



Merseyside
County Council

Merseyside Green Belt Local Plan

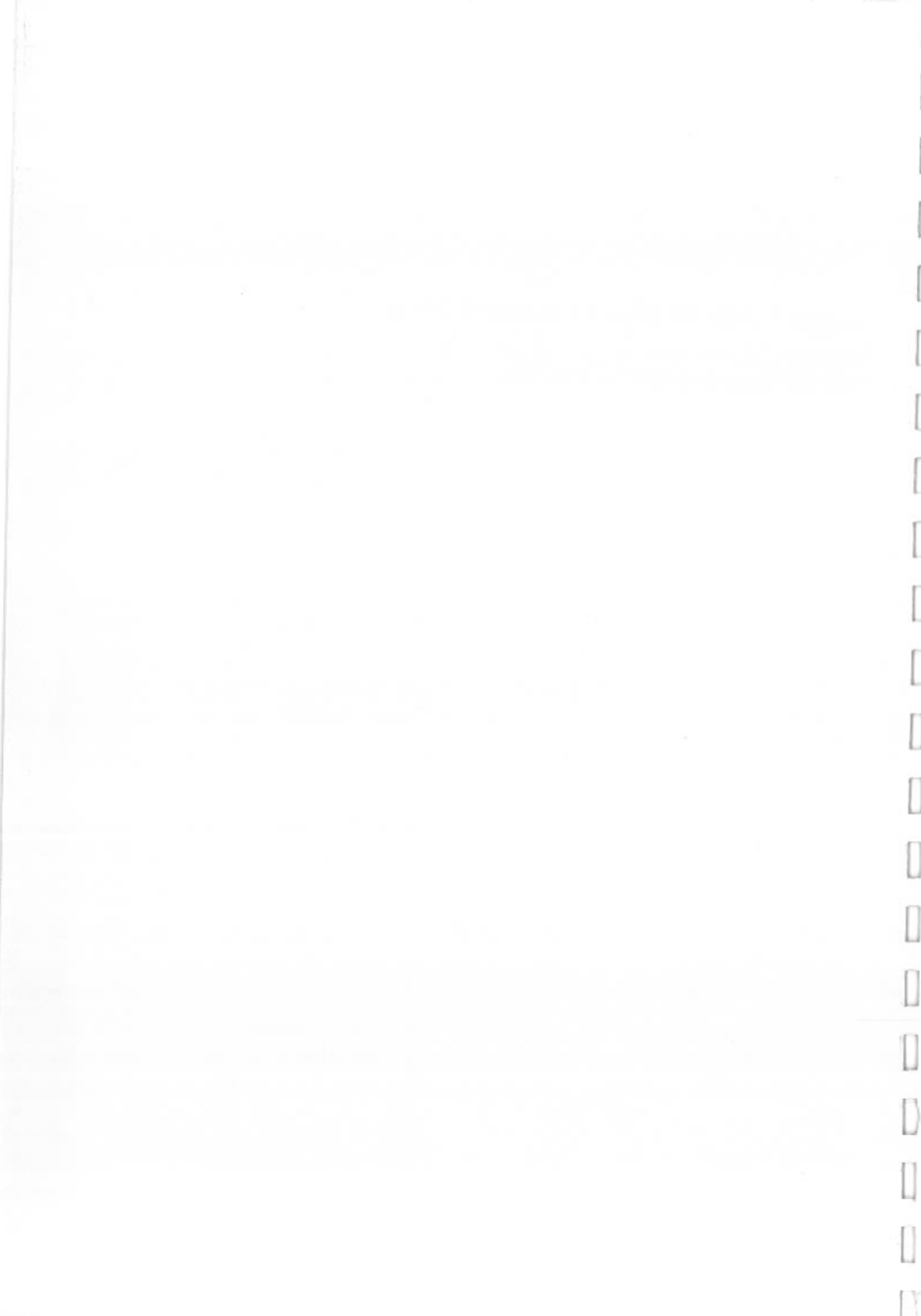
Report of the Inspector on objections
and representations to the Plan

June 1983

CERTIFIED A TRUE COPY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. K. Wilson'.

County Solicitor and
Secretary



MERSEYSIDE COUNTY COUNCIL

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971

MERSEYSIDE GREEN BELT SUBJECT PLAN

REPORT OF LOCAL INQUIRY INTO REPRESENTATIONS

Inspector: C DANBY ARICS MRTPI

Date of inquiry: 21 September to 11 November 1982

Tollgate House
Houlton Street
BRISTOL
BS2 9DJ

21 March 1983

To the Chairman and County Councillors of the Merseyside County Council

MERSEYSIDE GREEN BELT SUBJECT PLAN - REPORT OF LOCAL INQUIRY

Mr Chairman and Councillors

1. On 21 September 1982 I opened the inquiry at the Sefton Town Hall at Bootle, into objections and representations which had been made to the Subject Plan. The inquiry continued until the afternoon of 11 November and on 12 November I made some unaccompanied visits to the few sites I had not already seen. During the course of the inquiry I had visited and inspected most of the subject land, on some occasions being driven round by the Programme Officer, all the participants being willing that in view of the great number of sites to be visited, the visits should be otherwise unaccompanied.

2. A pre-inquiry meeting had been held on 2 September with your officers and some of the objectors and this proved useful in that a programme was arranged which in the event seemed to meet everyone's convenience. Your officers and those of the Borough Councils were most helpful to me, and I am sure, to the other participants, and in particular the work of the Programme Officer, Mr R E Campion, contributed to the smooth running of the inquiry. The Council's case was conducted by the Senior Assistant Solicitor, Mr N S McGinn, and Mr J P Wesencraft, Principal Planning Officer, had the main task of responding to the representations made.

3. There was unanimous acceptance of the concept of the Green Belt, the discussion ranging broadly about principles (the relationship with Structure Plan policies, the permanence or otherwise of the boundaries, the degree of "tightness" at the urban fringe and so forth), and secondly, the exclusion or inclusion of specific parcels of land. Although at the inquiry these aspects inevitably overlapped, I consider that the clarity of this report might benefit if the discussions about principles are rehearsed first and conclusions drawn before the individual sites are dealt with. Thus Part 1 of the report deals with general principles and the strategy adopted in the draft Plan, while succeeding Parts deal with specific parcels of land on a District basis. Part 1 is written on a topic basis, outlining the main arguments advanced by the participants and the Council's response on each topic followed by my conclusions and recommendation. The succeeding Parts set out the gist of the representations made by objectors on the specific sites, the Council's replies and my conclusions and recommendations. The reports of the cases made are necessarily brief, but I hope fully represent the views expressed, and where I make recommendations to change the Plan, it is not only in trying to be fair to objectors but, I believe, in the general public interest; the acceptance or otherwise of these recommendations is now a matter for your County Council.

4. Not all those persons making representations to the draft Plan were present or represented at the inquiry but their written submissions are dealt with, again on a District basis, in the relevant Part of the report. There is a general page index to

the cases at the front of the report and a list of appearances, documents, plans and photographs referred to is attached.

I have the honour to be
Mr Chairman and Councillors
Your obedient Servant

C. Danby

C DANBY
Inspector

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PART 1 - GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND GREEN BELT POLICY

1.1 The County Council had, at a meeting on 8 June 1982, proposed certain modifications to the Green Belt Plan, mainly as a result of representations received. These included sites to be added to the Green Belt in the districts of Sefton, Knowsley, St Helens and Wirral and sites to be excluded in these districts except Knowsley. In the Written Statement the title of Policy 14 was to be amended to read "New Industrial and Commercial Developments and Extensions" and a new Policy 16 inserted entitled "Public Services and Statutory Undertakers", subsequent policies being renumbered. Policy 23 relating to development outside the Green Belt was to be deleted but included as an appendix to the Plan as was Policy 24 relating to land at Crossens Marsh. The full details of these modifications are contained in a separate sheet appended to the Written Statement; the site specific modifications were the subject of further objection or representations which are dealt with later in this report, but the amendments relating to the policies in the Written Statement were not challenged.

1.2 I recommend that the proposed modifications to the Subject Plan Written Statement relating to Policy 14, a new Policy 16, renumbering and the deletion of Policies 23 and 24 be adopted and the Written Statement amended accordingly.

1.3 The Metropolitan Borough Councils fully supported the proposed Green Belt boundaries with some fairly minor exceptions (apart from St Helens Borough Council who wish to see a site for high technology industry near Haydock) and very few comments had been received from the Parish and Town Councils or the neighbouring planning authorities. The main objectors to the way in which the Green Belt boundaries have been drawn were the House-Builders' Federation (on behalf of Members in the North-West and Liverpool Regions), Messrs Edmond Kirby and Sons, Chartered Surveyors, (on behalf of various landowners) and Mr K A Whittacker representing several objectors, although the arguments raised in these cases were adopted in some part by many of the other objectors and are dealt with where appropriate in succeeding parts of this report. Following the opening of the inquiry the County Council witness gave evidence outlining the relationship of the Green Belt to the approved County Structure Plan, the Regeneration Strategy, the Housing Policies, adequacy of land supply in relation to building rates, economic policies and land for industry - in short, the policies and assumptions leading up to the drafting of the Green Belt boundary; this part of the report examines the discussion relating to these matters.

THE "TIGHTNESS" OF THE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

1.4 That the Green Belt boundary had been drawn too tightly around the urban area with no account taken of the future needs of the population beyond the Structure Plan period (1986) was the main objection by the House-Builders' Federation. This criticism was also adopted and elaborated by Messrs Edmond Kirby and Son, Mr K A Whittacker and others on behalf of their clients. The 2 main areas of disagreement were i. that adequate house building land to meet the requirements of Structure Plan Policy 8.36 had been provided outside the Green Belt, and that this land would be likely to be sufficient for a number of years beyond the existing Structure Plan period, and ii. that as a consequence of drawing the Green Belt tightly around the urban area, land may need to be released from the Green Belt at some future date to accommodate new development, ie that the proposed boundary would need to be altered within the decade. The Federation and many other objectors believe that the Green Belt boundary should be drawn on a line of some permanence if the public and developers are to have confidence in it. A minimum strategic Green Belt should be determined, of sufficient robustness to allow flexibility for future land allocations outside of it. Circular 42/55 says that the purpose of Green Belts is to check "the unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas" and safeguard "the surrounding countryside against further encroachment", while Circular 50/57 provides guidance on the definition of the inner edge of the boundary ... " ... the edge of notation will mark a long term boundary for development" and

"There may be some pockets of land, between the town and the Green Belt which are not to be developed within the present Plan period but which could be developed later without prejudice to the Green Belt. It would be misleading to allocate such areas now, but to include them in the Green Belt for the time being might give rise to difficulties and undermine public confidence in the Green Belt at a later date if it were then decided to allocate the land for development". This Circular suggested a draft paragraph for the Written Statement explaining how the pockets of land would be treated ... "In order to keep amendment of the Green Belt boundary to a minimum the inner boundary has been defined to leave unallocated certain areas of land between the Green Belt and the development proposed in the Plan: these areas may later be allocated to meet demands for development beyond the present period of the Plan".

1.5 The Federation pointed out that the 1962 MHLG publication, 'The Green Belts', had reviewed the situation and given a clear indication as to an appropriate time-scale, thus: "A Green Belt is an area of land which is kept open by a permanent and severe restriction on building. "Ministerial decisions in the past had implied that some stringent protection other than Green Belt is necessary where development may be needed in the future, thus preventing development until such need arose. The policies contained in the Open Land: Rural Economy section of the County Structure Plan, in particular Policies 10.52 and 10.54 provide this protection as do those in the Open Land: Countryside Amenity section. These could be strengthened in local plans covering the area, if necessary.

1.6 The Federation recommended that a minimal, strategic Green Belt be determined that would be long-lasting, and that sufficient flexibility be provided to allow development beyond the present Structure Plan period.

1.7 The County Council explained that the need for and purpose of a Green Belt in Merseyside is set out in Chapter 11 of the approved County Structure Plan, its general extent being described in Policy 11.4 and indicated on the Key Diagram. The first draft Subject Plan had been published in November 1980, and following 452 replies and comments, the revised proposals were put on formal deposit between December 1981 and February 1982. By May 1982 some 560 comments and objections had been received leading the Council to make the modifications already reported at paragraph 1.1 above. The proposed modifications had been advertised in July 1982, leading to a further 90 representations. It is the unresolved representations and objections which are being considered at the inquiry.

1.8 The Structure Plan strategy was one of urban regeneration concentrating investment and development within the urban county and particularly in those areas with the most acute problems, enhancing the environment and encouraging housing and economic expansion on derelict and disused sites. Development at the edge of the built-up areas would be restricted to a minimum and a reciprocal effort would be made to enhance and conserve the natural features of open land and agricultural land while ensuring that its capacity to meet needs for leisure, recreation and informal education was exploited. In many respects, the strategy reversed the previous planning policies for Merseyside which sought to disperse population and jobs to new and expanded towns or to the urban fringe. Such policies had been adopted mainly in the 1950's and 1960's during a period of economic growth; circumstances are very different today and the need for dispersal no longer exists.

1.9 The County Council said that the present strategy had received the unanimous support of the District Councils and of almost all interested parties in preference to 2 alternative strategies, namely "managed dispersal" and "passive decline", both of which had been considered and rejected by the Panel holding the Structure Plan EIP. The desirability of concentrating development within the urban areas in preference to green field sites had been accepted at a national level, not only through the approval of the Structure Plan but also by the decision to designate Liverpool, Wirral, Sefton

and St Helens as authorities receiving extra borrowing powers and grants under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978. There was also the decision to create an Urban Development Corporation on Merseyside and an Enterprise Zone at Speke.

1.10 While concern over the feasibility of the urban regeneration strategy in relation to resources and time scale had been expressed at the EIP, these had been recognised by the County Council through the intention to monitor progress in each policy sector so that adjustment to targets may be made in the light of experience and progress. It had been considered prudent to limit the Plan period to 1986 and to roll the Plan forward through a series of reviews. This approach had been fully endorsed by the EIP Panel and agreed by the Secretary of State. The approved Structure Plan makes it abundantly clear that the Green Belt is expected to support the urban regeneration strategy. Paragraph 5.17 states that "the County Council is drawing up a Green Belt plan to support its policies of limiting development on open land in country areas", and paragraph 10.1 says that "the establishment of a Green Belt around the urban area is the essential first step in reducing the development of open land for urban uses".

1.11 The Structure Plan Key Diagram shows the extent of the Green Belt in relation to the urban area and although it is not possible to translate the Diagram onto an Ordnance base map it is clear that the intention is to draw the Green Belt tightly round the built-up area. Only 4 representations had been made to the Green Belt proposals when the Structure Plan was placed on deposit in January 1980 and these related to the need to ensure an adequate supply of land for housing and industry while maintaining a tight approach, and to development control policies. The Panel did not consider that the Green Belt was an issue requiring detailed debate. The Secretary of State had confirmed the policies for the Green Belt subject to modifications of the policies for development in villages and the deletion of 2 areas, at Crossens Marsh/Marshide, Southport and the M53 corridor between Bidston and Woodchurch, pending the outcome of studies relating to appropriate uses and suitability for inclusion in the Green Belt. The conclusion must be that the Green Belt should be drawn in such a way as to reinforce the regeneration strategy by directing development into the existing towns.

1.12 The proposed Green Belt, extending across the Wirral peninsula~~and~~ and on the east side of the River Mersey in accordance with Policy 11.4 of the Structure Plan, wraps round the principal settlements and includes green wedges into the conurbation. There is a high degree of similarity between the extent of the Green Belt and that shown on the Key Diagram. Many of the relevant policies of the Structure Plan are repeated in the Written Statement to the Subject Plan or included in its appendix.

1.13 It is an integral part of the strategy that the Green Belt has been drawn tightly round the urban area, with the consequence that land may need to be released from the Green Belt at some future date. This eventuality is allowed for through the preparation of local plans but any amendment would need to conform with the basic principles of maintaining the separate identity and character of settlements and be compatible with the regeneration strategy. The guiding principles by which proposals for the release of green field sites would be considered are set down in the Structure Plan as being to:

- i. minimise the need for new services by promoting the use of spare capacity in existing services;
- ii. encourage the development of unused and derelict sites;
- iii. minimise the use of good quality agricultural land and protect farms of good structure;

iv. encourage the development of land with good access to public transport services, where this does not conflict with other aims;

v. encourage the development of land (for industry) in or near to areas of highest unemployment; and

vi. avoid areas of heritage landscape, woodland or land of ecological interest.

Thus any new peripheral development should strengthen the viability of the existing urban area.

1.14 Earlier green belts, such as those of the former Lancashire and Cheshire County Councils within Merseyside, had been formulated against a background of expanding population and a buoyant economy, with new towns, Town Development Schemes and over-spill areas; they were intended to form part of the development plans at that time. Such plans were intended to be reviewed (though not necessarily amended) at least once every 5 years, so that the Green Belt may be the subject of review in the same way as any other development plan or Structure Plan. It had been made clear in public statements that the Government, while attaching great importance to the Green Belts, were prepared to see boundaries amended where there were very strong reasons to justify such amendment; the Green Belt must be firm in principle but the boundaries may be flexible in detail. The case for taking land out of a Green Belt must be very strong, but this in turn implies that land should not be included in a Green Belt without good reason. It is the County Council's view that this justification is contained in the approved Structure Plan.

1.15 Within less than 10 years of the former Green Belt policies having been formulated both the population and economy of Merseyside had entered a period of decline. To attempt to draw a Green Belt which would endure for 20 years or so, or even into the 1990's, would require an assessment of the amount of land likely to be needed for private and public housing, industry and all other urban uses taking into account the social and economic factors which will influence demand and any changes in living styles which may arise. There would also need to be an assumption that these requirements could be distributed with a high degree of accuracy and that the timing and manner in which land is released can be adequately controlled. There was no guarantee that the present planning authorities would be any more successful in predicting land requirements and suitable locations into the 1990's than former authorities have been and certainly the Secretary of State did not wish to look beyond 1986 when he approved the Structure Plan in November 1980. In the past the presence of white land between the Green Belts and the allocated land provided a soft option to development and tended to be 'land banked' by developers, leading to a lack of capital investment in farming and to the break up of farm holdings. The need to support the approved regeneration policies and concern to protect good quality agricultural land with which the county endowed, were seen as overriding reasons for drawing a tight Green Belt here.

ADEQUACY OF LAND FOR DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE PROPOSED GREEN BELT

1.16 The main thrust of the argument advanced by the House-Builders' Federation was that insufficient land exists outside the proposed boundary to meet the allocations provided for in the approved Structure Plan and beyond 1986 only very limited amounts of housing land have been identified. A report on a Joint Study of Land for Private Housebuilding carried out by the County and District Councils and the Federation had been published in September 1982. Availability was determined having regard to the advice contained in Circular 9/80, the criteria being taken into account including:

- land must be free, or easily freed from planning, physical, and ownership constraints;

- land must be capable of being economically developed;
- land must be in areas where potential house buyers are prepared to live, and be suitable for a wide range of housing types which the market now demands;
- the housebuilding industry should be consulted especially on the rate at which houses can be marketed on each site over the next 5 year period.

