept that there has been some encroachment by domestic development into the area over a long period of time. However, the UDP designates the Dales as Urban Greenspace⁵. The Dales has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest⁶, and is proposed to be included in the Dee Coast Area of Special Landscape Value⁷. Accordingly, considerable protection of the landscape and ecology of the Dales will be available by virtue of Proposal GR2 and Policies NC3 and LA1⁸.

7.198 In all these circumstances I do not see any clear benefit from the incorporation of the Dales into the Green Belt, and I conclude that no exceptional circumstances exist to justify that course of action.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.199 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 080/19, 215/6 and 215/21.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

⁵ Under Proposal GR2/208.

⁶ Proposal NC4/6.

⁷ Proposal LA2/2, as proposed to be amended under ALT/LANDSCAPE/005 and 006 (CD056, pages 186 and 187).

⁸ Proposal GR2 (The Protection of Greenspace within the Urban Area) lays down relevant criteria. Policy NC3 (The Protection of Sites of National Importance for Nature Conservation) and Policy LA1 (Protection of Areas of Special Landscape Value) also contain appropriate criteria.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
The Castle Fields Estate, Leasowe Road, Leasowe

OBJECTIONS: 108/1, 108/3 Mrs V Daley, for the residents of the Castle Fields Estate

Summary of Objections

- 7.200 The Castle Fields Estate serves none of the Green Belt functions listed in PPG2 *Green Belts*¹. A residential estate of some 30 dwellings, it was mostly constructed before planning control was introduced, and is in lawful use. The Estate has mains services and is adjoined by a large hotel with residential caravans in its grounds and by a golf course with club house and car park. It is close to a Council yard and warehouse building within a built up area, not in open countryside. The Green Belt designation places unjustified restrictions on the Estate's residents and should be removed.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.201 Land north of Leasowe Road and west of Bayswater Road, including Castlefields Estate became part of the Green Belt in 1983, there having been no objections to such a designation in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 advises that detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans should be altered only exceptionally². Changes which in the Objector's view amount to exceptional circumstances include improvements since 1983 to water, electricity and gas services and the transition from holiday homes to permanent dwellings.

7.202 I saw that despite the rebuilding of some of the dwellings, the Estate has a spacious and lightly developed character which compliments other Green Belt land nearby and serves to maintain the generally open character of the land north of Leasowe Road. Improved services do not in my view change the circumstances in which the Estate was included in the Green Belt or justify its removal from the Green Belt now. There are restrictions on how residents may extend or rebuild their dwellings, in UDP policies GB4 and GB5³. However the need by some to enlarge their dwellings more than allowed for by policy is not to my mind a good reason to remove the Green Belt designation given my conclusion about the Green Belt function of the Estate land. Accordingly I see no justification for changing the Green Belt designation.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.203 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 108/1 and 108/3.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 1.5.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ Policy GB4 (as amended by ALT/GREEN BELT/005 and ALT2/GREEN BELT/004 & 005 (CD056, p 52 and CD057, p 8)) - Replacement of Existing Dwellings; Policy GB5 (as amended by ALT/GREEN BELT/006 (CD056, p 53)) - Extension of Existing Dwellings.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

51 Meols Drive, Hoylake

OBJECTIONS: 108/2, 108/4 Land Planning in Partnership Ltd

Summary of Objections

7.204 The site of 51 Meols Drive was wrongly included in the Green Belt in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan (MGBLP). This land serves no Green Belt purpose and should be removed from the Green Belt and designated as part of a Primarily Residential Area.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.205 The Objector accepts that the guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts* that detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans should be altered only exceptionally¹ applies to his Objections. His case is principally based on two aspects considered to amount to 'exceptional circumstances'. These are that the site was included in the adopted MGBLP as a result of a flawed process, and that the site does not serve a Green Belt function.

7.206 So far as the process of the MGBLP is concerned, the Objection site was not shown within the Green Belt in the deposit version of that plan. Its inclusion arose as a result of consideration by the Inspector who held the inquiry into Objections to the plan ('the Green Belt Inspector') of representations that the Royal Liverpool Golf Club course (RLGC) should be included within the Green Belt². The Green Belt Inspector concluded that the golf course performed a real Green Belt function in separating Hoylake and West Kirby, and that it could be linked to the remainder of the Green Belt across the few houses which were opposite the RLGC's frontage to Meols Drive (including No 51).

7.207 The fact that the Green Belt Inspector's formal recommendation did not expressly refer to the linking properties did not in my view constrain the Merseyside County Council as plan making authority reasonably from interpreting his report to mean that the incorporation of the RLGC course into the Green Belt required the inclusion of the 'link'. Although the Objector contends that there were shortcomings in the manner in which the relevant modification to the MGBLP was advertised, no objection to that modification or legal challenge to the plan finally adopted was made. There is therefore no clear case in my view for seeking to change the Green Belt boundary now for such a reason.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

² Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan Inspector's Report (CD081), pages 84-85.

7.208 PPG2 states that the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness³. I accept that where the Green Belt crosses Meols Drive the openness of the golf courses to the east and west gives way briefly to the somewhat less open character of this part of Meols Drive, described by the Green Belt Inspector as 'arcadian'. There is no explicit advice in PPG2 as to whether the Green Belt can include fragmented portions, to assist the issue of whether the golf course could have been incorporated into the Green Belt without the 'link'. Nevertheless the PPG refers to the desirability of Green Belts being sufficiently wide enough to ensure that their function is maintained⁴.

7.209 In my view the separation function afforded by the RLGC course would be diminished by the removal of the 'link' or any of its constituent properties. This would be especially the case if the Council's ability to consider the effect of any subsequent development on this part of Meols Drive on the separation function were weakened by the removal of all or part of the 'link' from the Green Belt. In these circumstances I consider that the Objection site continues to serve a Green Belt purpose, and therefore conclude that it should not be removed from the Green Belt.

Inspector's recommendation

7.210 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 108/2 and 108/4.

³ PPG2, paragraph 1.4.

⁴ PPG2, paragraph 2.9.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

Land at the Old Anselmians Rugby Club, Eastham Village Road, Eastham

OBJECTIONS: 101/1, 101/2 Mr R Kimpton

Summary of Objection

7.211 The Objection site should be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for development¹. The Old Anselmians Rugby Club ('the Club') is experiencing difficulties in relation to its ground because of the effects of drug abuse, vandalism and fouling by dogs which has meant that the Club cannot attract junior players or justify improvements to the ground or club house. The Club therefore requires assistance either in the form of direct financial help or the ability to make the ground available for development.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.212 The Objection site was included in the 1961 West Cheshire Green Belt, having also been shown as a Private Sports Ground on the Bebington Town Map. There were no objections to its retention in the Green Belt in the 1983 Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. PPG2 *Green Belts* advises that the detailed boundaries of Green Belts defined in Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally². The PPG also emphasises that the purpose of firm boundaries is to ensure the permanence of the Green Belt³.

7.213 RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* does not change this basic approach. The RPG observes that current Green Belts should be maintained 'for the foreseeable future' if urban regeneration is to be achieved. The RPG records that there is no evidence to indicate that Green Belts needed to be changed prior to plan reviews that look to 2011, although early review is anticipated in the light of further work on housing land requirements. In the meantime, the RPG stresses that local authorities will need to show very strong justification for changing the approved Green Belt in their development plans⁴.