This review afforded an examination of the 5 year supply of land as the requirement set out in Structure Plan Policy 8.36 only covers development up to 1986.

1.17 In relating the Review figures to the table in the Structure Plan, allowance has to be made for housing completions that have taken place in the period 1979-1981. On the criteria, the Federation agree with certain reservations, that the minimum dwelling figure as recorded in the Review is the land available for private housebuilding. Where on Category 1 and 2 sites there is a difference between minimum and maximum, this reflects that due to such things as marketing considerations, these sites or part capacity of sites would not be completed until post-1986. Thus the land supply is seen as follows:

Table 1 : Land Supply (hectares)

	Structure Plan Requirement	Completions 1979-81	Land Available 1981-86	Residual
Knowsley	136	23	123	+ 10
Liverpool	397	83	291	- 21
St Helens	166	43	103	- 20
Wirral	173	64	161	+ 52
Sefton	159	43	99	- 17
Total	1,031	256	777	+ 2

Note: Dwellings have been converted into hectares using the densities contained in paragraph 8.34 of the Structure Plan.

From Table 1 it can be seen that there appears to be insufficient land in 3 of the districts, and as the Review included all sites, allocated or likely to be allocated for housing, the study was comprehensive.

1.18 The main reservations held by the Federation in regard to the availability of sites were raised in a letter to the County Council dated 13 July 1982. They were:

- It would be wrong to assume that given certain market conditions the maximum number of houses referred to in the Review would always be built. The proximity of sites to each other, or their general location and size may still mean that despite high demand in general, phased development would still take place and total capacity would not be reached in 1986.
- Some of the land agreed for development would only be suitable on the attainment of a number of outside factors, including area improvement, land reclamation and confidence in a particular area.
- Category 1 land in the study is land immediately available for development with no constraints; Category 2 land is not immediately available because it has some constraints which require public sector action expected to make it available by the end of 1985/86. Land in these categories in the ownership of a private developer is very limited and the agreed availability is dependent upon ability to acquire, particularly from public bodies who own large percentages:

Table 2 : Land Available for Private Housebuilding, Categories 1 and 2 : Ownership by Districts

% of land in ownership	Liverpool	St Helens	Knowsley	Sefton	Wirral
Private developer	15	5	3.5	35	34.5
Other Private	19	49	14	11.5	36.5
District Council	47	32	25.5	38	19
Other Public	19	6.5	56.5	2.5	1
Other	0	7.5	0.5	10	9

1.19 Looking at the land supply post-1986 outside the proposed Green Belt boundary, a scarce situation is apparent:

Table 3 : Housing Land Supply, post-1986 (hectares)

	Residual from Table 1	Category 1+2 post-1986	Category 3	Total
Knowsley	10	16	27	53
Liverpool	0	57	45	102
St Helens	0	5	21	26
Wirral	52	17	1	70
Sefton	0	23	0	23

Note: Category 3 land is unlikely to be available within 5 years.

On the basis of construction rates achieved in the first 2 years of the Structure Plan period, the figures in Table 3 suggest that the housing land would last each district after 1986 the following periods:

Knowsley	4.6 years
Liverpool	2.5 "
St Helens	1.2 "
Wirral	2.2 "
Sefton	0.7 "

The conclusion must be drawn that the proposed Green Belt boundary allows little scope for future land allocations for housing development beyond the present Structure Plan period, and the Federation believe, insufficient in some instances during the period

1.20 In adopting the evidence of the Federation, Messrs Edmond Kirby and Sons, on behalf of their various clients, expressed the view that the proposed Green Belt act as a severe constraint in that sufficient suitable and marketable land for housing purposes was not being released. Development sites in Wirral and Sefton were continually being sought by developers but because the intention was to regenerate the inner urban areas, the release of land in those 2 districts was restricted. Demand for housing was being stifled in those areas where it was desired and thus the natural development of the County was being retarded. It was thought that as the boundary of the Green Belt, once it is established, will be considered as sacrosanct, the effect would be either to choke existing urban areas or for development to burst through, neither of which was desirable. Alternatively, where suitable land is unavailable for development and land within the inner urban areas considered as unattractive, the effect of the policies will be to drive developers to locations other than Merseyside resulting in the neglect of the County as a whole.

1.21 To consider that the Green Belt can, by restricting the availability of industrial land in the peripheral areas, foster investment and employment in the inner areas

is unrealistic and illustrates, Messrs Edmond Kirby and Sons believe, a misuse of the Green Belt concept by the local planning authorities.

1.22 The County Council explained that in distributing land for new housebuilding throughout the districts, account had been taken of the amount of land already allocated for development, the aim of the strategy to minimise the loss of good quality farmland and the need to re-use vacant and derelict land in the existing towns, together with the need to redress the imbalance of the distribution of privately owned houses. Hence it was proposed to restrict the release of land in Sefton and Wirral. It was also proposed to make an increased provision for private building in Knowsley and Liverpool which in turn would result in a reduction in the need to provide land in St Helens. This had been agreed by the Panel following the EIP into the Structure Plan. In order to conform with the Structure Plan housing policies the Green Belt must, therefore, at least allow sufficient land to be made available to meet the needs set out in Policy 8.36, located according to the principles of the regeneration strategy.

1.23 It was explained that Policy 8.36 of the Structure Plan set out the requirements for housing land for each district (at the date of survey) for the period between September 1979 and 1986; the figures were expressed in terms of land area being derived from the maximum end of the range of dwelling requirements presented in Row E of Structure Plan figure 33. It was a requirement for non-started sites and did not differentiate between private and public sectors. It had been possible to update the housing land requirement to the time of the submission of the Green Belt Subject Plan as a result of the August 1981 Housing Land Review (already referred to) and the Merseyside Structure Plan Housing Review 1981. The latter examined past and future trends in local authority housing resources, performance in the treatment of unsatisfactory housing and likely future housebuilding rates; the report will contribute towards a future review of Structure Plan policy and it gives some indication of likely future building rates in the County which can be compared with the current supply, and hence its likely duration. This in turn has a bearing on the likely duration of the Green Belt.

1.24 Private building nationally had declined recently due to the economic situation; however, output on Merseyside during the last 3 years fell by only 7% compared with 25% in the North West Region and 14% nationally, which suggests that there had been no overall lack of housing land within the County compared to most other areas. In detail there had been a reduction in the private building rate in Wirral and St Helens and especially in Sefton all of which experienced rapid suburban growth in the 1960's and early 1970's, while private building in Knowsley had remained steady; this decline had been largely offset by a rapid increase throughout the mid to late 1970's in Liverpool. The increase in private building in Liverpool had included the development of sites in the inner areas with the agreement of the City Council, while the fall in Sefton largely reflects a determination by the Borough Council to protect areas of valuable landscape and agricultural land.

1.25 On a general assumption that the economic recession has bottomed out and taking an optimistic view, it could now be expected that an economic recovery would take building rates back towards the levels of the early 1970's, and this assumption could be made for all districts except Liverpool for which an optimistic forecast would assume private building rates equivalent to the average of the past 3 years. A minimum forecast would assume that private building rates would remain as at present, with a fall in Liverpool to approximate to the activity there of the 1970's.

1.26 Ideally the forecast demand in the Housing Review should fall below the number of houses which the builders themselves consider they could build, and considerably below the maximum capacity of the sites available, to allow for a degree of choice. The comparisons of the forecast number of completions, the Federation assessment of sales plus LA and HA completions, and the capacity of the identified sites was as follows:

	Maximum Forecast completion 1981 Review	Likely output from identified sites	Capacity of identified sites and sites under construction
Knowsley	1,818	4,398	4,848
Liverpool	6,192	11,996	14,001
St Helens	3,245	3,874	4,247
Sefton	4,385	4,345	5,017
Wirral	5,922	6,686	7,201
Merseyside	21,552	31,299	35,314

All the surveys which have been undertaken by the Councils and the Federation suggest that sufficient land is available to meet likely requirements within the Structure Plan period without recourse to the release of land from the Green Belt, in the County Council's view.

1.27 Additional land may become available for residential purposes from a variety of sources such as the redevelopment of large houses in extensive grounds or infill development in gardens. Between 1975 and 1981 permission had been granted in Wirral for an average of 530 new dwellings each year on sites within existing residential areas, not previously identified. Such "windfall" sites exist in other districts although to a lesser extent, the average per year in St Helens being 30 dwellings, in Liverpool 600 and in Sefton 125, with a total average for the County of some 1,285 dwellings. It was thought that this rate of generation of such sites could continue for some time. In addition, other sites are being released through rationalisation programmes of institutions such as hospitals and schools and other public sector landowners.

1.28 The County Council were confident that the Green Belt proposals conform with the housing and other policies of the approved Structure Plan, and because of:

- a. the need to implement the urban regeneration strategy;
- b. the instruction of the Secretary of State to the Planning Authority to take total view of the situation in about 1985; and
- c. the need to conserve the character and quality of the remaining open land in Merseyside,

it was considered that the Green Belt now presented was the most appropriate for Merseyside. Representations seeking to exclude land from the Green Belt had been considered on the basis of whether the site assists in preventing the coalescence of neighbouring settlements and whether its inclusion would produce a more satisfactory boundary to the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND GREEN BELT POLICY

1.29 I have much sympathy with the generally accepted view that a Green Belt should have a degree of permanence. The concept is one which has in the past had the support of successive Governments and the general public. Once land had been included within an established Green Belt, only rarely was general development permitted and then only under very special circumstances or needs. This degree of permanence was of course possible only because the original boundary had been drawn fairly loosely leaving pockets of white land on which, at the time unforeseen, developments might take place. This was the concept of a "minimum strategic" Green Belt advocated by several of the objectors at the inquiry who saw support for their cases in paragraph 6 of Circular 50/ which states:

"There may be some pockets of land, between the town and the Green Belt, which are not to be developed within the present Plan period but which could be developed later without prejudice to the Green Belt. It would be misleading to allocate such areas now, but to include them in the Green Belt for the time being might give rise to difficulties and undermine public confidence in the Green Belt at a later date if it were then decided to allocate the land for development. Such areas may well be left as pockets of "white" land"

While Circular 50/57 (and the earlier Circular 42/55) remain the foundation for the identification and establishment of Green Belts, it is clear that circumstances and conditions have changed enormously since that advice was first given. In particular in Merseyside a Structure Plan has been approved which is attempting to solve very different problems from those intended to be tackled by earlier plans.

1.30 This Green Belt Subject Plan flows directly from the contents of Chapter 11 of the approved Structure Plan, which at paragraph 11.3 sets out what the intention is:

- check the outward spread of the built-up area, direct development into existing towns, and encourage their regeneration;
- ensure that towns and villages keep their individual character;
and
- safeguard the surrounding countryside, so that its potential for agriculture, nature conservation and recreation and its value as an amenity for townspeople is preserved.

Policy 11.4 says there will be 2 broad areas of Green Belt, in the Wirral Peninsular and to the east of the River Mersey, around the principal settlements and including green wedges into the conurbation, the Key Diagram indicating in a general way the extent of the Belt. While, because of the special problems and character of Merseyside which are fully set out and explored in the Structure Plan, the intention does depart and go beyond the advice in the Circulars, I am confident that the boundary chosen and now under discussion does reflect in general those aims and intentions. It is important to remember the very high proportion of built-up area as against open countryside in Merseyside, in this regard; if a "minimum strategic" Green Belt had been adopted it would have been an invitation in the longer term to further erode the already scarce open areas by encroaching onto the white land.

1.31 The policies adopted do, however, as many objectors said at the inquiry, leave very little space for flexibility or manoeuvre and this is clearly intentional and seems to me to reflect the County and Borough Councils' faith and belief in the integrity and ultimate success of the Structure Plan aims. In approval of the Structure Plan as the basis for a regeneration strategy up until 1986 with regular monitoring and a review in 1985, a degree of flexibility has been built in and this would be supplemented in the future by the preparation of local plans for specific areas of the County. In the meantime the Subject Plan would be a powerful and additional tool in preventing peripheral developments. While in changed circumstances in the future I believe it may be necessary to review a part or parts of the Green Belt boundary, for the most part it could be regarded as permanent and retain its status.

1.32 Another aspect dwelt on by several objectors was whether there was a real need for the additional "sledgehammer" policies of a Green Belt when so many aspects of development control were so firmly dealt with by the other policies in the Structure Plan. Indeed, it was said in evidence by the Council's witness, the Secretary of State had already confirmed his support for the regeneration policies by his decisions on planning appeals against the refusal of permission on green field sites,

irrespective of whether they had been included within Green Belt proposals by the former authorities or whether it was white land between those Green Belts and the urban area. The answer to this must be that there must be pockets of land which could not be caught by the present approved policies and, if not covered by a Green Belt, would attract further peripheral development. While such peripheral development is nowhere completely banned by the Structure Plan policies, building on such sites would provide an easy option which could only damage the strategy and make it more remote fulfilment.

1.33 It is clearly not for this report to attempt to make a detailed assessment of suitable land for development for housing purposes to meet the needs of the County for the remainder of the Structure Plan period and beyond but I must be satisfied that following approval of the Green Belt, the boundary for the most part can be relied upon, at least for the foreseeable future. It was argued at the inquiry, particularly by the House-Builders Federation, that an upturn in building rates could lead to a shortage of particular types of site very soon after the end of the Structure Plan period; further, that the predominance of "urban" as opposed to peripheral sites in the agreed survey lists would itself depress the building rate and leave some parts of the market unsatisfied. On the other hand, promised monitoring and review and the continued addition of "windfall" sites were seen by the authorities as providing sufficient leeway into the late 1980's at least. I believe that this is probably true for the County as a whole, and there is certainly insufficient evidence on which I could recommend major changes to the proposed Green Belt boundary, but in some parts of the area I think there may be cause for concern that all tastes and requirements of the housing market may not be satisfied, at least in the longer term.

RECOMMENDATION

1.34 In the light of these conclusions on general principles, which will be borne in mind during consideration of specific sites, I recommend that the Green Belt boundary generally remain as at present drafted.

SPECIFIC POLICIES IN THE WRITTEN STATEMENT

POLICY 1 - Development Control

1.35 Several written representations were submitted suggesting even stricter control on the type of developments which would normally be permitted within the Green Belt. I have noted, however, that the wording adopted follows generally the advice in the Circulars with an addition related directly to the "open land" policies in the Structure Plan. I am satisfied that the policy provides the necessary degree of control to ensure the achievement of the aims and intentions of the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

1.36 I recommend the retention of Policy 1 as drafted in the Written Statement.

POLICY 2 - CRITERIA TO BE APPLIED IN PERMITTING DEVELOPMENT

1.37 Representations by the Merseyside Friends of Cycling (W20), the Friends of the Earth (Wirral) (W26), the Pedestrians' Association (W97), Transport 2000 Northwest (25P), and Mr P R Fry of Birkenhead sought additional words in Policies 2(ii) and 2(iii) so that developments might be avoided which might cause danger to pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders or other people using the open areas for quiet enjoyment and

recreation. Increases of traffic on rural roads within the Green Belt should be prohibited. The submissions were made at the inquiry by Dr Roland Graham, Merseyside Cycling Campaign.

1.38 While the County Council had some sympathy with the views expressed, it was pointed out that the type and nature of traffic using public highways was not a matter which could be properly controlled under planning policies; it was a matter for the Highway Authorities and the Police. Where appropriate noise attributable to new developments would be controlled by the Planning Authorities.

INSPECTORS' CONCLUSIONS

1.39. There must be some inevitable conflict between the needs for road transport communication from one built-up area to another and the use and enjoyment of the Green Belt for recreation and quiet enjoyment, and I have noted that policies are being pursued to provide long-distance non-vehicular routes within the County. I am satisfied that as at present drafted the Policy would prevent all but appropriate and essential developments in the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

1.40 I recommend the retention of Policy 2 as drafted in the Written Statement.

POLICIES 6, 7 AND 8 - KEY WORKERS, NEW AND REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS

1.41 Mr W R Foster (S59) made written representations suggesting that these policies were not strong enough to ensure only acceptable development took place within the Green Belt. He thought standards of design generally poor and that the range of exceptions to the general rule against development too many to be sure unwanted building would not take place; agricultural buildings should be controlled.

1.42 The County Council have said that all applications for such dwellings are carefully scrutinised and limited occupation conditions imposed where appropriate. The policies were intended to keep new building to a minimum commensurate with the needs of the countryside.

INSPECTORS' CONCLUSIONS

1.43 A principle aim of the Green Belt is to contain the urban areas and prevent them encroaching further into the countryside and it should not stifle legitimate improvements or changes in the economy of the rural areas. I consider these policies essential to prevent unnecessary development.

RECOMMENDATION

1.44 I recommend the retention of the Policies 6, 7 and 8 as drafted in the Written Statement.

PART 2 - REPRESENTATIONS ON SPECIFIC SITES - SEFTON DISTRICT

2.1 At the commencement of this part of the inquiry, a representative of the Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council outlined negotiations which had taken place during consultation on the draft Plan and confirmed that there were no outstanding differences of opinion between the Borough and County Councils. The Borough welcomed the Plan and supported it.

SITE 1A AND 2A - CROSSENS MARSH AND MARSHSIDE MARSH, SOUTHPORT

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr I Brodie-Brown, Friends of Crossens Marsh

S263

Councillor S J Shaw

S261

Councillor D C Griffiths

S260*

Mr S D Eades, Save Our Shoreline, Southport, Association

S30

Freda E Whiteley

S58*

Mr P B Nowell

S60*

Catherine Kelly

S265

Note: *relied on written representations

2.2 This land, an extensive area of about 250 ha, is low-lying grassland to the north of Southport and it separates the town from the coast road. At the inquiry Mr I Brodie-Brown explained that the marshes formed a site of great ecological importance and was widely used by naturalists. There were 213 species of birds recorded and the marshes were frequented by a very large flock of swans; in winter, many ornithologists visited the area. The Structure Plan had, in paragraph 11.3 given protection to the area until a study had been completed which would lead to the adoption of a local plan; an "options" report had now been prepared and those options chosen by Council would not allow the area to be in the Green Belt. Mr S D Eades confirmed that the land needed protection and Mr John Ashworth said that the site was now the third most important site in Britain for observing Bewick Swans; photographs were submitted together with technical reports on the wildlife value and species present by Mr S J Riley and Mr P H Smith. Councillor S J Shaw thought there was no reason why the site should not be in the Green Belt, there was no reason to wait. Mr J S O'Law representing the West Lancashire District Council, said that a Green Belt was proposed in his area adjoining the County boundaries and was expected to be adopted soon.

2.3 The County Council said that over 2,000 ha of unenclosed saltmarsh and sandflats lying immediately to the north of the site was managed by the Nature Conservancy Council as a National Nature Reserve, while part of the site itself is included within the Ribble Estuary SSSI. The site had not been included in the Green Belt as Sefton Borough Council was aware of increasing pressure to release more land for development and to identify land suitable for waste disposal. The key issue was seen as the conservation value against other needs and the impact of the necessary tipping to raise the land levels for development. The importance of preserving a wedge of open land between Southport and the sea right into the heart of the resort had been recognised by the decision to include the marshes on the seaward side of the Coast Road within the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.4 In addition to the evidence in chief submitted to the inquiry I have studied the Local Plan Options Report prepared by the Borough Council, and I fully appreciate the stated needs of the area in terms of additional housing land, tipping space, industry and extensions of tourist facilities. I have noted that parts of the more southerly Marshside area are already devoted to leisure activities such as a golf course, and it appears to me that any developments of the kinds being considered would be better site there, related to existing development nearer the centre of the town. To the north-east of Marshside Road, however, the land including Crossens Marsh has much more affinity with the unenclosed marshes beyond the Coast Road and I consider it could quite properly be added to the Green Belt. This alone would not ensure its protection in wildlife conservation terms as the Green Belt would not preclude development of an open nature such as sports grounds and other leisure facilities, but it would be a safeguard against built development encroaching on the equally important areas to the north and west. It would be logical for the Green Belt in this locality to match up with that proposed nearby in Lancashire, (and it would not offend the options chosen by the Borough Council Committee during the course of the inquiry).

RECOMMENDATION

2.5 I recommend that land north-east of Marshside Road and north-west of the main drain (including Crossens Marsh) extending to the Coast Road, be included within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 3A - WELD ROAD, BIRKDALE

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by	reference
Mr M Braham, of Southport, on behalf of 100 local residents	S206
Mr J Wall, of Southport	S82*
Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation	S5*

Note: *relied on written representations

2.6 These objections relate to the exclusion of about 14 ha of mainly duneland to the north of the Green Belt as drawn at the Birkdale end of Southport. Mr Braham said many local residents would like to see this extension as it would prevent further encroachment by car parks and similar uses on the dune area. An unbroken tract of open land could be secured between the proposed Green Belt and Victoria Park thus maintaining the full length of Rotten Row free from development. This part of Southport had a unique character which should be preserved and the site had potential for nature conservation and recreation. The Lancashire Trusts' representations confirmed that part of this land had been recommended for inclusion in the Local Sites Register as an area of outstanding botanical interest.

2.7 The County Council pointed out that the boundary of the Green Belt was clearly defined in this vicinity by the traffic island at the junction of the Coast Road, Esplanade and Weld Road. To extend here would take the Green Belt into an area where the seaside resort activities become prominent, and a less well defined boundary would result.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.8 While I agree that the traffic island is a positive feature to mark the boundary, in either case the seaward limit of the Green Belt would remain undefined down to high water mark. Mr Braham's suggestion would take the boundary to an undefined line being a seaward extension of the path marking the southern edge of the tennis courts in Victoria Park and enclose all the objection land apart from the most northern portion of that referred to by the Trust. From the point of view of clarity, I do not think that there is much to choose between the present proposed boundary and that suggested. If the land were to be included in the Green Belt, most forms of built development could not occur but open recreational uses would not be barred. I think it important to contain built development nearer the town centre where provision is already made for tourists and retain the open sweep of land into Birkdale to the south.

RECOMMENDATION

2.9 I recommend that the land north-east of Weld Road and west of Rotten Row (more particularly shown on Mr Braham's objection plan) be added to the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 5A - LAND AT MOSS LANE NEAR POOLE HOUSE FARM, CROSSENS, SOUTHPORT

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of Scarisbrick Settlement

S57

2.10 This is a rectangular area of about 1 ha surrounded by trees fronting the south side of Moss Lane. The County boundary lies beyond Pool House Farm to the east and the proposed Green Belt extends across the land to the backs of properties in Southport to the west. Land adjoining the subject land on the east, south and west is in agricultural use and the Old Links golf course is to the south-west. For the objectors it was explained that the land had been used officially during the 1939/45 war for timber stocking since when it had been used commercially on the basis of temporary planning permissions. While agreeing that the Green Belt boundary followed a well defined line along the edge of the built-up area was a correct visual description, it was claimed that this land should be excluded as the present use for storage was incompatible with the Green Belt; the land was weed-infested and overgrown and could never be successfully returned to agriculture. If it remained within the Green Belt there must be an assumption that the existing use would be curtailed. A use not compatible with adjoining uses would be development for housing and an outline application had been submitted.

2.11 The Council said that the site was at the end of a ribbon of houses and if developed would form an isolated group surrounded by farmland, much of it of high value. A boundary enclosing the ribbon and the present site would make it very difficult to resist development of all the land south of Moss Lane up to the County boundary. That would be incompatible with the regeneration strategy and approved open land policies.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.12 Although the site may be untidy inside, from distant views it has the appearance of an overgrown area of woodland, not in itself incompatible with the Green Belt, nor would the designation as Green Belt affect in any way the claimed existing use situation. To exclude the site, either by insetting or by a connection via the road-side ribbon, would, in my opinion gravely weaken the boundary at an important strategic point to the east of Southport.

RECOMMENDATION

2.13 I recommend that Site 5A at Moss Lane be retained within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 6A - LAND BETWEEN LYNTON ROAD AND THE RAILWAY, SOUTHPORT

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Lynton Residents' Association
Individual residents of Lynton Road

S75
S211 to
S259*
S269*

Mr S Cheetham, of 98 Lynton Road

Note: *relied on written representations

2.14 This objection is to the exclusion of a narrow strip of level land from the Green Belt at the rear of properties fronting the west side of Lynton Road. The Green Belt here sweeps around the west side of Ainsdale enclosing the Brikdale Hills. The objectors point out that the land has not been suitable for additional housing because of inadequate access by way of a narrow track and restrictive covenants. As the land is unused and untidy at present, the objectors believe that its inclusion in the Green Belt might lead to an improvement in amenity, should it be purchased for a non-residential use. Access grounds had figured in 3 refusals of planning permission for development in the past. It was thought that the present boundary chosen for the Green Belt was unacceptable (the railway line) as it unnecessarily severed open space - a golf course on one side and the subject land on the other.

2.15 Mr Cheetham owns a triangular area of land at the extreme south of Lynton Road, adjoining the subject land but with a short frontage to the road. As he contemplates development of his land, he does not wish it to be included within the Green Belt.

2.16 The County Council confirmed that generally the boundary of the Green Belt had been drawn in this vicinity hard up against the backs of existing development, but here as the railway line was an easily recognisable line joining the golf club house to the north and the south end of Lynton Road, and it was felt that the land was substantially within the built-up area, a different line had been chosen. The land was owned by British Rail who had not objected to its exclusion; although applications for development had been refused on access and drainage grounds, in principle it was thought development may be acceptable.

INSPECTORS' CONCLUSIONS

2.17 I noted that although on a map the railway appears to be a firm boundary to the Green Belt, on the ground it is not a visual barrier, being at ground level, the Green Belt crosses the railway immediately south of Lynton Road. It would seem logical to follow the type of boundary used elsewhere in this locality and make the backs of built development the edge of the Green Belt. If this land were included, it could enhance the outlook not only for residents but also for those using the railway and the open land to the west.

RECOMMENDATION

2.18 I recommend that the land at the rear of Lynton Road (Site 6A) be included with the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 8aA - LAND WEST OF LARKHILL LANE, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

New Ideal Homes Limited

S74

Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by

Residents of Larkhill Lane

S3, S4, S11, S12
S14, S16, S19, S20
S29, S31, S33, S42
S45, S48, S62, S63
S262 and S270

2.19 The land is about 8.5 ha lying to the west of Formby, with a frontage of about 420 m to the west side of Larkhill Lane, which forms the boundary to the Green Belt at present drafted. The owners of the land asked that it be excluded as they believe that a low-density high quality residential development along the frontage of the land to a depth of some 60 m would not affect the Green Belt and would make full use of existing services, including the road. The appearance of the new houses would be adequately controlled by the planning authority and the Green Belt boundary could run along the back of the new houses. The remainder of the land would be dedicated to the local authority and could be used as public open space.

2.20 The residents claimed that this was the only open space in this part of Formby available for recreation and it was enjoyed for a wide range of activities and was safe for children. If houses were built on the frontage $\frac{1}{3}$ of the land would be lost and the visual amenity of the nearby Formby Hills and pinewoods would disappear from this approach to them. They fully supported the County and Borough Councils.

2.21 The County Council said that in earlier plans part of the land had been allocated for public open space and there had been a history of planning applications for development refused, including a dismissed appeal. In this locality the Green Belt prevented the westward spread of the built-up part of Formby in order to protect the very fine dune-based landscape between Formby and the sea; in addition to the aesthetic quality the area had considerable ecological value. The boundary as drawn followed well defined features and it was felt that no further developments should be

permitted. The subject land was one of few places from where the scenic value of the area could be appreciated. There was a need for recreational space here which should not be provided on the more fragile dune system.

INSPECTORS' CONCLUSIONS

2.22 While I am in general sympathy with the view that maximum use should be made of existing services and road frontages, if attractive land is to be saved for public enjoyment there comes a time when a line must be drawn. Here, at Larkhill Lane, there are fine views of a landscape of special character which would be lost if further development took place; much of the woodland area is already hidden behind housing development elsewhere in the locality. Whether or not the land eventually becomes formal open space, I consider that it makes an important contribution to this part of the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

2.23 I recommend that all the land to the west of Larkhill Lane (Site 8aA) remain in the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 10A - LAND AT SIXTEEN ACRE LANE, FRESHFIELD, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Messrs Albert Brother Limited, owners of the land

S40

Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by

Mr M J Jenner, on behalf of local residents

S1, S2, S6, S8, S5, S9,
S10, S13, S15, S17, S20,
S21, S24, S25, S26, S27,
S28, S32, S35, S36, S37,
S38, S39, S41, S44, S46,
S47, S49, S50, S51, S53,
S54, S56, S61, S63, S64,
S266(M) and S267(M)

2.24 This is a little over 12 ha of flat grassland at the north end of Formby and immediately west of Formby Bypass Road. Sixteen Acre Lane passes along the south and a drain, the Wham Dyke marks the northern boundary; there is residential development to the west and south of the Lane, while beyond a further area of undeveloped land to the north there is the Woodvale airfield. A plan was handed in showing that the objectors to the inclusion of the land in the Green Belt owned a little more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of the land, fields at the extreme east and west being in a different ownership. The land contains a riding school and was in use for grazing horses.

2.25 It was explained on behalf of the objectors that the land had not been included in the North Merseyside Town Map for residential purposes because of lack of adequate drainage facilities and an airfield safeguarding height restriction; it was believed that the physical constraints had now been overcome. Other proposals for use of the land as open space and as the site of a primary school had been abandoned. The

original draft Green Belt Plan had shown the area as subject to special study, but following a report by the Borough Council, it had now been decided to include it.

2.26 Concern was expressed at the total lack of consultation between the 2 Councils and the owners of the land about its future; once the land became Green Belt it would be sacrosanct, despite promises of flexibility. The need for and objectives of the Green Belt were not challenged, the objection relating to other competing policies as to the local needs of Formby. As the development of inner city sites was not within the scope of the objector's company, and there was nothing in the Structure Plan to exclude a small scale local development aimed at satisfying locally generated needs, eventual housing on the objection site would be complimentary to the work of other agencies and firms who were geared up to adequately fulfil the Structure Plan strategy. Paragraph 8.43 of the Structure Plan acknowledges that land already with planning permission or allocated for development in Sefton and St Helens will not meet future needs, so more housing land must be found. Reference is made to the fact that local plans may identify more land at Formby and Hightown. Development on the subject land would not be at variance with any of the policies in the Housing chapter of the Structure Plan.

2.27 The suggestion that the subject land would be needed to make up a deficiency of public open space was refuted and tables showing existing and suggested open space in Formby were submitted together with a plan indicating distribution. It was believed that the use of a peripheral site such as this did not fully meet the needs of the community or the objectives of Chapter 13 of the Structure Plan, and that other better placed land, some in public ownership, would be more effective. The requirement for land for this purpose varied substantially according to the standard applied and if 16 acres per 1,000 persons was used, there was a deficit of some 31 acres, whereas at the lower standard of 5 acres per 1,000 persons, only 5.4 acres would be needed to make up the deficit. The land north of the Wham Dyke would be suitable, following resolution of drainage difficulties on the subject land; that land would benefit. Open areas and landscaped buffer strips could be incorporated in any development on the subject land to provide a habitat for the flora about which naturalist interests have expressed concern.

2.28 The Wham Dyke had been originally chosen by the Council as an appropriate boundary for the Green Belt, and before that was abandoned it was essential that a more detailed local planning study with full public consultation and participation should be undertaken. Such an exercise would give the opportunity for the development option to be more thoroughly evaluated, involving all interested parties, without the backcloth of a "zero" development stance now adopted by the authorities.

2.29 The inquiry heard from Sefton Borough Council that a local planning exercise had been completed before the Council had decided in January 1982 to include the land in the Green Belt and in reaching the decision the following points were considered:

- i. the North Merseyside Town Map showed the area as "white land";
- ii. it had been included within the submitted 1960 Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt;
- iii. the approved Structure Plan had relevant policies relating to size of development proposals, local needs, open space and loss of agricultural land;
- iv. the County Council had received 250 individual objections from local residents to omission of the area from the draft Green Belt;
- v. on land with planning permission and past construction rates, it was estimated that Formby had $3\frac{1}{2}$ years' supply and Sefton as a whole, 7 years' supply of housing land at September 1981;

vi. while past policies had led to the population of Formby rising from 11,700 persons in 1961 to 26,819 persons in 1981, the Structure Plan now indicates that no major development should take place in Formby; it was implicit in the approved strategy that it was not possible to ensure the provision of large amounts of housing land for every urban area in the Borough;

vii. there was a particular deficiency in playing field provision in Formby;

viii. 30 acres of land north of Sixteen Acre Lane had been earmarked previously for public open space on land of limited agricultural value, adjoining the urban area;

ix. consultations on possible development had resulted in objections from the Water Authority regarding drainage, the Ministry of Agriculture about the displacement of existing uses onto more productive land and naturalist interests about conservation;

x. the engineering view was that residential development would require extensive works, including pumping, by the developer.

2.30 There was very considerable difficulty in determining what is "local need" as the housing market in a suburban community puts no geographical limit on purchasers; as Formby is an attractive location there is no doubt that land released for residential development would be used. To allow the pattern of suburban peripheral development to continue would be to undermine the whole basis of the urban regeneration strategy. The release of land for, say 250 houses, may be of small significance in the context of Merseyside as a whole, but in Formby terms it would be equivalent to almost 3 years output at the 1976-81 private sector completion rates. There is a continuous flow of small sites within the existing built-up area for infill or redevelopment, sometimes offering opportunities for flats which are needed to expand the range of the dwelling stock. A copy of the local study and tables setting out the housing position were submitted by the Borough Council.

2.31 On behalf of 150 local residents who had attended a public meeting in Formby strong support was expressed for the retention of the land north of Sixteen Acre Lane in the Green Belt. The Lane was a logical conclusion to the edge of the urban area, having a fence line, a line of trees, a well established bridleway, a bank, hedge and ditch, whereas Wham Dyke was a ditch with no feature visible above ground level. This area had prompted the biggest response from the public when it had been excluded from the original draft of the Green Belt, with over 250 written objections. The land had been accepted and designated for Green Belt for at least 14 years and the apparent security of Green Belt status had influenced peoples' choice of homes.

2.32 It was a natural meadowland environment with a fauna and flora not found elsewhere in the North Formby locality; Snipe breed here and the plants include the Southern Marsh Orchid while it is the breeding area and summer feeding ground for the rare Natterjack Toad.

2.33 The County Council saw the issue as whether or not Formby should expand further, the particular purpose of the Green Belt here being to check the spread of development along the north-south axis of the Liverpool to Southport railway line and in order to retain the separate identity of the settlements and protect the character of the intervening landscape. The further expansion of Formby is constrained on the west by the pine woods of the coastal dune system; to the south there is high quality agricultural land and the flood plain of the River Alt, while to the east there is the Formby Bypass Road. The northern boundary is less clearly defined but is fixed by the Golf Course, sandy heathland and the open land of which the objection site forms part; the latter is shown as being Grade IV on the land classification map. The site is

included in the draft Register of Sites of Local Biological and Geological Interest, though it is of less value than the Sefton Coast which is of national importance.

2.34 The subject land had been omitted from the original draft Subject Plan as it was considered to be a possible location should further peripheral development be needed; the Borough Council's study had confirmed that such development would not be needed, and the County Council accepted their recommendation that the land be included within the Green Belt. The boundary of the Green Belt here follows the edge of the existing built-up area and is clearly and well defined.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.35 This objection site has clearly already received a great deal of consideration by the authorities and I do not think there would be much merit in prolonging the uncertainty about its future by the commissioning of yet a further planning study. Having seen the site I am convinced that it forms an important part of the gap and separation between Formby and Woodvale along the Southport Road and would thus make a substantial contribution to the Green Belt. Against this there is the case for further peripheral housing, probably of a type which will become more rare as the regeneration strategy starts to bite. Following the special study already undertaken both the Borough and County Councils have been convinced that such peripheral housing will not be necessary and indeed, would be contrary to the Structure Plan policies. Whether this will still be the view taken in 1986 when the Structure Plan is reviewed remains to be seen but I am convinced that Sixteen Acre Lane is a good and logical boundary whereas the Wham Dyke is less easily recognisable and to an extent is uncertain. The land had been included in earlier Green Belt proposals and nothing raised either at the inquiry or in written representations causes me to think that conditions have changed in favour of its development.

RECOMMENDATION

2.36 I recommend that the land north of Sixteen Acre Lane (Site 10A) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 11A - FORMBY MOSS

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Messrs S Rostron Limited

S52

2.37 The Formby Moss site is an area of about 13 ha of poorly drained, flat land to the east of Formby Bypass Road and immediately north of the existing industrial estate of about the same area, from which it is separated by a ditch. The embankment of the Downholland Brook forms the eastern boundary of the land while a rough track separates the land from agricultural land to the north. The residential areas of Formby lie immediately east of the main road while to the south of the existing industrial estate, Altcar Road passes eastwards into open countryside. The substance of the objection the land being within the Green Belt was that it was not productive for agriculture and although tenanted, only a limited part was capable of cropping and then gave only an extremely low yield; because of its proximity to the main road and remoteness from the main steading, cattle had not grazed there for many years and it made no

contribution to the farmers' dairy business. Being separated from the residential area by a road carrying fast moving traffic, it was unsuitable for recreational purposes.

2.38 The objectors contend that there is a demand for light industrial development space in North Sefton and as this land adjoins the existing estate and could be developed as an extension to it, it would be ideal. A belt could be landscaped against the main road, minimising the impact of further development on the housing area, and access difficulties could be overcome by internal road improvements. The Structure Plan had acknowledged the eventual need for 22 ha of additional industrial land in North Sefton for development before 1986 and this land was well placed to satisfy part of that requirement. For these reasons the land should be excluded from the Green Belt.