7.214 There is therefore in my view no case in policy terms for the release of the Objection site from the approved Green Belt as part of the current UDP. It is however necessary in the light of this general conclusion to determine whether there are any special reasons why the Objection site should be released from the Green Belt. The site is together with the remainder

¹ The Council in their response interpret Objections 101/1 and 101/2 as a request that the Objection site be allocated for *housing* development. However, there is no express reference to housing in either Objection, and my report takes this into account.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.6.

³ PPG2, paragraph 8.

⁴ RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

of the Eastham Village centre an important part of a relatively narrow neck of Green Belt land which separates the large urban area to the west from the Eastham Oil Terminal to the east. It therefore continues to fulfil the important Green Belt purpose⁵ of preventing neighbouring towns (or in this case, a large residential area and a major industrial complex) from merging into one another.

7.215 The Objector has not made the case for redevelopment of the Objection site for any specific purpose. I conclude elsewhere⁶ that the UDP's new dwelling requirement should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings. The thrust of the UDP's key urban regeneration theme is that land for housing should first be sought in the urban areas, next in other areas outside the Green Belt, and then only as a last resort from the Green Belt itself. I am satisfied that sufficient land has been identified in the UDP or as a result of recommendations in this report either in the urban areas of the Borough or elsewhere outside the approved Green Belt, to satisfy that increased requirement.

7.216 This report deals with land use matters, and whether the Club can be given financial assistance to help them out of their present difficulties is not for me to determine. That such difficulties may be real and may be affecting the future of the Club is not in my view a good reason for removing the Objection site from the Green Belt. In the absence of evidence which would seek to justify any other specific form of development and in all other circumstances already discussed I consider that there is no justification for the Objection site to be released from the approved Green Belt.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.217 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 101/1 and 101/2.

⁵ As listed in paragraph 1.5 of PPG2.

⁶ See pages 18-35 of this report.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Caldy Hill

OBJECTION: 080/20 Cheshire Wildlife Trust 127/8 Wirral Wildlife

Summary of Objection

7.218 Caldys Hill (NC6/3) should be incorporated into the Green Belt, as the site has suffered from visually intrusive adjacent development which could be more strictly controlled if adjacent to a Green belt Area.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.219 The Green Belt boundary defined in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan follows Fleck Lane east of the Objection site. The inclusion of the Objection site in the Green Belt was considered in the Inspector's Report into Objections to that Plan¹. The Inspector regarded Caldys Hill as an urban open space which could be protected by existing approved policies.

7.220 Caldys Hill has significant landscape, recreational, wildlife and geological or geomorphological value. Enclosed by development on most sides it is only connected to the approved Green Belt by a narrow neck of land. The land is designated in the UDP as Urban Greenspace, a Site of Biological Importance, Site of Local Importance for Earth Science and Area of Special Landscape Value. In my view effective protection can be given to the site under Policies GR1, NC5, NC9 and LA1². I am not convinced that control over development on adjoining land would be any different if the Objection site were designated as Green Belt.

7.221 Green Belt protection is therefore in my view unnecessary and such a designation inappropriate, owing to the almost complete detachment of the land from the remainder of the Green Belt. There has been no material change in circumstances since the possible inclusion of the land in the Green Belt was last considered, such as to constitute the exceptional circumstances necessary in policy terms to justify such a course of action³.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.222 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 00/20 and 127/8.

¹ CD085 (Site 5E, page 85).

² Policy GR1 - Standards for the Provision of Greenspace (as amended by ALT/GREENSPACE/003, CD056 p 64), Policy NC5 - The Protection of Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (as amended by ALT/NATURE/004, CD056 p 173), Policy NC9 - The Protection of Sites of Importance for Earth Science (as amended by ALT/NATURE/006, CD056 p 175), Policy LA1 - Protection of Areas of Special Landscape Value (as amended by ALT/LANDSCAPE/003, CD056 p 184).

³ PPG2 *Green Belts*, paragraph 2.6; RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*, paragraph 3.10.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Meols Meadow SSSI (South of the Railway Line)

OBJECTIONS: 080/7 Cheshire Wildlife Trust 127/5 Wirral Wildlife

Summary of Objections

7.223 The Objection site should be incorporated into the Green Belt. It is the only traditional hay meadow under such management in Wirral and one of the best meadows in Merseyside. The site was excluded from the Green Belt at the last Green Belt review, which predated its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Inclusion of the site in the Green Belt would give it added protection from development and might help in negotiations with the owners to establish management.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.224 At the time of my summer visit there was on the Objection site a rich display of meadow flowers and grasses and associated insect life, illustrating the reasons why it was designated an SSSI. However, the boundary of the Green Belt was clearly defined in 1983 in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan, as running along the railway line to the north and Carr Lane to the west. These are to my mind defensible boundaries. Both PPG2 *Green Belts* and RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* confirm that once detailed boundaries have been defined for Green Belts in local plans, those boundaries should be altered only exceptionally¹.

7.225 Although the designation of the Objection site in 1990 as an extension to the Meols Meadow SSSI post-dates the definition of the Green Belt boundary in this area, this does not to my mind itself constitute 'exceptional circumstances'. Considerable protection will be available to the site under UDP Policy NC3². Whilst designation as Green Belt would serve the Green Belt objective of securing nature conservation interest, this is not regarded under the guidance of PPG2 as being a factor in determining Green Belt boundaries³. I therefore consider that there is no strong case for changing the Green Belt boundary under the present circumstances.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.226 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 080/7 and 127/5.

¹ PPG2, paragraph 2.6; RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

² The Protection of Sites of National Importance for Nature Conservation (as proposed to be amended by ALT/NATURE/003 (CD056, p 172) and ALT2/NATURE/003 (CD057, p 24)).

³ PPG2, paragraph 1.6.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

Land at Upton Storm Water Detention Tanks, Upton Park Drive, Upton

OBJECTION: 082/5 North West Water Ltd

Summary of Objection

7.227 Objection is made to the designation of the Objection site as allotments¹; the site should be removed from the proposed Green Belt and put within the adjoining 'Primarily Residential Area'. The housing land provision in the UDP allows very little scope for slippage or flexibility. There is likely to be a need at the end of the Plan period to identify further land for housing, and it would be contrary to current guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts* to have to alter the Green Belt boundary at that time for this purpose.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.228 I conclude elsewhere² that the case for the extension of the Green Belt northwards along the M53 corridor is justified in general terms. The consideration of this Objection therefore turns on whether the Objection site in particular should be part of this extension. Although the Objector's operational installation occupies part of the site, the site nevertheless is generally open in character. Thus it contributes with adjoining land to the open swathe of land in the corridor which helps to fulfil the Green Belt purpose of preventing the large urban areas of Beechwood/Noctorum to the east and Upton/Woodchurch to the west from merging³.

7.229 Furthermore without the application site, the Green Belt at this almost the narrowest part of the M53 corridor would be so narrow that the effectiveness of the Green Belt here could be seriously compromised. I consider this to be a strong reason for retaining the Objection site in the proposed Green Belt. This also outweighs any case there might be for designating the land to facilitate its future development for housing, bearing in mind my general conclusions on the Borough's housing requirements⁴.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.230 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 082/5.