2.39 Sefton Borough Council accepted the need to make more land available for industry in North Sefton but pointed out that the take up rate of allocated land had been much lower than had been anticipated when the Structure Plan figure of 22 ha was estimated; in North Sefton it had been barely 0.5 ha per annum over the past 4 years and no account had been taken of the very large amount of vacant industrial floorspace which was on offer. Because of Formby's situation at the middle of the district, the Council thought it not unreasonable to regard the town as part of South Sefton in industrial land terms. For that reason the search for additional industrial land was being concentrated on Southport and it was anticipated that the needed land would be found within the Town Lane Local Plan area of Southport. As much of the land which was available in Southport in 1981 is still available, the County were being asked to review the situation before further commitment was made; the extent of vacant premises, low land take up rates and forecasts of further decline in employment were all reasons for delaying a decision. There was ample land at Southport not in the Green Belt and at South Sefton substantial areas of vacant land and unused premises exist at Aintree, Bootle and Litherland. Fairly recently an application had been refused and an appeal dismissed for the industrial development of the subject land.

2.40 The County Council said that the land had not been shown as Green Belt on earlier plans, it had been considered as a possible site for industrial development in 1962, but in 1963 the then Minister had suggested that land to the east of the trunk road at Formby be included in the Green Belt otherwise problems could arise with cross traffic. While this site could be developed as an extension of the existing industrial estate, such enlargement was not required within the terms of the Structure Plan regeneration strategy and it was thought appropriate to consider inclusion in the Green Belt. The purpose of the Green Belt here was to retain the separate identity of Formby, which is residential in character. The boundaries were particularly well defined to the east by the coastal dunes and to the west by the bypass road; it thus had an island character. Although the existing estate stands outside these limits, further development there would increase its impact on the landscape and its boundaries at present give sharp definition to the open area.

INSPECTORS' CONCLUSIONS

2.41 I noted that the existing industrial estate was the only major development situated to the east of the trunk road for some miles to the north and south and that the Formby Moss site, although of allegedly low agricultural value, is really indistinguishable visually from the other open land to the north and east which plainly make a big contribution to the Green Belt in this vicinity.

2.42 If other planning difficulties could be overcome - traffic, drainage, residential amenity etc - and if Formby had an established need for further industrial development, it would be tempting to think that this site would be a logical extension

to the existing estate. However, the evidence was to the contrary, and I have no doubt that the land has value as a vital part of undeveloped open countryside to the east of Formby, and as such is appropriately designated Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

2.43 I recommend that Formby Moss (Site 11A) be retained within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 17A - AINTREE RACECOURSE

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by reference

The Walton Commercial Group Limited, owners of the land S268

Representations in support of inclusion, by

Merseyside Civic Society S210

Melling Parish Council* S273

Note: *relied on written representations

2.44 For the owners of Aintree Racecourse, which extends over an area of about 90 ha, it was pointed out that the land had never been included in former Green Belt proposals nor had it been indicated as proposed Green Belt on the Key Diagram of the Structure Plan. It did not appear on the First draft of the present Subject Plan in 1980, nor in 1981, its first inclusion being in July 1982 following representations by the Civic Society. As racing only took place at Aintree on 3 days in each year, it was generally known that the Grand National was at risk, but that was not a good reason for including the land in the Green Belt. The owners were determined to try to ensure the retention of the Grand National, but had sustained heavy losses over a period of years; the maintenance costs were frightening.

2.45 Although some of the land was grazed, it was not productive farmland and other parts were degraded; it was within the built-up area being surrounded by dwellings, railway land and factories and simply did not qualify to be described as open countryside. There had been talk in the past of some development on parts of the land, whether or not the racecourse were retained - a covered sports centre had been suggested, and the owners objected strongly to its inclusion in the Green Belt when it made so little contribution to the aims and intentions of the Subject Plan.

2.46 The County Council said that in 1965 the then Minister of Housing and Local Government announced that he would call in any planning application involving development at Aintree for non-racing purposes and an application had been submitted in 1973 including housing on 15 acres alongside the Leeds - Liverpool Canal; that application had been called in but was withdrawn before an inquiry had been held. A further application to use part of the course for Saturday market trading had been refused in 1975. While the land had not originally been included within the present Green Belt proposals, the Councils believe that it is of sufficient size and so located at the edge of the conurbation, close to good road and rail services, that it should be developed for open recreation uses which would be compatible with, and provide a suitable setting for, horse racing. Intensive recreational uses need not be excluded and

Aintree could become a regional or even international centre for a variety of activities. It was agreed that the land was unattractive at present and the owners difficulties were understood, but with a general upgrading of the racecourse and surroundings, a green wedge could be formed into the urban area, being linked to the open countryside by the Canal. The County Council believed that it would not be possible to retain the Grand National as an event of international stature unless it is run in an attractive "country" setting. If the land were included in the Green Belt the intention would be put beyond all doubt.

2.47 The Merseyside Civic Society had been formed in 1938 out of the old City Guild with which Professor Patrick Abercrombie had been associated; the Society had been involved in many recent issues, not only as an objector but in positive contributions. It was suggested that the inclusion of the Aintree area within the Green Belt would satisfy the objective of "checking the growth of a large built-up area" and in acting as a buffer zone it would "prevent neighbouring towns from merging", the industry to the south being within Liverpool while the housing at Aintree to the north is in Sefton. In protecting Aintree village from amalgamation in a spread of development from the south, the objective of "ensuring that towns and villages keep their individual character" would be achieved. In addition to satisfying the principle objectives of the Green Belt, Aintree lends itself to inclusion in many other ways; first, its historic use as a racecourse relates well to acceptable Green Belt uses; second, it forms an undoubted recreational amenity; third, it forms an inward extension linked to the outer area by the historic Canal; fourth, it is an area of special character, associated with unique events, and thus an important and valuable asset; and, finally, the evidence has been that there is adequate supply of land elsewhere for housing and industry and thus the inclusion of Aintree would complement the regeneration strategy by directing new development into the inner areas where it is needed. To question its inclusion must be tantamount to questioning the very need for the Green Belt itself.

2.48 Sefton Borough Council confirmed that they had adopted a policy against redevelopment at the racecourse in 1974. They believed that the Grand National should be retained, that a sports centre could be developed and other land could be devoted to a park.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.49 In many ways the arguments advanced for including Aintree within the Green Belt could be applied to other major urban open spaces within Merseyside, for instance at Sherdley Park in St Helens. It seems to me that the real test is whether the land involved can properly be described as an integral part of the open countryside, albeit a finger or wedge, and whether such countryside is naturally flowing into the urban area. Here, at Aintree, the connection between the main part of the Green Belt between Kirkby and the main built-up area is at Handcock's Bridge where the Leeds and Liverpool Canal passes from east to west. It is a narrow neck, about 50 m wide, partly occupied by railway land at the Fazakerley Sidings. I do not think that it passes the test, either as regards size or character.

2.50 Few people would disagree with the sentiments expressed at the inquiry about the importance and prestige of the Grand National and the need for its retention, nor with many of the views held about the need for Aintree to remain substantially open and, perhaps, provide additional recreational facilities in the future. I cannot agree, however, that to achieve these aims requires the added powers which would result from Green Belt designation. In my opinion the Structure Plan policies provide a wide array of possible controls with, at the end of the day, the possibility of a called in application should a feature of such national interest as the Grand National be threatened by unsuitable development proposals. While this is a major urban open space, it does not qualify, in my view, as part of the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

2.51 I recommend that Aintree Racecourse (Site 17A) be excluded from the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 22A - LAND AT LITTLE ALT CAR, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr W H Storey, owner of the land

S282

2.52 This objection related to about 2.9 ha of land which includes a car park at Liverpool Road to the extreme south of Formby. At the inquiry it was explained by the owner that the car park served 2 supermarkets, an office block, a restaurant, garage and a fencing business, and that it was grossly inadequate. His concern was to enlarge the car park, only on part of the land. The remainder could stay in the Green Belt. An altered or new entrance had reduced the area of the original car park blocking off the unloading area and leading to less safe traffic movements.

2.53 The County Council said that the land was allocated for public open space purposes on the 1968 Town Map and had been included in the submitted Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt. An application for housing had been refused in 1981. Both the County and Borough Councils agreed, however, that an appropriately landscaped extension to the existing car park would not be out of place here, if required, but that the Green Belt boundary should remain close to the built-up area and an outward spread of development was to be avoided.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.54 I saw that this land forms part of a sweep of open land from the Formby Bypass up to the edge of the built-up area, and I think that it is correctly included in the Green Belt. However, I do not think that the Green Belt should inhibit or frustrate the continuance of legitimate business activities if they are providing a useful local service. The objector seemed satisfied with the assurances given at the inquiry by the County and Borough officers, that a suitable car park extension could be agreed.

RECOMMENDATION

2.55 I recommend that the land at Little Altcar (Site 23A) be included in the Green Belt on the Subject Plan, without prejudice to the success of an application for a park extension.

SITE 9A - LAND SOUTH OF ALT CAR ^{LANE} ~~ROAD~~, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

S67

2.56 This is a rectangular area of about 4 ha of agricultural land immediately south of Altcar Lane with a sewage works to the west and Lovelady Farm to the east. On behalf of the owners it was said that the buildings at the farm were largely disused, the house being occupied by a service tenant, and the sewage works was, it was thought, being run down. As there was existing housing development to the north this was believed to be a good site for natural extension; the southern boundary would be formed by the flood plain to the River Alt and that could be adopted as a boundary for the Green Belt. The site had at one time been included in a comprehensive development scheme which had been refused on Green Belt and drainage grounds, but a more limited application for the site itself was at present before the Borough Council. The site was of poor agricultural quality and limited by drainage difficulties for that use, so would not be a significant loss to agriculture.

2.57 Although included as Grade IV on the Agricultural Land Classification Map, in response to the recent application the Ministry of Agriculture had raised objection on the grounds that the site comprised high quality land of Grade 2 standard, according to the Council, who also submitted a letter from the North West Water Authority expressing concern about development adjacent to the lee side of the biological filters at the sewage works. The purpose of the Green Belt in this locality was to restrict the outward spread of the built-up area and to retain the open character of the landscape to the south of Formby. It was thought that the boundary as drawn along Altcar Road and the rear of properties was a well defined line. To release this site would make the boundary illogical and invite an extension of the built-up area, contrary to the policies.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.58 This is a flat, open landscape and an important part of the Green Belt to the south of Formby. It was suggested that existing physical features - the sewage works to the west, housing on the north and the farm steading to the east - together with the flood plain of the river to the south would preclude possible further expansion of the urban area, but this ignores the fact that further peripheral development in this part of Formby is not envisaged in the Councils' plans and would be contrary to the Structure Plan policy of urban regeneration. In my view this land would need to be examined along with other peripheral land in Formby should it be decided that such further development was justified. The land does contribute to this part of the Green Belt, the boundary of which appears to me to be firmly defined in the vicinity.

RECOMMENDATION

2.59 I recommend that the land south of Altcar Road, Formby (Site 9A) remain within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 23A - LAND NEAR THE CRESCENT, MAGHULL

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

S281

2.60 This objection relates to an area of about 7 ha of rough grassland of an elongated shape situated between the backs of properties in The Crescent, Maghull, and the main conurbation at Netherton, where Dunning's Bridge Road joins the M57 and M58 motorway.

2.61 It was said on behalf of the Trustees that the land was not at present used and had only been used for rough grazing when it was part of Brook House Farm prior to 1978. An option granted to builders to purchase the subject land had led to an application for residential development which had been refused in March 1981, and since then informal discussions had been held with the authority with a view to agreement being reached on a more limited development on part only of the land; the remainder would be available for amenity use to alleviate in some way the substantial shortfall in open space land in the area. The Maghull Parish Council had previously approached the Trustees with a view to acquiring the bulk of this land as parkland; however, the opinion was held that about 8 acres as parkland with the balance of 5 acres to the north devoted to housing would be more in keeping with the locality, thus further discussions should not be prejudiced by the inclusion of the whole site in the Green Belt. It was thought that the railway embankment, being a major physical feature, would be a better boundary to the Green Belt here than the backs of properties.

2.62 The County Council said that the site was allocated for open space purposes on the 1965 Town Map and part had been included in the submitted Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt. In this locality the Green Belt prevented the coalescence of the built-up area of Bootle and Aintree with Maghull, and while railway lines and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal had been used elsewhere to mark the boundary, it was thought important that the landscape should flow across these features where possible. It was thought that the objection site was an important piece of open space which would be enhanced by proposals to use the line of the disused railway as a footpath and bridleway. The Borough Council described the shortfall in open space provision at Maghull as said that to lose any of this land would reduce unacceptably the opportunities for meeting the deficiency.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.63 While I accept that the argument about the form that the boundary should take here has a lot of logic, I believe that the crucial thing about the Green Belt in this locality is the width of the gap between Maghull and the main built-up area. It is not wide and it already contains an intense pattern of major roadworks, traffic islands and the like. Although the loss of this land from the Green Belt would not be at the very narrowest part, it would be close to it and the open stretch between Maghull and Netherton would be reduced. I do not think this is acceptable particularly in the light of the great need here for additional open space and specific policies against peripheral housing development; the contribution made to the Green Belt is too great.

RECOMMENDATION

2.64 I recommend that the land near the Crescent, Maghull (Site 23A) remain in the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

* SITE 21A - LAND AT MELLING LANE, MAGHULL

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

R G Swift Esq, owner

S280

2.65 On the south-east side of Maghull the Green Belt generally follows the railway line which marks the edge of the greater part of that built-up area, but the latter

spills over to the north-east of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, coming close to the M58 motorway which otherwise passes through open countryside. The subject land is a little less than 4 ha in agricultural use north of the motorway, east of the canal and with frontage to Melling Lane. There is existing residential development to the north and east apart from a width of open space between the houses and the motorway to the east. There is a detached dwelling within the site on the Melling Lane frontage.

2.66 A plan was submitted on behalf of the owner showing that there were existing gas and proposed water easements passing across the more southerly part of the site which would effectively prevent development on about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the land next to the motorway. That land could be landscaped and trees planted, permitting residential development on the balance of the site at a sufficient distance from the motorway to ensure acceptable noise levels. Although classified as Grade I land, the land was completely severed from the balance of the holding, being concealed from it by the high motorway embankment and involving a very roundabout route for the farmer to attend to it. Being unattended there was a risk of vandalism; thus there was a risk that the land could fall into disuse.

2.67 It was thought that the land formed part of a natural extension to Maghull, being fully contained by the Canal and the motorway and that none of the objectives of Circular 42/55 nor the requirements of the Structure Plan would be infringed by development here. It would be a logical rounding-off.

2.68 The County Council said that an application for residential development had been refused in 1979, the reasons including the Green Belt, the regeneration strategy, open land policies, agricultural land value and noise from the motorway. While it was accepted that development here would not be visible from Melling, Kirkby or Aintree and it would not be seen from the motorway because of baffle fences which had been erected, it would be open to views from the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. The latter was an important recreational asset and the retention of the land in the Green Belt for agriculture would accord with the rural economy policies of the Structure Plan. Should development take place on the northern part of the land as suggested, the strip against the motorway would be unlikely to be required for open space purposes and it would be too small to be farmed.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.69 I accept that the open nature of the land has value when seen from the banks of the Canal, but I believe this is very limited and as far as the major area of the Green Belt is concerned I think the retention of this land is of doubtful value. On this side of Maghull the Green Belt is relatively wide and this particular field does not, in my opinion, make any significant contribution to it. If the boundary of the Green Belt followed the line of the Canal south from the railway to the motorway, then turned east enclosing this land, I am sure that a better definition would result. Development on the subject land would still, of course, need to satisfy all the other restrictive criteria in the approved Structure Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

2.70 I recommend that the land at Melling Lane, Maghull (Site 21A) be excluded from the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

S68

2.71 The original objection had covered approximately 29 ha of agricultural land at the mouth of the Rimrose Valley between Thornton and Buckley Hill, Bootle, but at the inquiry the objection area was reduced to about 6.5 ha with a frontage to Rummells Lane. The general area had been subject to much development in the immediate post-war period but a road link intended to pass through the Rimrose Valley had now been abandoned, at least for the time being. The tenant of Tanhouse Farm, who had lost land to earlier developments, now faced vandalism, damage and thieving on an increasing scale from residents of nearby estates. The land was of good quality, capable of growing vegetable crops but potatoes and sprouts had been stolen on a considerable scale and corn crops burned. The present objection area had been the subject of an application for planning permission in 1981 but that had been refused and an appeal was pending; if some of the land could be released from the Green Belt to provide a buffer between the main holding and the housing estates, an improvement in the farming activities could be expected.

2.72 The purpose of the Green Belt here, said the Council, was to prevent the coalescence of Bootle and Crosby and therefore the boundary followed the edge of the existing built-up area through the narrow Rimrose Valley. The subject land had been allocated for open space purposes on the 1968 Town Map and it was included in the former submitted Green Belt. Development here would cut into the neck of the wedge of Green Belt which is only $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide at this point.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.73 I think the loss of even the reduced area of about 6.5 ha which was pursued at the inquiry would considerably reduce the effectiveness of the Green Belt in this critical situation; the remainder of the Rimrose Valley would almost become simply urban open space. On the other hand, I fully appreciate the problems faced by the agricultural tenant and understand that ease of access to the land across Rummells Lane is a prime cause for concern; as was explained at the inquiry, fencing alone is not a sufficient deterrent. I have noted that at the north the Green Belt boundary passed behind houses at the south side of Rummells Lane near the junction with Lydiate Lane and then along the frontage of the land with Rummells Lane. It would seem more logical to me to exclude a frontage strip down the Lane to Tanhouse Farm, so that should it be possible to overcome any other planning objections, a single row of houses could be built there thus prohibiting general access to the balance of the land.

RECOMMENDATION

2.74 I recommend that the land at Tanhouse Farm (Site 13A) remain in the Green Belt in the Subject Plan, except for a continuous strip along the frontage to Rummells Lane connecting existing development to Tanhouse Farm.

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

S69

2.75 This objection site is an elongated area of about 24 ha of high grade agricultural land situated between the residential part of Aintree and the M58 motorway with a railway embankment at the west. For the owners it was said that although the site had been included in the earliest Green Belt proposals in the 1960's, following severance by the M57 motorway, there had been an understanding that part should be used to make good the gross shortfall of public open space in Aintree and part used for housing. Land immediately to the south-east in the same ownership had been approved for housing and was developed in 1969/70 with infrastructure designed to enable the subject land to be so used. However, permission was eventually refused in 1971 and a follow up application similarly refused in 1974. A reduced area was submitted for development in 1981 and again refused; there was now an appeal pending on that application.

2.76 The owners believe that the motorway is the logical boundary for the Green Belt in this vicinity, as it would form a firm, physical deterrent to further development between Aintree, Kirkby and Maghull. Part of the site had been allocated for public open space in the 1968 Town Map, an indication that its agricultural quality was not such as to preclude development. It was subject to a high degree of trespass which affected the yields possible and if taken out of agriculture it would not be a significant loss.

2.77 The County Council pointed out that the land was within the M57 corridor defined in Policy 10.71 of the Structure Plan as a degraded landscape with priority for landscape renewal. The motorway was at ground level and the site was part of the belt of land preventing the coalescence of the main conurbation with Maghull and Kirkby. Where possible boundaries for the Green Belt other than the motorways and railways had been chosen and as there was no need for more land for development in this locality and the land was capable of being farmed, it should remain in the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.78 While I appreciate the difficulties faced by persons carrying on agriculture close to large urban areas and the possible economic benefits which might flow from using existing infrastructure, this site is large enough and forms an important enough part of the open view to the north-east of Aintree, in my opinion, to be considered a valuable part of the Green Belt. The M57 corridor is a very important linking part of the Green Belt, and to lose land here near a relatively narrow section, would not be fitting.