¹ This part of the Objection appears to be made on the basis that the Objection site is identified as an allotment site under Proposal GR4 (Allotments to be Protected from Development). However, this is not so; neither was it so in the UDP Draft for Public Consultation (CD052). I shall therefore base my assessment of the Objection on the Green Belt issue.

² See pages 120-123 of this report.

³ As set out in paragraph 1.5 of PPG2.

⁴ See pages 18-35 of this report.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Land at 'Freshways', Boathouse Lane, Heswall

OBJECTION: 029/1 Mr G Thomas

Summary of Objection

- 7.231 The Objection site has never been in the Merseyside Green Belt; until 1993 it was in the Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston. The UDP should now give an opportunity to consider objections to the inclusion of the site within the Green Belt. The site formed part of a larger site for which planning permission for housing was granted in 1955. The permission was not implemented in full and the Objection site was incorporated into the garden of 'Freshways'. The site does not contribute to the Green Belt, is divorced from the remainder of the Merseyside Green Belt and has no wildlife value. It should be included in the 'Primarily Residential Area' (PIA).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.232 The site was included in the Green Belt in the Ellesmere Port and Neston Local Plan (EPNLP)¹, to which provision no duly made objection was received at the deposit stage of that Plan. Although the adoption of the Local Plan took place two months after the Objection land had been transferred to the Wirral Borough under boundary changes, I consider that considerable weight should nevertheless be given to the Green Belt status of the Objection site at the date of transfer, in view of the advanced stage of the Local Plan at that time.

7.233 The fact that the Objection site was many years ago the subject of a planning permission for residential development should in my view be accorded little weight in the light of the subsequent action to incorporate the site into the Green Belt in the Neston Town Map and the EPNLP. The site may in land ownership terms have been incorporated with 'Freshways', but I saw no clear signs on my site inspection that the site is now in domestic use.

7.234 As to contribution to the Green Belt, the Objection site adjoins land to the west and south in the Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston which is in the approved Green Belt and with which it shares characteristics of countryside, even if with its tree cover it is less open than some land nearby. It thus fulfils the Green Belt purpose of assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment². I therefore consider that the Objector's case for removing the site from the Green Belt and placing it in the PIA is not justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.235 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 029/1.

¹ CD045 is the adopted version of the Local Plan.

² As set out in national planning guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts*, paragraph 1.5.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Brotherton Park, Bromborough

OBJECTION: 217/1 J R A Edwards

Summary of Objection

7.236 Brotherton Park, both east and west of the Birkenhead to Chester railway line should be included in the Green Belt. The railway embankment is not a hindrance to public access, and designation as Green Belt would be compatible with the use of the land as parkland in visual amenity, recreational and conservation terms.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.237 Brotherton Park to the west of the railway line was included in the Green Belt in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. Parkland to the east of the railway is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)¹. The Park east of the railway is allocated as Urban Greenspace in the UDP². The UDP will give strong protection to this area through policies for to the preservation of open space, recreational, landscape or conservation interests³.

7.238 The railway is a clear and defensible boundary for the Green Belt, an important function of which is separation of the urban areas of East and West Wirral. Land east of the railway would not serve that purpose, although it satisfies some Green Belt objectives mentioned in PPG2 *Green Belts*⁴. However this is not in my view reason to extend the Green Belt in the light of the guidance in PPG2 and RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West* that once defined, boundaries of the Green Belt should only be changed exceptionally⁵. Although the SSSI has been designated since the Green Belt was established, this the only material change of planning circumstances does not in my view amount to the exceptional circumstances or provide the very strong justification called for by national and regional guidance. I therefore consider that no change should be made to the Green Belt boundary in this area.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.239 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objection 217/1.

¹ Proposal NC4/9 in the UDP.

² Proposal GR2/65.

³ Policy GR1 - The Protection of Urban Greenspace (revised policy under ALT/GREENSPACE/003 (CD056, p 64)) and Policy NC3 - The Protection of Sites of National Importance for Nature Conservation (as amended by ALT/NATURE/003 (CD056, p 172)).

⁴ PPG2, paragraph 1.6.

⁵ PPG2, paragraph 2.6; RPG13, paragraph 3.10.

PROPOSAL GB1 - AMENDMENTS TO THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY
Bidston Moss Site of Biological Importance

OBJECTIONS: 080/18 Cheshire Wildlife Trust 127/6 Wirral Wildlife

Summary of Objections

- 7.240 That part of Bidston Moss Site of Biological Importance (NC6/62) which lies to the south-east of the Bidston Moss Trading Estate should be incorporated into the Green Belt (080/18, 127/6).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.241 I conclude elsewhere in this report¹ that a convincing case has been made in general terms for the extension of the Green Belt northwards along the M53 corridor. No specific Objection has been made to the inclusion of the western part of NC6/62 (immediately to the west of the Trading Estate) in the Green Belt, and I am satisfied that the Green Belt should extend up to the Trading Estate at that point.

7.242 However, to include any part of the remainder of NC6/62, substantially separated from the main part of that site by the buildings of the Trading Estate, would to my mind go against national guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts* which does not favour Green Belts which are narrow or badly defined². Designation of the Objection site would not in my view serve the purposes of the Green Belt as laid down in PPG2³ any better than the UDP proposals which show the termination of the Belt on the western side of the Trading Estate. Designation of the site would also not give any greater protection to the conservation interests of NC6/62, given the criteria in UDP Policy NC5⁴. I consider therefore that such a marginal and ineffective extension to the proposed Green Belt in this area is not justified.

Inspector's Recommendation

- 7.243 I recommend that no modification be made to the UDP in response to Objections 080/18 and 127/6.

¹ See pages 120-123 of this report.

² PPG2, paragraph 2.9.

³ PPG2, paragraph 1.5

⁴ The Protection of Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (as amended by ALT/NATURE/004 (CD056, p 173)).

POLICY GB2 - GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREEN BELT

Written Statement Paragraphs 7.14 to 7.17

Wallasey Golf Club

POLICY OMISSION - VILLAGES IN THE GREEN BELT

OBJECTIONS: 005/1 Wallasey Golf Club 082/6 North West Water Ltd
093/1, 093/3 The Leverhulme Estate 121/5 MAFF
122/7 Rural Development Commission
215/30 Wirral Green Belt Council 221/1 National Grid Co plc

COUNTER-OBJECTIONS: 060/AA Mrs C A Ford 070/A GO-M
215/A, 215/AA Wirral Green Belt Council

Summary of Objections

- 7.244 Reassurance is sought that Policy GB2 will not inhibit any reasonable development of the Wallasey Golf Club as golf links or purposes associated therewith. The boundary of the Golf Links is inaccurately shown on the Proposals Map (Objection 005/1).
- 7.245 The policy and supporting text should reflect guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts*, particularly about the re-use of buildings in the Green Belt (093/1). Reference to changes of use in the policy should be deleted, as it is conflict with Policy GB3¹; there is no need to refer to 'exceptional circumstances' in connection with changes of use (122/7). Paragraph 7.16 of the Reasoned Justification could be strengthened by the insertion of a reference to environmental considerations taking precedence (215/30).
- 7.246 The Plan does not include policies for villages in the Green Belt as advised by PPG2. Strict adherence to Policy GB2 would be detrimental to the wellbeing of the villages of Thornton Hough, Raby, Barnston, Brimstage, Landican and Storeton, predominantly in the Objector's ownership. Alternative approaches involving no new building other than under Green Belt policy, infilling or limited expansion should be considered (093/3).
- 7.247 Reference to an increase in the supply of agricultural products in paragraph 7.16 of the Reasoned Justification for Policy GB2 is unclear, and the linkage between more land becoming available and environmental impact is not appropriate. The paragraph should be removed (121/5).
- 7.248 Policy GB2 should be expanded to indicate that operational development for public utility provision will normally be permitted where this is necessary to secure the