RECOMMENDATION

2.79 I recommend that the land north of Oriel Drive, Aintree (Site 15A) should remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 16A - LAND AT WANGO LANE, AINTREE

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

S69

2.80 This objection site is a narrow strip of about 7 ha of land on the north-east side of Aintree, which widens out at the south-east where the Leeds and Liverpool Canal crosses the River Alt. At the inquiry the owners reduced their objection to the inclusion in the Green Belt of a wider part of the land near the Canal, there being problems of access on the remainder, which they thought could remain within the Green Belt. They held the view that the River Alt formed a more readily identifiable line than the backs of properties chosen in the Subject Plan. Should development eventually be permitted at the south, it would be a maximum natural and logical extension of the built-up area, using existing services. Any development north-east of the River Alt would easily be resisted.

2.81 The County Council said that the land had been included in the earliest Green Belt proposals and was within the M57 corridor defined in the Structure Plan as being a degraded landscape. The purpose here was that the Green Belt would preserve the open landscape between Aintree and Kirkby, any peripheral development tending to reduce the effectiveness of the gap.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.82 I noted that in the vicinity the M57 corridor is quite narrow at about 600 m and should the land adjacent to the Canal be excluded, a reduction of about 200 m would result. Also the field to the south-east of the Canal and between the Canal and the railway embankment would appear isolated in the Green Belt. Because of the general narrowness of the Green Belt here I believe the tight boundary closely following the edge of the built-up area to be the best. While I agree that development to the north-east of the River Alt would be very unlikely, it does seem important to retain the maximum gap possible in this rather critical area.

RECOMMENDATION

2.83 I recommend that the land at Wango Lane (Site 16A) be retained within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 8bA - LAND AT ST LUKES CHURCH ROAD AND MARSH FARM, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Mount Rule Land Company Limited

S74

2.84 Initially an extensive area in the ownership of the objectors had been included in the objection, but at the inquiry this was reduced to 2 parcels indicated on a submitted plan as about 9.7 ha to the west of St Lukes Church Lane and about 12.2 ha to the south of Barton Heys Road near Marsh Farm and extending eastwards to the railway. It was explained that there was a current consent for the development of an

18-hole championship golf course on land owned here, and while that was compatible with the Green Belt, its construction was not viable without the construction also of a certain amount of housing development. The concept of a top-class golf course was generally considered highly desirable and would be a boost for the County and the release of the subject lands from the Green Belt would play a significant part in generating much needed finance.

2.85 The objectors claimed that there was a high demand for land suitable for housing development in Formby and these sites would be a natural rounding-off on land of inferior agricultural quality.

2.86 The County Council said that both areas of land had been included in former Green Belt proposals and the more westerly area was within a heritage landscape described in Policy 10.69 of the Structure Plan, being in the Sefton Coast Management Scheme for the protection and conservation of the dunes. The purpose of the Green Belt here was to prevent the westward extension of the built-up area of Formby into the coastal dune landscape and to retain the open character of the countryside to the south separating the town from the built-up areas of Hightown and Crosby. The boundaries chosen followed easily recognisable features, including the backs of properties, whereas those chosen for the objection sites seemed entirely arbitrary and were even unrelated to the approved golf course boundaries.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.87 I can understand that the construction of a new high quality golf course would be a very expensive operation but if it is to be such an important contribution to the area, I believe that it would be viable in its own right and not need to be financed through the sale of speculative building land. As to the latter, the evidence is that it is not needed in Formby and as this land makes an important contribution to the aims of the Green Belt, in my opinion, I believe that it should remain within the Subject Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

2.88 I recommend that the land at St Lukes Church Road and Marsh Farm, Formby (Site 8bA) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 7A - LAND AT VICTORIA ROAD, FRESHFIELD, FORMBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

J C McDougall Esq

S55

2.89 This is a small area of garden land at the north-west edge of the built-up area of Formby with a short frontage to Victoria Road and it lies behind No 2 Larkhill Lane; the Formby Coast National Trust Property, a dune and pine wood landscape lies to the west. The owner claims that his domestic rear garden is bisected by the Green Belt and although much of the land is in a semi-natural state with trees and undergrowth, parts of it are a formal garden. Permission exists to build a stable block with conditions protecting the trees and the omission of the land from the Green Belt would not prejudice the principles and reason for the Subject Plan in any way; the boundary chosen

here does not follow any existing feature on the ground and elsewhere in the vicinity the boundary had been drawn around privately owned gardens.

2.90 The County Council made it clear that the land had been included in the earliest Green Belt proposals and confirmed that full permission existed to erect a block of stables. The Green Belt here prevented the outward spread of Formby into the fine dun and pine wood landscape to the west. In drawing the boundary the Town Map residential land allocations had been used as a basis and further encroachment of development should be resisted.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

2.91 I fully agree with the objective of the Green Belt in preventing further spread development to the west into such a valuable landscape. However, I have noted that generally the boundary has been drawn neatly around the curtilages of dwellings in the vicinity thus accommodating slight irregularities, and this seems a "one off" case. To exclude this land from the Green Belt would not bring this land out of line with the boundary to the north, where it extends even further west on the north side of Victoria Road. Neither, in my view, would it be likely to prejudice the main aims and objectives of the Subject Plan in this vicinity.

RECOMMENDATION

2.92 I recommend that the garden land at Victoria Road/Larkhill Lane (Site 7A) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ON SITES IN SEFTON DISTRICT

SITE 4A - LAND NEAR TOWN LANE AND CROWLAND STREET, SOUTHPORT

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The West Lancashire District Council

S2

Reserved support for exclusion from the Green Belt, by

L O Jeffs Limited

S73

2.93 That part of the West Lancashire District adjoining the Town Lane area of Southport has been identified as being suitable for inclusion within a Green Belt in the plans currently being prepared by the West Lancashire District Council. The Council are concerned that the lack of similar controls on the Merseyside side of the County boundary could lead to pressures for development within their own district and it is felt that until a local plan for the area has been adopted, the land in Southport should be protected by the Green Belt. Attention is drawn to paragraphs 1.5 and 1.6 of the Written Statement to the Subject Plan which says that the Plan will be used by the local planning authorities as a guide to preparing local plans and may be amended by these plans. It is suggested that the departure from that procedure implies a prejudgement that the land should not be included in the Green Belt, a view strongly opposed by the West Lancashire District Council.

2.94 The County and Sefton Borough Councils have said that there is a need to identify more land for development in north Sefton to comply with the Structure Plan requirements and that the Borough Council are actively engaged in studies of the area with a view to the placing of a draft plan on deposit within 12 months. The Secretary of State had considered that it would be inappropriate to include within the Green Belt those areas which were the subject of local planning studies and that those studies should eventually determine the area to be included.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

2.95 It seems reasonable to me that as work is continuing on a detailed study of the subject area, full consideration of a Green Belt boundary in the locality should await discussion of the local plan proposals, when all parties will have an opportunity of weighing the merits or otherwise of the proposals. Being land adjacent to the County boundaries, this is clearly a case for full consultation between all the interested parties at the appropriate time and I have no reason to suppose that the interests of the West Lancashire District Council would not be fully considered. I therefore make no recommendation affecting the Subject Plan as being now discussed.

SITE 14A - TRIANGULAR SITE BOUNDED BY M57, A59 AND RAILWAY, NORTH OF AINTREE

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Master Market Limited

S43

2.96 This is a small triangle of land between a major road traffic island and a railway embankment and the owners, who are currently pursuing an appeal to erect a supermarket on the land, are convinced that it is inappropriately included in the Green Belt. They claim that development would enhance what is regarded as a visually degraded site in the motorway corridor and that exclusion from the Green Belt could not encourage the coalescence of Maghull with the northern limits of Liverpool.

2.97 The Council have said that development is not the only way in which such degraded landscapes can be improved and improvements here are especially important as an active policy is being pursued to enhance the appearance of the major transportation routes into Merseyside. Development on the site would close the gap between Maghull and the main built-up area. The land had been within the earlier Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

2.98 I have no doubt that this site can be improved in appearance (whether by development or landscaping) but it does seem to me to be of importance as an open break or buffer between the housing to the south and the main traffic movements associated with the motorway. At the same time it forms part of the fairly narrow gap between the conurbation and Maghull and as such, in my view, is appropriately included within the Green Belt. I noted that there are views across the site into the open country and that when seen from the motorway the site has some value as a separation; the approved Structure Plan policies should eventually improve this. I therefore recommend that this triangle of land (Site 14A) should remain within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

PART 3 - REPRESENTATIONS ON SPECIFIC SITES - CITY OF LIVERPOOL

3.1 The City Council had formally confirmed in January 1982 that no objection be raised to the Merseyside Green Belt Subject Plan. The Council were therefore not formally represented at the inquiry.

Site 2B - LAND AT CROXTETH PARK

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

L8

3.2 This is about 2.2 ha of agricultural land at the east of Croxteth Park immediately south of an area on which extensive residential development is to take place. It is part of an area which links the main part of the Green Belt at Knowsley with Croxteth Country Park, and separates the residential developments between Croxteth and Cantrill Farm to the south. On behalf of the objectors it was pointed out that the existing planning permission for development to the north required a tree belt to be planted on the subject land which had a public footpath passing along its southern boundary. It was thought that when it takes place the landscaping would be a ready target for trespassers and vandals as it would be sandwiched between the proposed houses and the footpath. If the subject site were excluded from the Green Belt, a more logical boundary would be created and the tree belt could then be provided on the land south of the footpath giving a more discernible barrier. In that way it would prevent trespass from the residential development and footpath on to the agricultural land, thus improving the agricultural quality of the remaining area.

3.3 Although the land was reputed as Grade II, due to trespass and its proximity to the urban area, it could not be ranked as good quality. Efforts to sell the land on agricultural basis had proved abortive; the County Council had been prepared to offer only £500 per acre.

3.4 The County Council confirmed that permission existed for housing development to the north and that this land formed part of the wedge separating Croxteth Park and Cantrill Farm which linked as a heritage landscape with Knowsley Park to the east. The footpath was a country walk, intended to be retained, and if this land was lost to the Green Belt, it would be narrowed at a critical point. Both the County and City Councils considered that the footpath should form the dividing line between the agricultural land and the woodland belt and not between the houses and the woodland, as suggested by the objectors.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

3.5 I noted that the gap occupied by the Green Belt both to the east to Knowsley and south to Cantrill Farm estate was not more than about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide and it does seem to that to lose any of the agricultural land here would reduce the effectiveness of the Green Belt. Nor am I convinced that to plant the tree belt to the south of the footpath would necessarily remove the likelihood of trespass and vandalism from the agricultural land. I am therefore convinced that as this land forms an important part of the Green Belt at a critical point, its loss would not be justified.

RECOMMENDATION

3.6 I recommend that the land at Croxteth Park (Site 2B) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATION ON SITE IN THE CITY OF LIVERPOOL

SITE 1B - LAND BETWEEN AND INCLUDING CALDERSTONES PARK AND THE CEMETERY AT ALLERTON

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Liverpool Ecology Party

L4

3.7 As a natural green area within the City, the Party believe that this land traditionally near the outskirts should be incorporated in the Green Belt to protect it from development and ensure its survival. They see it being sacrificed for development if suitable safeguards are not enforced. The County Council have expressed sympathy with this view and point out that the value of the land as an open area and its contribution to the character of the locality have been recognised by the City Council in the Liverpool Outer Areas Plan. About 60% of the land is allocated for public open space while much of the remainder is earmarked for private open space. Housing at Woolton and Halewood separate the land from the main part of the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

3.8 I note that this land is discontinuous from the Green Belt and thus, despite its undoubted value, it would be inappropriate to recommend its inclusion. However, I am satisfied that both the planning authorities involved are conscious of its contribution as an open area within the urban scene and will safeguard it accordingly. I therefore recommend that this land (Site 2B) remain outside the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

PART 4 - REPRESENTATIONS ON SPECIFIC SITES - BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY

4.1 Preceding the hearing of objections to sites in the Borough of Knowsley, the Councils' representative referred to the consultations which had taken place between the 2 Councils and confirmed that his Council supported the retention of the Green Belt boundaries as now proposed and was in agreement in principle with the policies set out. The amount of land available for residential and industrial development within the urban area and outside the Green Belt was considered adequate and the Borough Council were conscious of the need to discourage building on the fringe areas.

SITE 1C - LAND NEAR M57 AND A580(T) JUNCTION, AT RANGLES BRIDGE

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the Estate of the Countess of Sefton

K8

4.2 This is a triangle of about 1.5 ha of grassland with frontage to an embankment on an M57 slip road, a frontage to A580(T) and the third side adjoining a gas regulator station. For the objectors it was said that the land had industrial potential, and could be developed for that purpose without affecting the open wedge between Kirkby and Gillmoss. In the past approaches had been made with a view to industrial development and the tenant farmer, who was buying the farm, had discounted this land and excluded it from the sale because of its limited agricultural value.

4.3 The Borough Council said that a considerable amount of land suitable for industry was available already for the foreseeable future and they thought that an access except for only very occasional traffic would be unsafe. The County Council confirmed that the object of the Green Belt here was to prevent the coalescence of Liverpool and Kirkby and provide an open corridor for the M57 through Merseyside. Clearly recognisable boundaries had been chosen and if this parcel of land was excluded, there would be pressure on the many similar areas of land near to the highway junctions. It had been noted that the land produced hay crops; being within a degraded landscape which had priority for landscape treatment, it could be planted with trees in the future.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

4.4 The motorway corridor is not particularly wide in the vicinity of the A580(T) junction and I believe that this site has value along with other land nearby in the Green Belt as a separation between the road system and the developed areas to the east and west. If such land were not protected from development the impression gained from the road would be of travelling through continuously built-up areas. I can understand the difficulties likely to arise in profitably farming this land, but I also foresee difficulties in regard to a safe access which could only be to slip roads or a roundabout. There is merit, I am convinced, in retaining the land in the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

4.5 I recommend that the land near Randles Bridge (Site 1C) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITES 9C(a AND b) - LAND AT CHAPEL LANE, CRONTON

Objections to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Ian Tuson Limited

K19

4.6 These are 2 areas of agricultural land on the west side of Chapel Lane and between Cronton and Widnes. The smaller parcel to the north, 9a, is about 3 ha with a frontage to the Liverpool-Warrington Road, A5080, immediately to the south of the village, while 9b is some 10.5 ha towards the south end of Chapel Lane and with its southern boundary adjoining a residential area and rugby football ground in Widnes. There is a certain amount of sporadic frontage development along Chapel Lane, mainly on the east side, but it is generally an open area between the settlements.

4.7 As a family firm the objectors had carried on a house building business in Widnes for many years and had bought this land in the 1960's with a view to eventual development. Over the years applications for development had been refused and lack of drainage and road safety had figured as reasons for refusal. However, the drainage difficulties had now been overcome and since the construction of the M62 motorway just to the north, traffic on the main road had declined significantly. There was a need to provide "middle bracket" housing in Cronton and Site 9a would be ideal. If the land was not in the Green Belt there would be a good chance of obtaining permission on an appeal.

4.8 Widnes had been earmarked for major expansion in 1969 and in laying out land to the south there had been huge public investment in services which had been designed to serve Site 9b. It was counterproductive to allow "urban regeneration" to stifle every enterprise outside Liverpool, and not everyone wished to live in urban surroundings. People should have freedom of choice, and a balance should be struck so that some peripheral development could take place. The objectors were quite willing that if their land was excluded, the 2 large fields between could be given to the village for use as open space.

4.9 The Borough Council representative said that there was land available in Knowsley District sufficient for 10 to 15 years of housing development, although there were no major areas at Cronton which was a conservation area and historic settlement. The main road was still busy with colliery traffic and commuters and formed a sensible southern boundary to the village. The County Council confirmed that the land formed part of a narrow and valuable gap between Widnes and Cronton which it was the purpose of the Green Belt to maintain. While Site 9a had been within the former Green Belt, Site 9b had been excluded being shown by a special notation as the possible site for development as an overspill area; however, the Town Development scheme did not go ahead, in the event, and there was now no justification for building here.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

4.10 I regard these sites as important if the village of Cronton is to survive as a separate and distinguishable feature away from the urban area to the south; despite the sporadic houses facing Chapel Lane, the rural fields which include these sites gives Cronton a separate identity. If further peripheral development was eventually justified at Widnes, the more southerly part of Site 9b may be considered suitable and the earlier investment in services prove to have been justified, but the evidence is that neither of these sites is needed for development within the foreseeable future and they should therefore continue making their contribution to the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

4.11 I recommend that the land to the west of Chapel Lane, Cronton (Sites 9C(a and b)) remain within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ON SITES IN THE BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY

SITE 4C - KNOWSLEY C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL AND PLAYING FIELD

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr and Mrs G Gough, of Knowsley Village

K10

4.12 The school and playing field occupy about 1 ha of land at the northern edge of Knowsley Village near Mill Lane and the objectors believe that the site should be within the Green Belt to prevent development taking place which might be out of keeping with the picturesque character of the village. Such development could have a bad effect on the quality of the conservation area, part of which had been acknowledged as outstanding.

4.13 The County Council have pointed out that the site is an integral part of the built-up area of the village and does not fulfil a Green Belt function, the boundary being drawn along Mill Lane to the north, a distinctive feature. An outline approval for sheltered housing accommodation had recently been granted by the Borough Council on part of the site.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.14 To draw the boundary around this site would depart from the recommended principles as the land is essentially part of the village which is protected by open land within the Green Belt from the industrial area to the north and west. Also in view of the recent permission for housing on part of the land, no purpose would be served by its inclusion at this stage. I recommend that the school and playing field (Site 4C) remain outside the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 8C - LAND AT LICKERS LANE, WHISTON

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Messrs R V McCutcheon and W E Fraser, owners

K2

4.15 This land, about 1 ha, fronts the south side of Lickers Lane and is rather untidy with some scrub woodland. The owners suggest that it could be developed for private housing with some planting of forest trees so that this part of the Lane could be enhanced and form a better link between local authority housing on the north side of the Lane and agricultural land, also within the Green Belt, to the south. The site was

at risk of becoming a rubbish tip and was ineffective as a barrier between the housing and the Green Belt. It could be very much improved with sympathetic development.

4.16 The land had been included in the former Green Belt proposals, the County Council say, along with the land to the north which was later released for housing for overspill purposes. It was agreed that the land had an unsatisfactory appearance but it was felt important that this landscape should be rejuvenated as it formed part of the former Halsmead Park Estate which had been characterised by belts of woodland and coverts. The further extension of the built-up area could upset the revival of the landscape and frustrate the maintenance of a strong agricultural economy on the land to the south.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.17 I saw that apart from skirting the group of houses fronting the Lane to the west, the Green Belt boundary here generally follows the strong line of the road, which itself is almost a ridge line with a general fall in levels to the south where the M62 motorway is located. To exclude this land from the Green Belt would make it possible for new development to spill over into views from the south at present confined to trees on this and nearby sites. This loss to the Green Belt would not be outweighed by the benefits of development here. I therefore recommend that this land at Lickers Lane (Site 8C) remains in the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 10C - LAND AT POTTERY LANE, WHISTON

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of W L McClure

K20

4.18 This is 2 plots of land either side of the M57 motorway where Pottery Lane passes over on an overbridge. The plot on the east is covered by trees while that to the west is grassland. The Trustees say that a large house formerly stood on the land to the east together with several cottages and they claim that both parcels are suitable for residential use and should therefore be excluded from the Green Belt.