¹ Policy GB3 - Re-use of Redundant Buildings in the Green Belt. The reference to redundancy in the title of this policy is proposed to be deleted under ALT2/GREEN BELT/002 (CD057, p 6).

development objectives of the Plan or to meet relevant statutory obligations and environmental standards (082/6). Policy GB2 should be consistent with paragraph 7.17 of the Reasoned Justification, recognising that it is preferable to concentrate additional facilities by statutory undertakers on land controlled by the undertaking, rather than using a variety of different and unrelated sites (221/1).

- 7.249 The first alteration to Policy GB2² omits reference to the general presumption against inappropriate development in Green Belts, as set out in PPG2³ (070/A). The alteration contains no criteria relating to infill development, replacement buildings or extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt (215/A).
- 7.250 The reference to 'limited affordable housing subject to local community needs' in Criterion (iv) of Policy GB2 as amended by the second alteration⁴ is unnecessary in relation to the Wirral Green Belt, and could lead to the erosion of open parts of the Green Belt. The amended policy does not recognise the characteristics of some Green Belts identified in PPG2 and PPG3 *Housing*⁵. Criterion (iv) suggests that affordable housing is acceptable anywhere in the Green Belt. The word 'and' in the criterion should be replaced by 'including' (060/AA). The reference to affordable housing is unnecessary, as the UDP's housing land provision is adequate in all areas (215/AA).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.251 A published change to the Proposals Map⁶ corrects the boundary of the Wallasey Golf Course. The course is part of the Green Belt defined in the Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan. Its use as a golf course falls within 'outdoor recreation', and in my view any small-scale development reasonably required in connection with such a function would not be subject to the presumption against inappropriate development in PPG2. However, it follows that other development proposed by the Golf Club would if inappropriate development in Green Belt terms, be subject to the strictures of Green Belt policy. The flexibility in the promotion of other forms of development written into the 1995 Deed of Transfer when the Golf Club purchased the freehold of the Course from the Council does not affect the land's Green Belt status.

² ALT/GREEN BELT/001 (CD056, p 47).

³ PPG2, paragraph 3.1.

⁴ ALT2/GREEN BELT/001 (CD057, p 5).

⁵ See paragraphs 11 to 14 of Annex E to PPG2, which reproduces guidance in Annex A of PPG3 about affordable housing.

⁶ ALT/TOURISM/011 (CD056, p 124 and facing page).

7.252 In these circumstances, the possible future need to promote any wider range of development at the Wallasey Golf Club should be considered on its own merits, having regard to the inclusion of the Course in the Green Belt. Such a need, or the terms of the Deed of Transfer, do not in my view justify the removal of the golf course from the approved Green Belt; PPG2 advises that changes to the defined boundary of the Green Belt outside a general strategic review should only be made in exceptionally⁷.

7.253 The first published change to Policy GB2 brings the policy into line with PPG2⁸. Reference to changes of use has been omitted. The second change expressly refers to the general presumption against inappropriate development. The amended policy whilst referring to infill development, replacement buildings and extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt, does not contain criteria for those types of development. However the policy mentions Policies GB4, GB5 and GB6⁹ which do contain such criteria, and I do not consider it necessary to repeat them in Policy GB2. It would not in my view be appropriate for the supporting text to single out environmental considerations as overriding all others; however the point made by Objector (215) is in my view served by reference in the proposed amended Policy to development not damaging the visual amenities of the Green Belt¹⁰.

7.254 The UDP makes provision for some villages to be inset into the Green Belt, as proposed to be amended for some to be 'infill' villages¹¹, and for others to be 'washed over' by the Green Belt. The status to be accorded to the villages mentioned in Objection 093/3 is discussed elsewhere in this report¹².

7.255 The Council propose to alter paragraph 7.16¹³. This has not satisfied Objector (121/5). Whilst the Objector would prefer removal of the paragraph, it seems to me that with

⁷ PPG2, paragraph 2.6. This approach is also supported in RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*, paragraph 3.10.

⁸ PPG2, paragraph 3.4.

⁹ Policy GB4 (as amended by ALT/GREEN BELT/005 (CD056, page 52) and ALT2/GREEN BELT/004 (CD057, page 8) - Replacement of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt; Policy GB5 (new policy under ALT/GREEN BELT/006 (CD056, page 53)) - Extension of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt; Policy GB6 (new policy under ALT/GREEN BELT/007 (CD056, page 54) and amended under ALT2/GREEN BELT/006 (CD057, page 10)) - (Housing) Development in Infill Villages in the Green Belt.

¹⁰ ALT2/GREEN BELT/001 (CD057, page 5) and ALT3/GREEN BELT/001 (CD205, page 3).

¹¹ ALT/GREEN BELT/008 (CD056, page 55) Proposal GB7 - Infill Villages in the Green Belt.

¹² See pages 199-205 of this report.

¹³ ALT/GREEN BELT/002 (CD056, page 48).

its theme of diversification it does have a place in the supporting text to Policy GB2. The paragraph does little more than (by implication) to state the obvious - any development in the Green Belt requiring planning permission is subject to Green Belt policy. As the Council point out, agricultural diversification which does not amount to development will not come under the influence of the UDP. I therefore see no reason why the amended paragraph should not remain.

7.256 The Council state that the reference to essential public services and utilities in the comparable policy of the UDP Draft for Public Consultation¹⁴ was deleted after representations that that policy should make no reference to development not listed in paragraph 13 of PPG2 (1988). I see no reason to change that approach now. The circumstances under which the site at Prenton Dell might be extended for operational purposes is discussed elsewhere¹⁵. There are 'permitted development rights' for some development by statutory undertakers. The Council interpret PPG2¹⁶ as relevant to overhead power lines as 'other operations'. The basis for consideration of such operations appears clear; whether they constitute inappropriate development in Green Belt terms depends on their effect on the openness of the Green Belt and any conflict with its purposes. I therefore do not consider that any further change need be made to Policy GB2 to accommodate the needs of public utilities.

7.257 A third published alteration to Policy GB2¹⁷ appears to satisfy the concern raised in Counter-objections 060/AA and 215/AA. The Council's view that the most appropriate locations for the provision of affordable housing in Wirral are likely to be within the 'infill' villages is generally supported by the reference PPG3 to such provision within *or adjoining* existing villages¹⁸.

7.258 The amended Policy is slightly stricter on affordable housing than PPG3 in locational terms, but I accept that the compact nature of the Green Belt in Wirral is justification for such an approach and I note that no further counter-objections have been received to that amendment. My conclusions on the general housing land requirement¹⁹ do not present such a picture of abundance of provision as the Objector (215/AA) contends, and accordingly do not suggest to me that the reference to affordable housing should be omitted from the Policy.