4.19 The County Council have pointed out that this land was included in former Green Belt proposals and was considered unsuitable for housing because of proximity to the motorway. The land was in the present motorway corridor and included in the Green Belt as a separation between Huyton and Whiston. The land was considered of strategic importance in providing access points to open land within the Green Belt and it had recreational value. To take the land out of the Green Belt would be to depart from the policy followed here of drawing it close to the built up areas.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.20 Although narrow, I consider this an important break between the settlements and to exclude the subject land from the Green Belt would be to isolate a significant area of open land to the south, through which the motorway passes. I note that there are proposals in a draft local plan, which if implemented, would lead to an improvement in the appearance of this land and I therefore recommend that the 2 parcels of land at Pottery Lane, Whiston (Site 10C) remain in the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 11C - LAND AT COALGATE LANE, WHISTON

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of W L McClure

K20

4.21 A small plot of land at Coalgate Lane near the junction with Paradise Lane is said by the owners to be no use except as a site for residential development. It adjoins residential property though it has been in use as the site for a quarry canteen.

4.22 The Coalgate Lane area had been consented for tipping, according to the County Council, and this land was intended for parkland in the local plan now being considered. It was thought that to permit development here would be out of keeping with the reclamation proposals.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.23 This is a very small plot with residential development on 2 sides and I noted that at this locality, although the Green Belt is limited overall, it is in fact quite wide. I therefore think that the loss of this small plot, for whatever eventual purpose it is used, would be of little consequence to the objectives of the Green Belt. recommend that the land at Coalgate Lane (Site 11C) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

PART 5 - REPRESENTATIONS ON SPECIFIC SITES - BOROUGH OF ST HELENS

5.1 The Borough Council of St Helens indicated that in general they fully supported the County Council's Green Belt proposals with some exceptions regarding specific areas; they would rely on written representations for most of those, but felt very strongly about the need for the exclusion of land at Haydock as a site for high technology industry.

SITE 25D - LAND NEAR HAYDOCK PARK RACECOURSE

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by	reference
The Council of the Borough of St Helens	-
Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by	
Wigan Borough Council	-
Greater Manchester Council*	-
The Council for the Protection of Rural England*	-

Note: *relied on written representations

5.2 The Borough Council seek the exclusion of about 40 ha of arable land situated immediately east of the M6 motorway and north of the East Lancashire Road, A580(T). Haydock Park Racecourse and Ashton-in-Makerfield are to the north, Golborne to the east, Newton-le-Willows to the south and Haydock itself to the west, the site being otherwise in an area of open fields and woodland belts at the extreme east of the County. The site is flat with a very gentle fall to the south where there is a frontage of about 900 m to the trunk road. The western boundary has a frontage of 450 m to Lodge Lane, A49(T), and to the roundabout intersection with M6 and A580(T).

5.3 The Borough Council see the form of development proposed for the site as an "industrial park" accommodating "clean" industry such as incoming high technology industry and medium sized and growing firms already nearby. The development would be achieved in partnership or by agreements and would be of a quality suitable to the adjacent Green Belt. This had been evaluated together with 5 others and was chosen as being the most marketable available large site. The site has a good image being related to the nearby racecourse which is nationally known and could offer conference facilities, exhibitions and sporting activities. Access to the main highway network was excellent and although the land was Grade 3A development could be phased so that the minimum amount of land was taken out of agriculture at any one time. The site has Development Area status and the Department of Industry had confirmed by letter that they saw it as a strategically important site for top quality inward investment.

5.4 The Borough Council had informed the County Council that the acceptance of such a site was the most/effective single contribution which the County Council could make to the future employment and economic prospects of the Borough. The decision to ask for the exclusion of this site from the Green Belt had not been taken lightly, as the regeneration strategy and the "tight" Green Belt had been consistently supported by the Borough Council and was seen as the way to make the best use of existing resources and investment in St Helens. The Council were active in reclaiming difficult sites from over 500 ha of derelict land within the town and, with Knowsley, had been chosen for the

Operation Groundwork experiment. Industrial promotion had helped to create over 2,000 new jobs in the past 2 years through the St Helens Trust, a local initiative.

5.5 The release of this site was seen by St Helens as an essential component of the regeneration strategy. The Borough Council had consistently maintained that the existing supply of industrial land is inadequate in terms of quantity and quality to meet demand and that the release of "green field" land was necessary if Structure Plan policies were to be successfully implemented. Reclaimed sites would by their siting and location preclude development of the type envisaged within a reasonable period. The town had to compete with adjoining authorities, including New Towns in Cheshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester where substantial provision is made or is being made for such sites.

5.6 Policy 7.17 of the Structure Plan governs the supply of land for industry within the County and over the Plan period 1979-86 Policy 7.23 suggests 72 ha in St Helens, or demand for 6 ha per annum; a 5 year supply at any one time is suggested to permit a degree of choice and flexibility, with land for a further 5 years beyond the period of the Plan. The Borough and County officers had completed a review of the supply of industrial land in St Helens within the past 6 months and this showed that only 12 ha is immediately available in the "good marketability" category with only 27 ha immediately available in total. The total of potential industrial land was 155 ha of which 28 ha was described as "poor - unlikely to find a market". Within 5 years only 99 ha could be made available, on the assumption that some present constraints could be overcome. St Helens argue that land should be available to meet a demand of 10 ha per annum or 50 ha at any one time. The review reduced the overall total of potential land from 318 ha in the Structure Plan as approved, to a realistic total of 127 ha (plus 25 ha of expansion land already held by firms) - a reduction of 52%. Only 12 ha have good marketability and even sites in this category are not excellent high quality sites but only "good" in the St Helens context.

5.7 It was believed that marketability of sites was even more important at present than 3 years ago, since there are fewer firms chasing high quality sites, many of which are available outside the County. The policy of regeneration demands that Merseyside must make itself attractive to such inquiries, and the quality aspect is acknowledged in paragraph 7.21 of the Structure Plan. The Green Belt is at present drawn will simply compound the problem, an unacceptable position to the Borough with unemployment rates of 20%.

5.8 Although the Structure Plan assumes a demand level in St Helens of 6 ha per annum, the average take-up in the last 3 years of almost unprecedented recession has been 6.3 ha, an indication of the consistent underestimates made. Demand had been particularly strong in the small firms sector, but many firms were lost, not only to the Borough but to Merseyside because of the lack of suitable sites in St Helens. A small but regular demand existed from the large firm needing a high quality site which could not be satisfied at present in St Helens or indeed elsewhere on Merseyside. Today, such a firm can be very choosy about its location. This site at Haydock could cater for these requirements and ensure that the employment opportunities are not lost.

5.9 The County Council have used the same argument in paragraph 7.51 of the Structure Plan in regard to office sites and if "research and development industry" is substitute for "offices" the Borough Councils' present submissions are made. It is clearly not practicable, as the County have suggested, that before a Green Belt site can be made available an industrialist must first show that other sites are unsuitable; an industrialist is unlikely to wait for a site to be made available given the ready availability of sites elsewhere.

5.10 The County rely on the allocation under Policy 7.25 of the Plan of a large site at Gilmoor at the junction of the M57 and A580(T), but that site is not available to a

developer and its marketability is questionable, being at best "average". A second site at Upton has already been made available and has attracted a number of potential investors as a "science park" for high technology industry and as an office and research centre. Unfortunately, its location to the west of the Mersey will make no contribution towards relieving unemployment in St Helens. The Department of Industry had made clear that a further site was needed and that Haydock would be ideal for it.

5.11 The Structure Plan made, in Policy 7.21, provision that on review new land allocations should substitute for land currently being held for industry but which is unlikely to be developed. In County terms Haydock could substitute for Gilmoor or for the 44 ha site at Knowsley south of the East Lancashire Road which is now being returned to agriculture because of lack of industrial demand. Within St Helens Haydock could help to substitute for the 166 ha not now considered to be potential industrial land in the short or medium term.

5.12 Despite the Borough Council having urged the County Council to reconsider the industrial land situation and release land in the Green Belt for a new site, the County Council have no current proposals for a general review of strategy. That is why the Borough consider it is appropriate to debate the release of this site at the Green Belt inquiry. The proposal would be the subject of full public participation procedures in the Haydock Local Plan and any planning application; this should not be pre-empted by the Green Belt Subject Plan.

5.13 Following representations by the Borough prior to the Structure Plan, 2 sites had been approved in 1980. These were Abbotsfield Road (or Tunstalls Farm), 11 ha, and the Beeches, Haydock, 14 ha. The first site is owned by the local authority and intended for appropriate general and light industry, though it has only "average" marketability. The second site is opposite the Haydock site on the west side of the M6 motorway, privately owned and providing units for light industry, general industry and warehousing, it is seen as an extension of the existing Haydock Industrial Estate. Neither of these 2 sites are seen by the Borough Council as providing the site or the appropriate location in terms of the type of development envisaged at the Haydock site, nor do they satisfy the quantitative shortfall.

5.14 Of 5 reclamation sites referred to by the County Council, only one site of 7 ha, at Worsley Brow, is to be made available within 5 years and none of the sites are good in terms of marketability. Looking at the industrial land supply in neighbouring authorities, it would appear that at least in total all are better supplied than St Helens, and in some cases there appears to be an over-supply of land where there is no demand. Proposals, if approved, in Cheshire and Lancashire will result in further land allocations, and these policies are seen as likely to divert growth from Merseyside.

5.15 At the Structure Plan EIP in 1980 St Helens argued that demand was higher than the County estimated and that supply was inadequate. The Panel and the Secretary of State found against St Helens, stating that: "The disadvantages of not releasing green field sites is that it is quite possible that one or more industrialists who would otherwise have come to St Helens will not do so" but that: "Our judgement is that it is better to concentrate resources on improving the existing industrial estates and on reclaiming derelict sites". These comments were made in ignorance of the facts now agreed, namely the percentage reduction in land availability, poor quality sites and confirmation of the Boroughs' view regarding the reclamation of derelict land. Sites on such land would only be suitable if the location and siting was correct, which unfortunately is not the case.

5.16 Extensive further evidence was submitted on behalf of St Helens on the unemployment situation, the industrial demand both in terms of take-up and enquiries, the non-referral of enquiries by both agencies because of site constraints, the demand for a large industrial park and recent redundancies. Only those local authorities capable of

supplying what the market requires would successfully attract new companies and provide their unemployed workforce with new jobs. The unemployment problem is so severe that even a return to normal economic conditions would not solve it. The Haydock Park site is the best located and most easily serviced of the potential large sites in the Borough, and is probably the best located site available in the whole of Merseyside. The Borough claims that employment needs must come before the presumption of retaining agricultural land and prospects of employment for people here must prevail over the requirements of the County Green Belt Policy.

5.17 The County Council's case for having the Green Belt in this locality rests on the need to prevent the coalescence of the built-up parts of Haydock and Garswood and Ashton-in-Makerfield by retaining an area of attractive and scenically varied landscape. A policy had been pursued by all the local authorities of keeping development away from major routes, such as M6 and A580(T) which pass this site, since it was recognised that views from such routes provide the first image which visitors have of the County. St Helens had supported the County Council in many other cases against development near these main routes, whereas this proposal would completely transform the character of the landscape and effectively extend the built-up area of Ashton-in-Makerfield southwards to A580.

5.18 The County Council said they were concerned, as was the Borough, about rising unemployment and were acutely aware of the strong competition for foot-loose industry which was mounted by the New Towns who have special powers and good situations near the principal motorways. In this quest Merseyside was challenged by the whole of the United Kingdom, and in some instances, Europe. It was true that the Borough Council consistently maintained the need for a large green field site to be released from the Green Belt, although the exact location had varied in the recent past. The County Council's response had been that until the land at Gilmoor which had already been identified for development by major new industries had been substantially developed no further large green field site should be released.

5.19 As recently as September of this year, the Borough's Draft Haydock Local Plan in Policy 4 I(1) suggests a change in emphasis in the Borough Council's thinking, describing the site as an "area under consideration as a large industrial site for high technology industry", whereas it is later described as needed to "accommodate a large industrial user to meet expressed demand for such a site". The Proposals Map simply shows the site as being under consideration for industry while there are no specific policies for the control of development on the site set out in the Written Statement and it appeared to be treated no differently from any other site. It seemed that any land which might be released at Haydock Park would be added directly to the land supply and marketed alongside other land in the Borough without stipulation except for the requirements of the Draft Local Plan.

5.20 The County had always been prepared to consider an increased supply of industrial land in St Helens, or indeed in any other district, to maintain the impetus of the regeneration strategy. However, it was thought that the present proposal involved a major change in the strategy which could have repercussions not only for industrial policies in the other Districts but also across the wider spectrum of the Structure Plan policies; it would be a completely different approach to the location of industry in Merseyside from that adopted in the Structure Plan, more akin, in fact, to the 2 alternative strategies of managed dispersal and passive decline considered but rejected at the Structure Plan EIP. St Helens contend that the unemployment situation had deteriorated since the Panel met and there was still a short term deficiency in the land supply. While the County Council concede these points they do not accept that a release of this magnitude, in this location and for the purposes for which the Borough wish to see the site developed, can be determined without a more comprehensive examination of the consequences for the Structure Plan's strategy in general. If Haydock then proved appropriate, the Green Belt could be amended at that time.

5.21 The representative for Wigan Borough Council said that his Council strongly objected to the loss of land at Haydock from the Green Belt. Ashton and Golborne were presently separated from Haydock and Newton-le-Willows by an extensive and attractive belt of open land and the development of this site for any type of urban use would intrude. Such development would have the effect of extending the built-up area of Ashton to the A580 road and thereby link Ashton with Haydock by a continuous frontage along the East Lancashire Road and Lodge Lane. The open break between Haydock and Golborne on the north side of the main road would also be reduced by over one half. It was thought there would be difficulty in defending the boundaries of the subject site as the other parcels of neighbouring farmland would be at risk and if released, further reduce the open land break. The site was very prominent from all the main roads including the M6 motorway and its development would detract from the attractive wooded entry point into Wigan Borough.

5.22 The Wigan Council feared that general industry may be permitted and there was really no shortage of sites in the vicinity for such developments; 2 large estates were available for further development in Wigan less than 2 miles from the Haydock site which were very accessible to St Helens residents.

5.23 Written representations were received from the Greater Manchester Council and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, both supporting the Merseyside County Council in retaining the subject site within the Green Belt and objecting to industrial development here.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.24 In addition to hearing the evidence at the inquiry and reading the written submissions, including the support St Helens have had from the Department of Industry and the St Helens Trust Limited, I made several visits to the Haydock site and looked at other land shown on the maps submitted as being eventually available for industry in and near the Borough. I am in no doubt at all that the land at Haydock at present makes a very substantial contribution to the Green Belt and I am convinced that only the most extreme proved need could justify its exclusion.

5.25 Unemployment on the present scale is itself an extreme situation and if by removing the Green Belt designation one could at a single sweep anticipate the creation of a useful number of new jobs, it would be very tempting to try. However, despite the strong case ably made by the St Helens Council at the inquiry, there still appears to me far too many uncertainties to be sure of the outcome. There is a real danger, I fear, that should the site be developed and promoted, with all the necessary infrastructure etc, the opportunity to accept almost any type of development which provided jobs would be difficult to resist. The effect of this would be that the policies of the Structure Plan for the utilisation of land already earmarked and the regeneration of massive parts of Merseyside, could be put at risk. If that happened many resources, already committed, could be wasted. Such decisions should be taken only after the most painstaking investigation and full consultations when all the possible effects on related policies had been weighed, in my opinion.

5.26 That there have been unforeseen changes in economic terms since the Structure Plan EIP and a very good case has been made out by St Helens for a new initiative regarding the allocation of land to provide employment in the Borough, cannot be denied, but these are matters strictly for a Structure Plan review. Whether, at the end of the day the site at Haydock can be considered as the most appropriate should further land need to be released, would have to be judged in the light of claims on other land, perhaps not so potentially damaging to this part of the Green Belt.

5.27 At present open views towards a parkland landscape, which includes Haydock Racecourse, are possible from the roads to the west and south of this site. Despite the proximity of major towns not far away, it is a pleasant, rural view. Even the best landscaped site with extensive planting and land mounding would result in a complete change in character and loss of visual amenity. With 4 distinct urban areas all only 1 mile away, this open amenity is clearly of great value as an outstanding element in the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

5.28 I recommend that the land at Haydock Park (Site 25D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 20D - LAND AT BOLD POWER STATION, SUTTON

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

The Central Electricity Generating Board

H31

5.29 To the south-east of St Helens at Sutton the Green Belt boundary follows closely the edge of the built-up area, but includes the freestanding Bold Power Station and Bold Colliery, to the south of the main Liverpool-Manchester Railway, and tipping areas to the north. The County boundary passes north-south to the east. The objection relates to the inclusion of CEEGB land which may not be required for operational uses in the future, the CEEGB now being satisfied that the policy in the Subject Plan relating to operational land of statutory undertakers, as now amended, will not inhibit such use.

5.30 The CEEGB indicated that the 'A' power station had already closed and that part of the site could be released immediately for industrial development, although no plans for that had been made. It was likely that the remainder of the power station would cease to be operational in the future and there were no plans for any operational redevelopment. The question of industrial development was a matter which the Board had taken up with St Helens Borough Council in the context of the Sutton Plan, now under discussion.

5.31 As Bold Colliery and the Power Station were classed as industrial areas in the District Plan and the colliery was expected to remain productive for many years, it was thought unrealistic to include both within the Green Belt when industrial redevelopment of the power station site could be seen as a logical infill between the long-life colliery and the existing urban area. It was asked that the site be inset in the Green Belt. As the site is already developed by urban uses redevelopment would not involve the outward spread of the built-up area, damage the character of a town or village nor involve the use of land in agriculture or with potential for conservation or recreation. The boundary of the Green Belt here was seen as a matter for the District Plan to determine in the light of other important local planning decisions.

5.32 The Borough Council said that proposals for industrial use of the site were at an early stage and as parts of the site which the Board have asked to be deleted were now covered by plant or buildings, it could be that those parts were not suitable for industrial use and should be restored as open land. The Borough agreed that the District Plan was the proper vehicle for detailed consideration of the proposal, but believed that there was insufficient information available at present to support the exclusion of any part of the area from the Green Belt. If the Borough Council could eventually support a modification to the Green Belt boundary this could be achieved by way of the District Plan.