¹⁴ Policy GBT2 (CD054, page 45).

¹⁵ See pages 87-88 of this report.

¹⁶ PPG2, paragraph 3.12.

¹⁷ ALT3/GREEN BELT/001 (CD205, page 3).

¹⁸ PPG3, Annex A, paragraph 1.

¹⁹ See pages 18-35 of this report.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.259 I recommend that the UDP be modified:

(a) by the amendment of the Proposals Map in accordance with ALT/TOURISM/011;

(b) by the amendment of Policy GB2 in accordance with ALT3/GREEN BELT/001;

(c) by the amendment of paragraph 7.16 of the Reasoned Justification for Policy GB2 in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/002 and

(d) by the insertion of Proposal GB7 in accordance with the recommendation on page 205 of this report,

but that no further modification be made in response to Objections 005/1, 093/1, 121/5, 122/7 and 221/1 and Counter-objections 060/AA, 070/A, 215/A and 215/AA.

POLICY GB3 - RE-USE OF REDUNDANT BUILDINGS IN THE GREEN BELT

Written Statement Paragraphs 7.18 to 7.21

OBJECTIONS: 070/39 GO-M 093/2 Leverhulme Estate 120/1 National Farmers Union
121/6 MAFF 122/8 Rural Development Commission

COUNTER-OBJECTIONS: 093/A Leverhulme Estate 120/AA National Farmers Union
215/B Wirral Green Belt Council¹

Summary of Objections

7.260 The word 'normally' should be omitted from the Policy (070/39). The Policy and supporting text should be amended to accord with PPG2 *Green Belts* on the re-use of buildings which removes the 'redundancy' test (093/2, 121/6, 122/8). This applies to the amended Policy² (093/A). Redundancy is no longer an issue in the re-use of buildings not in the Green Belt and the UDP should acknowledge this³. The Policy does not deal with farm diversification generally (120/1). Reference in amended paragraph 7.19 of the Reasoned Justification to re-use limited to small firms⁴ is against national guidance; larger businesses can benefit (093/A). The amended paragraph appears to reintroduce the 'redundancy' test (120/AA).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.261 Successive published changes to Policy GB3 and paragraph 7.19 of the Reasoned Justification⁵ delete 'normally' and all reference to redundancy, to bring the policy into conformity with national guidance and remove the implication that small scale conversions only benefit small businesses. The changes appear to satisfy all objections and counter-objections.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.262 I recommend that the UDP be modified, by the amendment of Policy GB3 in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/003 and ALT2/GREEN BELT/002 and paragraph 7.19 of the Reasoned Justification in accordance with ALT3/GREEN BELT/002.

¹ This Counter-objection relates to Policy GB3 wrongly numbered in the first published Alterations, and since then corrected to Policy GB4. The correct Policy number is referred to in ALT2/GREEN BELT/004 (CD057, page 8) - Replacement of Existing Dwellings in the Green Belt. The Counter-objection is considered on page 196 of this report.

² By ALT/GREEN BELT/003 (CD056, page 49).

³ This comment was made before the revised version of PPG2 was published in 1995.

⁴ ALT2/GREEN BELT/003 (CD057, page 7).

⁵ ALT/GREEN BELT/003 (CD056, page 49), ALT2/GREEN BELT/002 (CD057, page 6) and ALT3/GREEN BELT/002 (CD205, page 4).

POLICY GB4 (DEPOSIT DRAFT) - CLATTERBRIDGE HOSPITAL

OBJECTIONS: 047/8 Bryant Homes Ltd 070/40 GO-M

Summary of Objection

7.263 The word 'normally' should be omitted from Policy GB4 (070/40). The Policy is unnecessarily restrictive in terms of development uses. The policy should comply with the guidelines relating to hospitals in the Green Belt in PPG2 *Green Belts*¹ (047/8).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.264 The Council propose to delete Policy GB4 relating to Clatterbridge Hospital² from the UDP and to refer to the Hospital as a major employment site in the Green Belt under new Policy GB8 and new Proposal GB9³. Policy GB8 offers more scope in terms of the potential uses to which the site could be put than Policy GB4, which restricts uses to those specified. I note that the new policy generally follows the guidance in the revised PPG2, particularly in the criteria for redevelopment⁴. No Counter-objection has been received to the new Policy and Proposal, which appear to satisfy the concern expressed in Objection 047/8.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.265 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the deletion of Policy GB4 (Clatterbridge Hospital) and its supporting text and the insertion of Policy GB8 with its Reasoned Justification and Proposal GB9, in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/004, 009 and 010.

¹ The Objection was made before the revised version of PPG2 was published in 1995 and is understood to refer to PPG2 *Green Belts* (1988).

² ALT/GREEN BELT/004 (CD056, page).

³ Policy GB8 - Guidelines for Major Developed Sites in the Green Belts (ALT/GREEN BELT/009, (CD056, page 56)). Proposal GB9 - Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (ALT/GREEN BELT/010 (CD056, page 58 and Plan GB9/2 following)).

⁴ PPG2, Annex C.

POLICY GB4 (FIRST¹ AND SECOND² ALTERATIONS) - REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING DWELLINGS IN THE GREEN BELT

COUNTER-OBJECTION: 215/B Wirral Green Belt Council

Summary Of Objection

7.266 A further criterion should be added to Policy GB4, requiring that any replacement building must be of acceptable quality to merit the description of a 'dwelling'.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.267 The Council submit that the basis in law for defining a dwelling is clearly laid down, apart from the question of abandonment of use, and that Policy GB4 clearly applies only to dwellings. I see no obvious circumstances in which the Policy could be misapplied.

7.268 Clearly under Policy GB4, any replacement dwelling should be of a permanent construction and of a design and appearance appropriate to its surroundings. Any proposal submitted for planning permission would be subject to the design and environmental criteria of Policy HS2³. In these circumstances I consider that no further change to Policy GB4 is necessary.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.269 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the insertion of new Policy GB4 in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/005 (Policy text) and ALT2/GREEN BELT/004 (Policy number), but that no further modification be made in response to Counter-objection 215/B.

¹ ALT/GREEN BELT/005 (CD056, page 52), where it was erroneously numbered Policy GB3.

² ALT2/GREEN BELT/004 (CD057, page 8), which corrected the Policy number to GB4.

³ Policy HS2 - Criteria for New Housing Developments, as proposed to be amended under ALT/HOUSING/002 (CD056, page 32). Criterion (i) deals with matters of scale, (ii) with the effect of the proposal on its surroundings, and (iv) with landscaping and boundary treatment.

POLICY GB5 (FIRST ALTERATIONS) - EXTENSION OF EXISTING DWELLINGS IN THE GREEN BELT¹

COUNTER-OBJECTION: 215/C Wirral Green Belt Council

Summary of Objection

7.270 Policy GB5 is too rigid, and should refer to the consideration of special circumstances. In particular, the 50% maximum enlargement figure may be inappropriately large for large dwellings and unnecessarily small for small ones.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.271 Policy GB2 as proposed to be amended² acknowledges that special circumstances may occasionally arise in the consideration of development in the Green Belt. Criterion (iv) of that policy refers to the extension of dwellings under Policy GB5, and extensions which go beyond the limits laid down in Policy GB5 can only therefore be permitted under 'very special circumstances'. A presumption in Policy GB5 in favour of a 50% increase in the size of dwellings seems to me to be not unreasonable for small dwellings; if a dwelling were so small that a larger than 50% enlargement were considered necessary, then consideration would have to be given to whether or not such circumstances constituted 'very special circumstances'.

7.272 A 50% enlargement of a dwelling which was already of a considerable size could raise issues of visual impact. The Council maintain that because the Reasoned Justification (paragraph 7.23) refers to consideration being given to whether an extension is in keeping with or alternatively disproportionate to the existing dwelling enables those issues to be dealt with. However, if the Policy is really to deal with those matters, then reference should be made to them in the Policy itself and not just in the supporting text. In this respect therefore I support the Objector's view that the Policy should be amended.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.273 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the insertion of Policy GB5 in the following form:

'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'

and of the Reasoned Justification in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/006.

¹ This policy is proposed under ALT/GREEN BELT/006 (CD056, page 53).

² Policy GB2 - Guidelines for Development in the Green Belt (ALT3/GREEN BELT/001 (CD205, page 3).

POLICY GB6 (FIRST ALTERATIONS) - HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN INFILL VILLAGES IN THE GREEN BELT¹

COUNTER-OBJECTION: 093/B The Leverhulme Estate

Summary of Objection

7.274 Policy GB6 which outlines the guidance about existing villages in the Green Belt in PPG2 *Green Belts*² is superfluous. The policy wording and supporting text should be combined with Proposal GB7³ to provide a clear policy statement about the treatment of built development in defined villages in the Green Belt. PPG2 does not limit infilling development to housing development, and Policy GB6 should therefore, be made broader by deletion of the reference to housing.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.275 A published change to Policy GB6⁴ removes the reference to housing as distinct from other forms of development, both in the title and body of the Policy. Although the Policy could be combined with Proposal GB7 I see no reason why in terms of clarity and ease of use of the UDP as a document, it should not remain separate from (but close to) the Proposal. This is an approach taken generally throughout the UDP.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.276 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the insertion of Policy GB6 and its Reasoned Justification in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/007 and ALT2/GREEN BELT/006.

¹ This policy is proposed under ALT/GREEN BELT/007 (CD056, page 54).

² PPG2, paragraph 2.11.

³ Policy GB7 - Infill Villages in the Green Belt (ALT/GREEN BELT/008 (CD056, page 55)).

⁴ ALT2/GREEN BELT/006 (CD057, page 10).

**POLICY OMISSION (DEPOSIT PLAN) - Land at Barnston and Thingwall
PROPOSAL GB7 (FIRST ALTERATIONS) - INFILL VILLAGES IN THE GREEN
BELT¹ - Landican, Barnston, Brimstage, Raby, Storeton and Thornton Hough**

OBJECTION: 082/7 North West Water

COUNTER-OBJECTIONS: 019/A Mr J Robinson² 093/C to G The Leverhulme Trust
215/D Wirral Green Belt Council 301/A Mr & Mrs G G Andrews
302/A Barnston Conservation Society 303/A Miss E H Bateson
304/A Mr & Mrs Blinkhorn 305/A Mr C B Davies 306/A Mr R T Fryer
307/A Mr W Leach 308/A Mr & Mrs Mycock 309/A Mr & Mrs J O'Grady
310/A Mr E S Proffitt 311/A Mr R J Skinner 312/A Mr T D Studdart
313/A Annette Taylor 314/A Sir Malcolm Thornton MP 315/A Y Thornton
316/A Mr & Mrs W Wright

Summary of Objections

- 7.277 A policy should be introduced into the UDP providing for infill development in Barnston village centre, along Storeton Lane, Barnston and Barnston Road, Thingwall and covering the site of the former Thingwall Children's Hospital. This would be consistent with the guidance in PPG2 *Green Belts*³. These groups of houses and other development constitute a 'village'. It might be appropriate to define suitable 'infill' boundaries for these areas (082/7).
- 7.278 Proposal GB7 should be deleted, as it establishes policy which is too rigid. It sets a presumption in favour of infill housing development, whereas each application should be considered on its merits. Villages in the Green Belt are vulnerable to loss of character, and infill development could potentially cause such harm. The spacious character of villages depends on spacious plots and trees, features destroyed by infill development. Such development must be appropriate to the site and locality (215/D).
- 7.279 The Leverhulme Trust ('the Trust') owns land in Landican⁴, Barnston, Brimstage, Raby, Storeton and Thornton Hough. UDP Green Belt controls would unduly restrict proposals

¹ As proposed under ALT/GREEN BELT/008 (CD056, page 55).

² Although this Counter-objection refers to Policy GB7 it is ostensibly an objection which advocates the removal of a specific site from the Green Belt and its allocation for housing purposes. It is therefore dealt with elsewhere in the Green Belt Chapter of this report (pages 152-153).

³ PPG2, paragraph 2.11.

⁴ The Council point out that no express reference to Landican was made by the Objector in the representations made during the official period for representations following the publication of the First Alterations, and thus consideration should not be given to that settlement as subsequent evidence given at the inquiry did not support a 'duly made' counter-objection. Whilst this may strictly be correct, I consider that it would be generally unhelpful in the assessment of the villages in which the Objector has a significant interest as a major landowner for Landican to be omitted, and I therefore deal with it in this section of the report.

for small infill or 'rounding off' developments in these villages and thus by preventing consolidation of the settlements adversely affect their future wellbeing.

- 7.280 In particular, the defined envelopes of Barnston and Thornton Hough do not represent the true extent of the built-up areas of these villages; the areas have been defined too tightly, with no possible sites for development. These villages should instead be inset into the Green Belt and their boundaries enlarged. Brimstage, Raby and Storeton should also be inset into the Green Belt. Failing that, the villages should become infill villages under Proposal GB7. Landican should be made an infill village (093/C to G).
- 7.281 Barnston should be removed from the list of infill villages under Proposal GB7, because infill development within the defined envelopes would damage Barnston's Green Belt character and the village is already overdeveloped. There is excessive traffic and further development would affect wildlife. There is poor public transport and only one shop. Property values would be reduced (301/A to 316/A).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.282 PPG2⁵ states that the UDP should treat existing villages in one of three ways. They should be 'washed over' by the Green Belt if only 'appropriate' development would be allowed⁶; 'washed over' and listed, or inset if infilling development would be allowed; and inset where limited development/expansion would be allowed. Thus the status given in the UDP to the subject settlements will depend upon the type and extent of development which might be permitted in each settlement, which to my mind should be largely influenced by the layout, framework and character of the settlement and its relationship with or role in the Green Belt.

7.283 Not all Green Belt villages are characterised by houses in large plots; infill development may sometimes increase cohesiveness of built development where considered beneficial or acceptable. Any new development in the villages listed under Proposal GB7 would be subject to Policy GB6⁷, and in consequence to the appropriate criteria in Policy HS2⁸. Under these policy constraints development in those villages will be capable of and indeed should be considered on its merits. The status of infill villages is supported by national planning guidance and I therefore consider that Proposal GB7 has a proper place in the UDP.

⁵ In paragraph 2.11 of PPG2.

⁶ As specified in paragraph 3.4 of PPG2.