5.33 The County Council confirmed that this land had been included in the former Green Belt by Lancashire County Council and the purpose of its present inclusion was to limit the extent of the built-up area and reinforce the policies for environmental improvements on the urban fringe around Sutton. The presence of the power station and colliery, for operational reasons, on the edge of the built-up area, should not be taken to mean that they are an essential part of the urban fabric. The assumption that industrial development is the only alternative land use would create a dangerous precedent affecting all other statutory undertakings.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.34 While the general public may not regard a massive power station and colliery as a normal phenomenon within the Green Belt, their siting is of course dependent on operational requirements and their function is protected in the Subject Plan Written Statement by the new Policy on Public Services and Statutory Undertakers. This would not apply to uses other than for statutory purposes, though it does not seem unreasonable that should land and buildings be no longer required for those purposes, any existing investment, for instance in infrastructure, which could be made use of to supply much needed new jobs, should be so used, and this is clearly one of the many matters which I have no doubt the Borough Council will consider when sufficient information is available. In the meantime there is a clear intention to which all the Councils have subscribed, derived from the Structure Plan policies, that the environment should be improved in the urban fringe areas, which this is. It was said at the inquiry that agreement had already been reached on landscaping proposals for some of the land here north of the railway.

5.35 The power station, colliery and Parr Moss north of the railway occupy a sector of land between Sutton and the County boundary on the other side of which the Cheshire County Council also propose a Green Belt. The boundary of this Merseyside Green Belt gives protection to this sector and aligns well with the proposed Green Belt in Cheshire. If the power station site were omitted it would be considerably weakened, especially in view of the proximity of the colliery site to the east. I therefore consider that there is merit in retaining the site in the Subject Plan at this stage, at least until the extent of future requirements for the land have been fully debated.

RECOMMENDATION

5.36 I recommend that the land at Bold Power Station (Site 20D) be retained within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 14D - LAND SOUTH OF NCB STABLE YARD, HAYDOCK

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by	reference
Mrs Sylvia Chee, local resident	H2
Mr J Dawd, local resident	H24
Mr and Mrs D K Pimblett, local residents	H16
Mr James S Collier, agricultural tenant, of Woodside Farm, Newton-le-Willows	H29
Mr E G Sheldon, local resident	H10

Mr James Goodwill, local resident*
Mr and Mrs J Leonard, local residents*
Mr and Mrs J Rigby, local residents*
Mr M S Deacle, local resident*
Mr and Mrs D Billing, local residents*
Mr G D Dinsdale, local residents*
The Council for the Protection of Rural England*

H5
H9
H4
H18
H27
H28
H37

Note: *relied on written representations

Support for exclusion from the Green Belt, by

St Helens Borough Council

H39

5.37 This relates to about 5.5 ha of good agricultural land at the south side of Haydock between Grange Valley on the west and land in the occupation of the NCB for industrial use to the north and east. The burden of the objections to its exclusion from the Green Belt arose because the site had originally been proposed within the Green Belt at the "deposit stage" in December 1981 and excluded later on the recommendation of the Borough Council who were preparing the Haydock Local Plan. Residents felt this was a valuable open area contributing to the break in development between Haydock and Newton-le-Willows and providing an amenity gap between residential properties and the industrial land. Although applications for residential and industrial development had been refused there was a great deal of uncertainty in the minds of residents as to the future of the land and they were very concerned that it should remain open. The tenant farmer thought it important that such good agricultural land should be conserved, in view of the large areas of semi-derelict and waste-land in the Borough. With such clear boundaries the CPRE felt the land fully met the criteria for Green Belt land in the circulars, both as a separation from Newton-le-Willows and contributing to the character of Haydock.

5.38 The Borough Council explained that as recently as 15 September in considering the draft local plan they had resolved that this land should be included in the Green Belt but that the Subject Plan boundary should not be altered until such time as the local plan has gone through all the various procedures involving public participation and consultation. The boundary now proposed by the County Council was a hedge and ditch and this was thought satisfactory.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.39 That conditions could be improved by development contributing to the tidying up of the NCB yard and the land to the east is clear, but I am uncertain that new industrial development need spread into this land to achieve those aims. Considering the overall strategy of the Structure Plan, and the extensive areas of under-used land within the Borough, it does seem important to me that peripheral land of this quality, in the relatively narrow gap between Haydock and Newton, should be given clear protection and I have noted that the local plan does include this land within the Green Belt as the original Subject Plan did.

RECOMMENDATION

5.40 I recommend that the land near the NCB Stable Yard at Haydock (Site 14D) be included within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 18D - LAND NEAR MANOR FARM PH, RAINHILL STOOPS

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Executor of the late Mr Fred Prescott

H11

5.41 This objection relates to an area of about 2 ha of land with a short road frontage located between the car park of the Manor Farm Public House and existing residential development which has Junction 7 on the M62 motorway just to the south. The objector said that it had been used in the past for grazing horses, but was not part of a farm unit and should be made available for development. The land was relatively low-lying and the ditch and hedge on the open side would make a good Green Belt boundary.

5.42 The County Council explained that the land had been included in the former submitted Green Belt and was at present included in the Subject Plan to prevent the outward expansion of Rainhill into open country where further development would be seen from the motorway. Apart from agriculture the Green Belt policies would permit the use of the land for recreation, forestry etc.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.43 I have noted that the existing housing development to the south-east of this site does in fact come up to the boundary of the motorway slip road; this land lies further away and is in essence an infill between the housing and the public house and car park. While the merits of development here may be suspect and be challenged on grounds of amenity, Structure Plan policies relating to housing and open land etc, it does seem doubtful to me whether the land could be strictly regarded as fulfilling a true Green Belt role - its loss would not seriously reduce the essential gap between Rainhill and Widnes or Cronton. Furthermore, if the south-western boundary of the land was followed between the car park and the housing a cleaner, straightforward edge to the Green Belt would result.

RECOMMENDATION

5.44 I recommend that the land at Rainhill Stoops (Site 18D) be excluded from the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 24D - LAND AT TUNSTALL'S FARM, SUTTON LEACH

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Dr R Critchley, on behalf of Mr and Mrs L Chapman and about 300 residents of Sutton Leach who had signed a petition

H45

5.45 This was a roughly triangular area of farmland adjoining industrial development and the railway, on the edge of Sutton Leach, extending to about 12 ha. The residents believe that the suggested use of the land for industrial development would be directly contrary to the approved Structure Plan policies which encourage urban regeneration, as it was a green field peripheral site. The appearance of development on the site, the loss of agricultural land, additional traffic and the proximity to residential areas were the reasons put forward against development and in favour of inclusion in the Green Belt, as it had been on the original draft.

5.46 The Borough Council said that the site had planning permission for general industry and a detailed application for roads, sewers and landscaping was under consideration. It was thought that further discussion should await the inquiry on the Sutton Local Plan, in which the land had been earmarked for industry. The County Council confirmed that they had no strategic objection to industrial development to meet a short-term deficiency in land supply and that the boundary of the Green Belt as now drawn along an electricity pylon line to the south-east of the land was satisfactory.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.47 Whilst I fully understand the objections from local people to a further loss of open land on the edge of the settlement, which on the face of it is contrary to the general strategic aims of the Structure Plan, I appreciate the authorities' requirement to be able to offer attractive sites for incoming industry in the hiatus period when the more urban redevelopment sites of equal quality are not yet available. With the Green Belt boundary being drawn generally so tightly round the urban areas, it is inevitable that land at some point may have to be released. While the choice in this case has clearly raised a great deal of protest, in view of the advanced stage reached in the planning process, I feel unable to make a recommendation favourable to the objectors.

RECOMMENDATION

5.48 I recommend that the land at Tunstall's Farm, Sutton Leach (Site 24D) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 12D - LAND AT CAMP ROAD, GARSWOOD

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr A Wain, of Ashton-in-Makerfield

H21

5.49 This objection site is a triangular area of about 4 ha of agricultural land between Camp Road and the railway at Garswood. Land excluded from the Green Belt lies at the south beyond Strange Road. The owner had held the land as builders' "stock-in-trade" for many years and held the opinion that Camp Road would be a better boundary for the Green Belt here, permitting development on the subject land which would round-off this part of Garswood. The settlement was really only an area of modest housing, with little separate identity, relying on Ashton-in-Makerfield for main facilities and services; it was linked to Ashton at the north and as no further major growth was contemplated, so coalescence was not an issue. It was believed that a perimeter road would present a better "face" than the backs of houses along the line of the railway which was in cutting.

5.50 The County Council said that the aim here was to retain the separate identity of Garswood and prevent further coalescence with Ashton; as Garswood lies entirely to the west of the railway, that was chosen as the logical boundary. Development to the east could not properly be integrated. The industrial development, excluded from the Green Belt, lay to the south in a shallow valley and was less obtrusive than a development on the subject land would be. The Borough Council agreed.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.51 While to exclude the land from the Green Belt would not of itself lead to further coalescence, it would reduce the rather narrow gap or wedge of Green Belt land through which the M6 motorway passes here. As a development site it is not well integrated with Garswood or Ashton, and although of less than best quality agricultural land, and not part of a farm unit, it is a green field and relates well to land on the east side of Camp Road. I noted that the Green Belt boundary follows the railway to the south of the industrial site and I am convinced that this is the most logical and well-defined boundary to adopt.

RECOMMENDATION

5.52 I recommend that the land at Camp Road, Garswood (Site 12D) remain within the Green Belt on the Subject Plan.

SITE 17D - LAND SOUTH OF ELTON HEAD ROAD, ST HELENS

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

H39

Support for exclusion from the Green Belt, by

Sherdley Estates

H6

5.53 This relates to about 55 ha of land between Sherdley Park and the main-line railway, the major part of which is in agricultural use. The Borough Council had refused various planning applications on the land in the past and were of the opinion that if it was not included in the Green Belt further applications would arise which would be difficult to resist. They consider the land linked to the substantial Green Belt area to the west and south, and forming part of an extensive wedge of open land leading well into St Helens via Sherdley Park and Golf Course. This formed a valuable "green wedge" into the urban area, as had been advocated in the Structure Plan at Policy 11.4. The land had been included in the original Green Belt proposals as an area within which a special study would be undertaken, but that designation had been deleted and it was not now proposed to carry out such a study. The locality had low priority for local planning status.

5.54 The County Council explained that part of the land to the west of Lowfield Road was under investigation for open cast coal extraction and it had been considered that the whole area was largely divorced from the extensive tracts of open land forming the essential gap separating St Helens from Rainhill. While it was pleasant open land, it did not strictly perform a Green Belt function, as other wedges, included elsewhere, did.

5.55 The owners of the land were convinced that the County Council had given full consideration to the question and had made the right decision as the land had only tenuous links to the proper Green Belt. They thought it may be appropriate land for housing in the future, although a recent appeal had been dismissed.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.56 I agree that the land is an integral part of the main wedge of open land leading to the north into St Helens, formed mainly by Sherdley Park which is in the Borough's ownership, but the mineral working to the south and industrial development to the south-west largely isolate this land from the Green Belt proper. The situation would not be improved if and when open cast coal working takes place on the western area but the opportunity may then follow for an effective improvement in landscape quality which could lead to further consideration being given to Green Belt status. In the meantime the policies on open land and housing in the Structure Plan and normal development control procedures should give this land ample protection. When a local plan is considered, special status could create the "green wedge" with which the Borough Council are concerned.

RECOMMENDATION

5.57 I recommend that the land south of Elton Head Road (Site 17D) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 23D - LAND AT STANLEY BANK FARM, ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Tootal Group PLC

H41

5.58 The objection area is about 60 ha of agricultural and woodland although the area of the Green Belt affected extends to about 70 ha as it includes other land at the fringes, not included in the objection but not viable as Green Belt on its own. The site has a long northern frontage to the East Lancashire Road, A580(T) and is roughly triangular in shape, at the north-east side of St Helens. The objection is based on the view that the site makes no contribution towards Green Belt objectives and that it would be contrary to proper planning principles for it to be included.

5.59 For the objectors it was stated that as well as being shown within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan, this land was also so shown in the No 2 Plan of the "Issues Report" relating to the Draft Haydock District Plan which is expected to cover the period up to 1991. Also shown as likely to affect this land on that plan was the possible route for the Blackbrook Bypass of A58, a proposal listed in the Structure Plan for more detailed evaluation in the road improvement preparation pool. The line of that road was shown as passing south-west to north-east through Stanley Bank Farm on a plan handed in at the inquiry. The Ashton-in-Makerfield Town Map of 1966 had indicated the land as a "white area" crossed by the proposed Blackbrook Bypass.

5.60 The objectors believed that the Subject Plan must prescribe Green Belt boundaries which are both appropriate to fulfil all the requirements and objectives of the operative planning strategy, and establish long-term, readily recognisable and defensible boundaries if public confidence was not to be undermined or prejudiced. It was the antithesis of sound planning practice to formulate and prescribe Green Belt boundaries in a manner which either invited or necessitated early review and revision. Green field land releases would still be needed with urban regeneration. The Council had acknowledged that such land may need to be released at some future date, and indeed have only said that they were satisfied that sufficient land had been excluded from the Green

Belt to satisfy demands of the Structure Plan up till 1986. It followed that the Subject Plan, as now drawn, may only succeed in prescribing boundaries for as short a period as some 3 years before detailed review and adjustment is called for. This was not in line with the advice in paragraph 4 of Circular 50/57 or a statement made by the then Minister on 5 July 1960 suggesting that land should not be included in the Green Belt unless it was necessary to keep it permanently open.

5.61 The objectors believe that the northern extremity of St Helens is defined by the East Lancashire Road as to the north of that road there is a predominance of open and attractive countryside with a few regrettable incursions, whereas to the south in sharp contrast the northern extremities of St Helens extend up to the road. The road had clearly been adopted at least during the 1950's, 60's and 70's as a logical boundary to development. It was not considered that the objection site performed any strategic function in checking the growth of the built-up area as the East Lancashire Road to the north comprises the most significant feature defining the limits; a characteristic of the objection site is that it is wholly contained by extensive housing and the urban area to the west as well as the road to the north. It does not form part of any wedge or open area separating St Helens from adjacent settlements.

5.62 The importance of the Green Belt contributing to the retention of the individual character of the settlements was acknowledged but here it was the open countryside between the East Lancashire Road and Garswood which had strategic importance in maintaining the open break between St Helens and Ashton and that area was rightly included within the Green Belt.

5.63 As to safeguarding the countryside to preserve its potential for agriculture, nature conservation and as an amenity was concerned, the farmed area owned by the objectors of 34.3 ha was not a viable farm unit, producing low income for only one worker and needing extensive investment in buildings, livestock and fencing to convert it to even a semi-intensive livestock unit. Such investment can not be forthcoming on the basis of a Green Belt boundary which was likely to be revised in a few years time. Whether in the Green Belt or not, the land continues to suffer from urban pressures, trespass, vandalism etc. The St Helens Council had considered this land as having development potential for housing in the Study of 1980/81 but had abandoned it on the basis of a superficial agricultural assessment. In fact the use of such a non-viable unit could remove pressure from more agriculturally valuable sites, and this must weigh heavily against its inclusion within the Green Belt.

5.64 The most noteworthy feature of the objection site in visual terms was thought by the objectors to be Stanley Bank Wood which runs roughly south-west to north-east across the site. Land to the east was not seen as contributing to the open setting of the town but should more appropriately be regarded as urban fringe, whereas land to the west of the wood was more open and more widely viewed while remaining a comparatively small and unexceptional re-entrant of open land on the southern side of the main road. The removal of the objection site from the Green Belt would not prejudice, impair or have any detrimental effect on the much more valuable Sankey Valley Park, or to land to the north of the East Lancashire Road. Any important habitats within the objection site could be conserved.

5.65 The objection site boundaries adopted by the Subject Plan, following the narrow and shallow water courses of the Black Brook and Clipsley Brook, are quite lacking in any significant physical distinction and thus appear arbitrary; if the objective of ensuring a "logical conclusion to the urban area" is adopted this calls for a revision of the boundaries here. This view does not necessarily depend upon there being any likely future land use needs to be accommodated on the objection site, nevertheless there are a variety of uses which could be considered within the scope of the Structure Plan objectives, some of which might be appropriate in the future. Residential land is needed to comply with the requirements of Circulars 9/80 and 22/80 and the County

Council are currently reviewing housing land policy. It was clear that the Borough Council considered the Subject Plan unduly constraining as they seek deletion of some areas from the Green Belt. The need for a large prestige office site and for hotel accommodation in this area is recognised in the Structure Plan. It is clear that the on-going activities of both the strategic and local planning authorities will call for the future identification of land for residential and employment purposes; these aims would be prejudiced and jeopardised by an unnecessarily restrictive Green Belt policy.

5.66 If the Green Belt Subject Plan is to form a positive part of a coherent forward planning strategy, then the objectors believe that it should allow for the future identification of all the land which is likely to be required for future needs for both housing and other categories of developments. The latest surveys show that at projected rates of construction the total available resource of land for housing within St Helens will only provide between 4.3 and 6.5 years' supply. There was little distinction between this site and Florida Farm in planning and locational terms, the latter having been chosen for an examination as to future housing potential.

5.67 The County Council said that 2 applications for residential development on the derelict glasshouse area (to the extreme south of the objection area) had been refused in 1980 on Green Belt grounds and an appeal had been dismissed. Permission had been refused on the whole of Stanley Bank Farm in November 1981 for various reasons including the Green Belt and although an appeal had been lodged, it had subsequently been withdrawn. As it was thought there was no need for additional residential land in this part of St Helens at present, the Council saw the issue as whether or not the boundary to the Green Belt should be drawn along the East Lancashire Road.

5.68 The intention to include green wedges into the conurbation as part of the Green Belt had been stated in Policy 11.4 of the Structure Plan and the Key Diagram makes clear that such a wedge should cross the East Lancashire Road on the north-west side of Haydock to prevent the coalescence of St Helens and Haydock. The objection site was the largest gap on the south side of the main road between the junction of the Rainford Bypass and the M6 and it had the most varied landscape. The loss of this land from the Green Belt would almost certainly lead to the loss of the adjacent wedge at Florida Farm while the principle of drawing the Green Belt along major physical barriers (such as main roads and motorways) would, if applied elsewhere completely change the character of much of Merseyside thus reducing its attractiveness and hence its ability to compete with other regions for industry and commerce. The Clipsey and Black Brooks are firm and easily recognisable features in the landscape.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.69 First, despite the argument that the East Lancashire Road is the natural boundary to the development lying to the south, I believe that this land does have an important Green Belt function in that it offers open views to the south in a stretch of road which otherwise would appear mainly to be passing through or by a built-up area, and further, it is a distinctive separation between St Helens and Haydock, breached only by the crossing of A58 with the Black Brook. As a wedge it allows the extensive Green Belt area to the north, an area of some quality, to flow right up to the existing development. Accepting the thesis that there is no urgent need to release further areas for housing in the immediate future, to which the objectors subscribed, I believe that the site may have merit in the long term for some special type of development such as mentioned at the inquiry, eg hotel or conference centre, but such developments are comparatively rare and to an extent footloose. Green Belt designation would not of itself necessarily preclude an institution in large grounds and faced with a proposition which they could reasonably support, the planning authorities would be unlikely, in my view, to do anything but seriously consider it. The evidence about agricultural viability was not seriously challenged, and it is true that this land may be favoured for development in the future in preference to more valuable land elsewhere.