⁷ Policy GB6 - (Housing) Development in Infill Villages in the Green Belt, as proposed under ALT/GREEN BELT/007 (CD056, page 54) and ALT2/GREEN BELT/006 (CD057, page 10).

⁸ Policy HS2 - Criteria for New Housing Development, as proposed to be amended by ALT/HOUSING/002 (CD056, page 32).

Landican

7.284 This small hamlet stands on its own in open countryside to the south of the A552 Woodchurch Road and to the west of the A551 Arrowe Park Road. It is largely agricultural in character and comprises two clusters of dwellings and outbuildings, one on either side of Landican Lane. The Trust's 'Village Development Plan' identifies a single site for possible infill, and it is maintained that this could assist in creating a sense of enclosure (when viewed from the Lane) between buildings identified as being of possible conversion potential and paddock/garden land behind dwellings adjoining the Lane.

7.285 My impression of Landican is whilst groups of buildings do provide some measure of enclosure from Landican lane, small incidental plots between and around the buildings also make a significant contribution to the character of the hamlet. I therefore see no pressing need to increase the degree of enclosure in order to 'strengthen' the character of the settlement. Whilst some buildings may be suitable for conversion there is also no case in my view to consider 'new build' development in order to sustain the settlement as a community; there appear to be no service uses or community facilities there. I do not therefore consider that the Objector's case for making Landican an infill village under Proposal GB7 to be justified.

Barnston and Thingwall

7.286 The Council propose that two housing areas outside the Conservation Area at Barnston, in the Overdale Avenue and Woodland Drive areas, should be given infill village status under Proposal GB7⁹. There appears to be only limited scope for infill development in these areas which are more suburban in character than the core of the village. Consequently I am not convinced that such infill development as may be permitted in these areas would have any of the consequences envisaged in Counter-objections 301/A to 316/A and I therefore consider that these areas should remain listed under Proposal GB7.

7.287 The areas of suburban housing referred to in the preceding paragraph fall within the areas proposed for 'infill' treatment in Objection 082/7. The enlarged areas also include low density frontage development on Storeton Lane and a small enclave of houses at Holmwood, Thingwall. Infill status to the Storeton Lane housing could in my view result in infilling which would harmfully change the character of Storeton lane by introducing more intrusive, higher density development. I do not therefore favour this area being included within the infill boundaries for Barnston. Similar status given to the Holmwood enclave is not in my view justified owing to the very limited opportunities for infill development there and the detachment of this small housing area from the larger area proposed by the Council for infill status in the Woodland Drive area.

7.288 The Trust considers that the core of the village including most of the Conservation Area and plots on the south side of Storeton Lane should be within a development boundary and that the village should be 'inset'. The Trust identifies potential development opportunities within

⁹ As shown on Plan GB7/1 under ALT/GREEN BELT/008a (CD056, following page 55).

suggested development boundaries. Of these, plots on Storeton Lane lie between the core of the village and low density housing. To incorporate this land into the development boundary could to my mind result in consolidated development on Storeton Lane harmful to the character of the Conservation Area and Green Belt. From my observations I consider that development there would also raise issues of access and traffic on a narrow, constricted part of Storeton Lane.

7.289 A 'possible infill' plot is identified on the south western outskirts of the village. However I do not see how its development could reasonably be described as infilling, as there is open land to the south. I do not therefore consider that such a development would be integral with the village framework. Lastly, a plot for 'possible infilling/rounding off' is shown on Barnston Road opposite Christ Church. Whilst development here could be loosely termed as a rounding off, it seems to me that it might run against one of the specified objectives of the Conservation Area, namely the retention of the character, setting and group value of imposing buildings in spacious grounds focused in a loose square around the church precincts¹⁰. I am not therefore convinced that development opportunities exist which would be such as to preserve or enhance the character of Barnston village or be otherwise acceptable as to justify the village being inset into the Green Belt or the areas identified under Proposal GB7 being extended.

Brimstage

7.290 Brimstage is a small linear village washed over by the Green Belt in the UDP and at the northern end of the Thornton Hough Area of Special Landscape Value (ASLV)¹¹. The development opportunities identified by the Trust are mainly conversions, but an 'infill' site is shown on the Trust's 'village development plan' at the eastern end of the village.

7.291 It seems to me that any building conversions could be considered under Policy GB3 as proposed to be amended¹², even if the Green Belt status of Brimstage were not to change. Although the remains of a wall within the 'infill' site suggests that a building could have once stood on the site, the site appears open and is adjoined by open land to the east. Any new development would in my view erode the rural character of the village approaches on this eastern side. I do not therefore regard this land as a justifiable development opportunity.

7.292 The village is rural in character, and undeveloped land south of Brimstage Road within the development boundaries identified by Trust could result in new development there likely materially to change that character. I do not therefore support the Trust's proposal that the village should be inset. No other genuine infill plots have been identified which would assist the Objector's fall-back position that the village could be listed under Proposal GB7. I therefore consider that there should be no change in the Green Belt status of Brimstage.

¹⁰ Criterion (iv) of Policy CH21 - Barnston Village Conservation Area.

¹¹ Proposal LA2/4.

¹² Policy GB3 - Re-use of Buildings in the Green Belt, as proposed by ALT/GREEN BELT/003 (CD056, page 49) and ALT2/GREEN BELT/002 (CD057, page 6).

Raby

7.293 Raby has a fairly compact and cohesive core around a number of intersecting country roads. It is washed over by the UDP Green Belt but lies outside the Thornton Hough ASLV. The Trust's 'village development plan' draws a fairly tight development boundary around the village. However this encloses a largely undeveloped area surrounded by public roads between *The Wheatsheaf* Inn and a cluster of houses at the western end of the village, part of which is identified as serving as a village green. Potential development sites are identified to the south of the green and to the south of *The Wheatsheaf* and its yard.

7.294 The conversion opportunities identified by the Trust would if taken forward, consolidate the built development east of the village core. However as with Brimstage, such initiatives do not add to the case for changing the Green Belt status of Raby. The Council contend that development of the site to the south of *The Wheatsheaf* would 'compete for attention' with the public house. Whilst not wishing to give this building any less accord than it deserves, I find difficulty in reaching the same conclusion in the absence of detailed proposals. Development of that site could in my view broadly fit the definition of limited infill¹³. Consolidating development in a part of the village which already contains an aggregation of varied buildings need not weaken 'the cohesive role of the village pub' if sensitively designed to respect the character of the village, which I note has no Conservation Area.

7.295 I recognise that the development suggested by the Trust 'to reinforce sense of enclosure of green' could be argued not strictly to fall within the UDP's definition of infill. I agree that the trees adjoining the central space are attractive features; but I am not convinced that the space merits preservation in its entirety under all circumstances. 'The green' identified by the Objector might be enhanced by suitable development on its southern side; despite the presence of the trees and of walls it appears to me that this space might benefit from a strengthening of its defining features on the southern side. Any proposal should of course be subject to Policy GB6 and therefore to the appropriate criteria in Policy HS2.

7.296 Whilst the inseting of Raby could bring about conditions which might relax the Council's control over new development to an extent which resulted in loss of village character, its definition as an infill village would in my view be an appropriate way to facilitate the type of modest development initiatives the Objectors consider may arise. Such an outcome would not in my judgement adversely affect the openness or character of the Green Belt. I consider the realistic development boundaries suggested by the Trust appropriate in the circumstances.

Storeton

7.297 Storeton village for the purposes of Counter-objection 093/F comprises the main settlement east of Lever Causeway. 'Washed over' by the Green Belt, it is a varied and fairly

¹³ Policy GB6 - Housing Development in Infill Villages in the Green Belt (as proposed in ALT/GREEN BELT/007 (CD056, page 54)) defines infill development as 'development filling a small gap within the defined built-up envelope of the village'. PPG2 refers to such development as 'limited infilling'.

extensive collection of buildings in residential, agriculture or commercial use. The Council emphasise the enclosed character of routes into the village centre, and attach importance to the protection of an open view towards the south-west offering visual relief at the village centre. The Trust describes that view as distant, referring to the weak and dispersed built up edge to the village in its south-western face; restoration of a 'neglected' pond and measures to give the village centre more definition and a sense of enclosure are suggested.

7.298 The Trust's 'village development plan' defines a development boundary which encompasses most of the buildings in the village. Apart from conversions the only development site identified by the Trust would effectively remove the broad view towards the south west. I accept that such an open view is pleasant, but its loss might in my view be outweighed by the greater cohesion given to the village centre by a small frontage development on the identified site, strengthening what appears to me to be rather a weak point in the village 'townscape'.

7.299 Like Raby, a decision to inset Storeton into the Green Belt could bring about conditions which might relax the Council's control over new development to an extent which resulted in loss of village character. However, I believe that limited frontage development of an appropriate design and scale on the site identified by the Trust could be accommodated within the terms of Policy GB6 and, as appropriate, HS2 and could benefit the village character. I therefore consider that Storeton should be listed as an infill village under Proposal GB7.

Thornton Hough

7.300 Thornton Hough is a village of moderate size and distinctive character which contains a range of services and facilities and a Conservation Area covering most of the village. The Council appear to recognise these factors in their proposal to list it under Proposal GB7¹⁴. The Trust considers that the village should be inset into the Green Belt and its development boundary slightly extended by incorporation of land near Hill Top Farm and adjoining Smithy Hill.

7.301 The Hill Top Farm site is a paddock on a back road north of the village centre. It lies to the north of the farm buildings and to the south of a detached house set in a large garden. Although it affords open views of open land to the north, this view is not one I would regard as of great public significance. Although the garden to the north is large the development of the subject plot could in my view be acceptable as infill development under Policy GB6. There is therefore a case in my view for incorporating it within the village development boundary.

7.302 The land adjoining Smithy Hill is actively used as allotments, although not protected under Proposal GR4¹⁵. However, the site is protected from inappropriate development by its Green Belt status, and lies within the Thornton Hough Conservation Area, although Policy

¹⁴ ALT/GREENBELT/008 and Plan GB7/2 (ALT/GREEN BELT/008c), CD056, page 55 and page facing p 56).

¹⁵ Proposal GR4 - Allotments to be Protected from Development.

CH15¹⁶ does not expressly preclude its redevelopment. The Trust identifies the site as being suitable for 'sympathetic development opportunities to provide off-street car parking and garaging for existing dwelling'. However in view of its active allotment use I have no evidence which would suggest that this state of affairs should cease and I do not therefore consider that the site's incorporation within the village development boundary is justified. As I have concluded that the only other development potential identified by the Objector can be accommodated within Policy GB6, there is no case in my view for any change in the proposed status of Thornton Hough as an infill village under Proposal GB7 to become a village inset into the Green Belt.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.303 I recommend

- (a) that the UDP be modified by the insertion of Proposal GB7 in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/008 subject to:
 - (i) the amendment of that Proposal by the addition of Raby and Storeton,
 - (ii) the insertion of supporting maps relating to those villages with boundaries based on those suggested by the Objector and
 - (iii) the amendment of Plan GB7/3 by the incorporation into the Thornton Hough village boundary of land adjacent to Hill Top Farm;
- (b) that no other modification be made in response to Objection 082/7 and Counter-objections 093/C to G, 301/A to 316/A and 215/D.

¹⁶ Policy CH15 - Thornton Hough Conservation Area.

POLICY OMISSION - AGRICULTURAL WORKERS' DWELLINGS

OBJECTIONS: 121/16 MAFF 120/7 National Farmers' Union

Summary of Objections

7.304 The UDP does not contain any policy about new agricultural dwellings for key workers.

Assessment and Conclusions

7.305 The Council's proposal to insert a new Policy GB10 and Reasoned Justification to remedy this omission¹ appears to satisfy the Objections in the main, although one of the Objectors (121/16) envisages that the policy would be placed in the Agriculture Section. However, as nearly all agricultural holdings in the Wirral fall within the Green Belt I see no objection to the policy being placed in the Green Belt Section.

7.306 The other Objector has subsequently criticised Policy GB10 (not as part of a duly made Counter-objection) so far as the requirement in Criterion (i) is concerned that an application for a key worker's dwelling be supported by an appraisal from an agricultural development consultancy. Although in theory it might be sufficient for clear and comprehensive information about the need for the new dwelling to be provided by the applicant, I accept that in practice this essential information is most likely to originate from a consultant or from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

7.307 PPG7 *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development* states that agricultural consultants may be able to give advice, and suggests that local planning authorities may wish to prepare a select list of consultants likely to provide independent and unbiased advice². I do not feel in these circumstances that the requirement of Criterion (i) is such a burden on an applicant for planning permission that it ought to be deleted from Policy GB10.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.308 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the insertion of Policy GB10 and its Reasoned Justification (paragraphs 7.31 to 7.33) in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/011.

¹ Policy GB10 - Key Workers Dwellings in the Green Belt (ALT/GREEN BELT/011 (CD056, p 59)).

² PPG7 (1997), Annex I, paragraphs I22 and I23.

**POLICY OMISSION - REMOVAL OF AGRICULTURAL OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS
POLICY GB11 (FIRST ALTERATIONS) - REMOVAL OF AGRICULTURAL
OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS¹**

OBJECTIONS: 120/6 National Farmers Union 121/23 MAFF

COUNTER-OBJECTION: 121/A MAFF

Summary of Objections

- 7.309 The UDP does not contain any policy relating to the removal of agricultural conditions (120/6, 121/23).
- 7.310 The reference to a 'substantial period' in Criterion (i) of Policy GB11 needs clarification (121/A).

Assessment and Conclusions

7.311 Policy GB11 would remedy the omission claimed in Objections 120/6 and 121/23. One Objector had envisaged that such a policy should be placed in the Agriculture Section of the UDP Written Statement; however as nearly all agricultural holdings in the Wirral District fall within the Green Belt I see no objection to the Policy being in the Green Belt Section. The Council have published a change to the Reasoned Justification for Policy GB11 (paragraph 7.34)² which suggests that the term 'substantial period' might be taken to be 12 months. I consider this to be a realistic clarification of that term.

Inspector's Recommendation

7.312 I recommend that the UDP be modified by the insertion of Policy GB11 in accordance with ALT/GREEN BELT/012 and its Reasoned Justification in accordance with ALT2/GREEN BELT/009.

¹ As proposed under ALT/GREEN BELT/012 (CD056, p 60).

² ALT2/GREEN BELT/009 (CD057, p 13).