5.70 The second consideration, relating to housing, is the longer term position coupled with the permanence or otherwise of the Green Belt boundary. I have already reported my general sympathy with the view that the Green Belt should as far as possible be regarded as a long-term planning strategy - I am sure that this is what the general public subscribe to. But assuming that the time comes when it is necessary to look beyond the present Non-Green Belt land for housing sites (and I believe it is quite impossible to predict when that may be), it is clear that the planning strategy would be modified to permit extensions of development only in particular peripheral areas, after full consideration and public participation. At that time I think that this land would be assessed but I cannot be sure that it would be chosen. In the meantime the boundaries formed by the brooks seem to me logical and adequate.

RECOMMENDATION

5.71 I recommend that the land at Stanley Bank Farm, St Helens, (Site 23D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 7D - LAND AT FLORIDA FARM, HAYDOCK

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

The Executors of S Littler Esq

H36

5.72 This objection relates to about 17 ha of land with frontage to the East Lancashire Road and immediately east of Stanley Bank Farm previously discussed, across the road A58. Not the subject of objection but contiguous with the objection site is an area of about 3.3 ha formerly used by the RAF but now in use as playing fields. Slag Lane crosses the north-eastern part of the land passing from Haydock Lane to the East Lancashire Road and giving access to Florida Farm steading. To the south the boundary is formed by the Clipsley Brook beyond which is the housing development at the western end of Haydock with further housing to a shallow depth from Haydock Lane to the east.

5.73 The basis of this objection is that the objectors believe that the Green Belt should form a long-term boundary to development and that this site should be excluded, as are other sites by the Structure Plan, as land for possible development in the period beyond the Structure Plan date of 1986. A flexible approach to the boundary in the Subject Plan is advocated, with more detailed, tighter control being devolved into local plans. Apart from agriculture, the policies in the Structure Plan on Open Land were not thought to apply to this objection site. The Green Belt should be justified on the criteria set out in the circulars.

5.74 As to housing land, the objectors thought that St Helens had the most critical land supply and therefore the Green Belt boundary should be less tight and rigid here, so that any shortfall could be made good without readjustment of the boundary. Any development of this land should be considered as a "rounding-off" to Haydock, as there is already built development to the west, south and east, with the East Lancashire Road forming a natural boundary to the north. The land does not contribute to a separation of settlements nor to the preservation of the individual character of the town; it offers little interest in landscape terms and is of lower agricultural quality than other land around St Helens. There are no public rights of way across the land and views of the site are limited, so that the public gain little from it.

5.75 The objectors said that although originally included in the Green Belt in the first Plan of 1980, the Borough Council had recommended that this land be excluded as it was under consideration as a possible housing site. Subsequently it had been shown as a site for detailed investigation and only in May 1982, following representations from the public and various other bodies had the County Council included the land again in the Green Belt. Because the Trunk Road was a physical barrier and clearly severed this site from open land to the north, it should be chosen as the natural Green Belt boundary. Persons travelling along the road saw continuous development through Haydock and this site was hardly visible with a dense hedge and line of trees screening it from the road, indeed towards the western end of the site the road is in cutting.

5.76 Florida Farm had been identified in the Haydock District Plan Issues Report of January 1982 as one of three possible sites in St Helens which could correct a shortfall of housing land, although in the later Draft District Plan it had been shown as within the Green Belt. A report on an appeal decision affecting the objection site, of July 1981, was thought by the objectors, based on the findings of fact, to show there was not a good case on agricultural grounds for including this land in the Green Belt, other findings were that the site was physically suitable for residential development and that infrastructure deficiencies could be overcome. For all these reasons this land should not be included.

5.77 The County Council had consistently held the view that to draw the Green Belt boundary along the line of the East Lancashire Road would be unacceptable; they saw the land as contributing to a visual amenity for townspeople and maintaining an attractive environment, by drawing the countryside across the road up to the Clipsley Brook, an effective and easily recognisable edge to the built-up area. To extend the urban development right up to the main road could create a precedent which, if followed elsewhere, would reduce the attractiveness of much of the County to the detriment of its future chances. This was an open break and it should logically remain within the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.78 There is a need, I believe, for the East Lancashire Road to continue to have open areas and the Green Belt flowing across it, and this land, together with Stanley Bank to the west, forms a major relief to the continuous pattern of urban development through which the road passes further east. While I agree that the objection site is not part of a vital separation (the Green Belt being quite extensive in this vicinity), it has a strong function as part of the rural scene in relation to the housing south of the brook, in my opinion a true Green Belt function.

5.79 My remarks above at paragraph 5.70 in relation to Stanley Bank Farm apply equally to this land at Florida Farm; it may be that in the fullness of time a need will be established and acknowledged for the release of further housing land and the boundary the Green Belt will need to be reconsidered. But I have no doubt that at present this land makes an adequate contribution to the concept of the Green Belt and should remain within it.

RECOMMENDATION

5.80 I recommend that Florida Farm (Site 7D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 16D - LAND AT RAINHILL HOSPITAL, ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Mersey Regional Health Authority

H42

5.81 The extensive Rainhill Hospital occupies grounds of about 72 ha within an area of 130 ha at the south-west of St Helens. The land not used for hospital purposes is in agricultural use. The whole area between the Liverpool-St Helens railway line to the north and Elton Head ^{Road} to the south had been shown in the Subject Plan as an area for further study, but as a result of representations by the Borough Council and others, the County Council had decided in May 1982 that it should be included within the Green Belt.

5.82 The Hospital Authority explained that the Rainhill Hospital was organised in 2 divisions, Sherdley to the east of Rainhill Road and Avon to the west. Rationalisation was now under consideration and it was likely that all future hospital services would be concentrated at the south-east on Sherdley Division, thus releasing about 41,000 sq ft of floorspace at the Avon site. The number of beds at this large mental hospital had been reducing steadily over some years and further reductions of the order of 4% per annum over the next 10 years was contemplated, by which time the Avon site would be run down.

5.83 Whilst the majority of the objection land was currently required for operational needs, it was likely that significant parts of the estate would be declared surplus to hospital requirements in the future. It was necessary for the authority therefore to maintain maximum flexibility as to the future use of all parts of their land. The release of land from operational use could extend well beyond the present Structure Plan period to a time when land supply statistics show a different pattern; at that time the hospital land might prove more suitable and desirable for development than other land in the area. The land had been shown outside the Green Belt when the Subject Plan was first published in draft form, and an application in June 1981 by the District Valuer for a determination as to future residential development had resulted in a decision to carry out a feasibility study. However, the Borough Council had later resolved, in February 1982 that the land should be included within the Green Belt, and the County Council had agreed.

5.84 The authority did not agree that this land was needed as a separation between the 2 communities of Prescott and St Helens, as consents for building in recent years had already created a development corridor to the south of the A58 road. The authorities' own future developments within the Avon site at the south-east would effectively create an urban link in the vicinity of the junction of Elton Head Road and Rainhill Road. The Sherdley site, the Farm Annex and the agricultural land would thus be effectively isolated from the Green Belt proper. Much of the land and buildings show little potential for an alternative use which would be found appropriate in a Green Belt location.

5.85 South of Elton Head Road a small strip of land within the hospital estate has been included within the Green Belt which, although partly disused, is occupied by garages and parking areas. That land had no scenic value and it added nothing to the Green Belt concept. It should be excluded as its loss would not prejudice the Green Belt. The boundary of the Green Belt here should follow Elton Head Road leaving the hospital grounds and buildings to the north, which have an urban character, excluded. The urban character was likely to be emphasised following further building works within the site which were now contemplated. Inclusion of the objection site within the Green Belt would not achieve any of the stated objectives, as the land is already almost entirely surrounded by development.

5.86 On behalf of the Borough Council it was explained that the request to the County Council to include the subject land within the Green Belt had followed a reassessment of the amount of housing land available within the Borough and a change in building rates forecast.

5.87 The County Council said that the land to the north of Elton Head Road had been shown in the approved Town Map for residential and hospital purposes, with a proposed St Helens Easterly Bypass dividing the 2 areas. After abandonment of the bypass in 1977 the Council had resolved to consider the inclusion of the land in the Green Belt. Land south of Elton Head Road, apart from some residential land, had been included within the submitted Merseyside and South Lancashire Green Belt. The agricultural land was believed to be Grade 3.

5.88 North of Elton Head Road the County consider that the purpose of the Green Belt is to prevent the coalescence of Knowsley and St Helens, although they have coalesced to the north of the playing fields along the A58 road. Coalescence is nearly achieved at Elton Head Road where the grounds of the hospital extend up to housing development. It was thought, however, that the objection site had a distinct rural quality and was large enough to form a break in the urban environment. Since the preparation of the Town Map conditions have changed and the abandonment of the bypass and the urban regeneration strategy had given an opportunity to consider this area afresh. It was considered that the land fulfilled a Green Belt function. South of the Elton Head Road the rear of properties along Rainhill Road were considered to be the most recognisable feature as boundary.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.89 I agree with the view that the farmland on the west side of Rainhill Road forms welcome separation between parts of the 2 settlements, and if there was a clear, well-defined tract of open land linking that area to the major part of the Green Belt to the south, I would have no hesitation in recommending the inclusion of the land in the Subject Plan. However, despite the view put forward at the inquiry as to the woodland rural nature of the Sherdley site abutting Elton Head Road, my impression of that is of an urban parkland; with the building already taking place and anticipated in that area, the urban character is likely, in my opinion, to increase and while an institution in large grounds may be an appropriate development to permit within the Green Belt, a site already developed and where further development is anticipated does not seem to me to qualify in quite the same way. In short I believe that St Helens and Rainhill must already be regarded as joined together at the Black Horse crossroads.

5.90 This leaves the much larger undeveloped area to the west of the Avon site as an isolated rural oasis, cut off from the Green Belt to both north and south. I cannot support the claims made at the inquiry for its early development, and I am confident that the Structure Plan policies relating to open land should afford sufficient protection, at least in the immediate future. In the longer term the planning authorities may decide to seek additional protection by way of special status in a District Plan as the land has obvious merit in its open state; because of its separation and isolation from the Green Belt proper, I am unable to recommend its inclusion.

5.91 The strip of land at the rear of Field Way and Gardeners Way, mainly used for garage purposes and car parking, should not, in my opinion, remain within the Green belt and a more logical boundary would be the agricultural land limit.

RECOMMENDATION

5.92 I recommend that the land at Rainhill Hospital (Site 16D) should be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan, and that the boundary of the Green Belt to the south

of Elton Head Road should follow the edge of agricultural land rather than the rear of house properties.

SITE 15D - LAND AT VISTA ROAD, HAYDOCK

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt by

reference

F B Cooper (Woodhead) Limited

H35

5.93 This land, about 7 ha, lies to the south-east of Haydock at the edge of the built-up area in the angle between the East Lancashire Road and M6. The original objection covered a large area extending in the east to the A49 Trunk Road, but at the inquiry this was reduced so that the boundaries of the objection site were undefined onto agricultural land to the south and east, road B5209 on the west and a playing field and residential property on the north. The neighbouring settlement of Newton-le-Willows lies about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile to the south.

5.94 On behalf of the objectors it was explained that the land formed part of the 400 acres Haydock Park Farm and was of Grade 3A classification. Following informal discussion applications for both industrial and residential development had been made to the Borough Council but they had been refused. Because the site was bounded to north and west by existing urban development it was considered as a natural area for rounding-off and a logical conclusion to the built-up area.

5.95 It was thought that the Green Belt boundary as now drawn did not have sufficient regard to any future land requirements and it was thus vulnerable to amendment and lacks credibility. The development of the site would in no way prejudice Green Belt policy as $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile would remain as a separation between Haydock and Newton. Visually development would be acceptable, the land not being in a dominating situation in the landscape and the edge of the new development would form a very adequate Green Belt boundary. For these reasons the land should be excluded from the Green Belt.

5.96 The County Council said that the land had been included in the adopted local plan for Newton as Green Belt although it had been white land in the Lancashire County Development Plan. The purpose of the Green Belt here was to prevent the coalescence of Haydock with Newton-le-Willows and maintain an open break between the built-up area and the M6 motorway. The boundaries as chosen for the Green Belt followed well defined features such as the backs of properties and the edge of the playing fields, whereas those suggested by the objectors were not at present defined. There were no proposals to extend the built-up area in this sector in the draft Haydock Local Plan.

5.97 If development were permitted here there would be only one field between Haydock and Newton; this would not be a sufficient gap to ensure adequate amenity or the retention of the individual character of the 2 settlements.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.98 I noted that the Green Belt between Haydock and Newton-le-Willows was generally narrow, and although the exclusion of the site would not be at the narrowest part, it would make serious inroads into the gap. Furthermore, while land to the west of the B5209 road has been excluded from the Green Belt because of some industrial use, it is

not all developed and has a less urban character than those parts of Haydock to the north; the consequence is that it too makes some contribution to the Green Belt, with hedges and trees. The subject site in contrast is open agricultural land with few features and wide views to the east and south-east. Its loss would amount to a fundamental narrowing of the Green Belt at a fairly critical location.

5.99 I am satisfied from the evidence that there is no urgent need for further land for development in this location.

RECOMMENDATION

5.100 I recommend that the land at Vista Road, Haydock (Site 15D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 5D - LAND AT HOUGHTONS LANE, ECCLESTON, ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Rt Hon The Earl of Derby

H34

Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by

Mr P Lennon, of Houghtons Lane, Eccleston
Eccleston Parish Council
Carmelite Monastery of Eccleston

5.101 This land is about 0.4 ha of grazing in a slight inset on the north-west edge of Eccleston, St Helens. It has a frontage to Houghtons Lane which leads from Eccleston to the A580 at the north, and a longer frontage to a track which gives onto Barrow Field Farm. The south-eastern boundary is formed by an electricity substation and the wall to the Carmelite Convent. The Green Belt boundary generally follows the edge of the built-up area which consists of modern housing to north-east and south-west.

5.102 It was said on behalf of the objector that several planning applications had been refused for housing on the land in 1973, 1978 and 1979, and an appeal was pending on a refusal of June 1982. The land had been shown as white land in earlier development plans which had also envisaged a western bypass to St Helens, leaving the site as a pocket on the fringe of the urban area. The "hard" edge of development had been established by housing to the north-east and south-west and an informal proposals map for the District of 1963 had allocated this land for residential development.

5.103 It was believed by the objector that the exclusion of this land from the Green Belt would not conflict with the objectives of the Subject Plan or of the circulars, as development here would clearly amount to rounding-off the township, there would be no outward spread or merging of settlements, nor would a precedent be established. The land was poor quality pasture with only marginal potential for agriculture and it did not form part of an agricultural holding. Trees behind the site would be unaffected whereas limited housing here would screen the substation and improve the quality of the area.

5.104 On behalf of local residents, the Parish Council and the Carmelite Monastery it was said that the traffic using the Lane as an access to the East Lancashire Road had

increased greatly in volume and become heavier in character in recent years, with consequent danger to pedestrians, particularly school children, as there were no foot-paths. The land was valuable as an amenity to local people and was frequented by wild-life. It gave seclusion to the Convent and if developed there would be disturbance and additional noise. Many elderly people walk in the area and dogs were exercised here. The Carmelite life was one of strict seclusion and local people would be shocked should the Community have to leave through intrusion of their privacy.

1.105 The County Council said that the earlier decision to permit development to extend up to the line of the former bypass road had resulted in a sharp definition between the rural and urban landscapes. The rigid wall of houses was broken to the east of Houghtons Lane by a public park which allowed a wedge of open land to flow through from the countryside and a similar opportunity existed at this site. The importance of the wedge was emphasised by the fine trees and the wall of the Convent, which improved this access point into the built-up area.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.106 I noted that the grounds of the Carmelite Convent were themselves something of an oasis or wedge within the urban area, and the objection site seems to me to be a fitting open lead up to the wooded area of the Convent, thus contributing to the Green Belt in this locality. It is true that from the point of view of coalescence of the settlements, outward spread of the built-up area or the safeguarding of surrounding countryside, the site makes little or no contribution. However, I believe it is a valuable open area from the point of view of the character of the settlement, particularly on the approach from the north when the wall and trees make a welcome change from nearby sections of Green Belt boundary composed mainly of garden fences and hedges.

5.107 To move the boundary to the access track, as suggested, would create a much less definite boundary and of course, invite further housing development to take place to the south-east. In my view this would destroy the character to which I have referred. The electricity substation could be screened in some less damaging way.

RECOMMENDATION

5.108 I recommend that the land at Houghtons Lane, Eccleston (Site 5D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ON SITES IN THE BOROUGH OF ST HELENS

SITE 8D - CRANK VILLAGE

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

Mr W Highcock, local resident
Mr G Heyes, local resident
Mr V Thorpe, local resident
Mr G Welsh, local resident
Mr and Mrs K Gibbins, local residents

reference

H19

H22

-

H23

H25

5.109 Crank is a small village lying to the north of St Helens and to the south-east of Rainford, within a fairly wide area of Green Belt within which it has been inset or

omitted. The objectors foresee its omission leading to some further new development which they believe would seriously strain water and drainage services and result in loss of rural character; they had been earlier advised that more new houses would not be permitted.

5.110 The County Council say that the village had been allocated for residential development in the 1967 Town Map and was inset in the submitted Merseyside and South East Lancashire Green Belt, but applications for further development had been refused in 1977. The Borough Council had considered that a limited amount of infill would be acceptable, without destroying the character of the village.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.111 I noted that generally the Green Belt boundary has been drawn quite tightly around the edge of the developed part of the village, except to the north where undeveloped land is included in the inset. The fact is that most of the inset is developed land and its inclusion within the Green Belt would not, in my opinion, make a true contribution to the objectives being sought. The accepted policies for the control of development in such localities should ensure that village character and amenity are conserved, should further building prove acceptable. I therefore recommend that Crank Village (Site 8D) should remain as inset within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 9D - LAND AT MARTINDALE ROAD AND MOSSEBANK ROAD, ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

H39

5.112 This is about 3 ha of land in a triangle at the extreme north of St Helens, with an eastern frontage to the A571 road leading to Billinge. The Borough Council consider that development here, most probably residential, would not amount to an urban incursion into the rural area and they think it would be a logical rounding-off. The Council say that the open gap between St Helens and Billinge would not be substantially eroded and the 2 roads, with existing development to the south, form the best boundary for the Green Belt.

5.113 The County Council point out that the site is very prominent with attractive countryside to the north, of which it forms part. It had been included as an Area of Great Landscape in the St Helens Town Map of 1965 and its loss to new development would seriously intrude into the open land.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.114 I have no doubt that this land is of value in the Green Belt as a means of preventing the outward spread of development into the attractive landscape between St Helens and Billinge and I noted that the boundary now drawn follows well defined features such as the edge of the present built-up area. In the absence of any firm need for additional development here I recommend that the land at Martindale Road and Moss Bank Road (Site 9D) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 10D - LAND AT THE JUNCTION OF MOSSBANK ROAD AND THE EAST LANCASHIRE ROAD,
ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

H39

5.115 This site of about 6 ha is low lying agricultural land to the north of the East Lancashire Road and south of Clinkham Wood. The Borough Council advise that this land had originally been intended as the site for a secondary school which was no longer needed and they believe that its development for residential purposes would be a natural rounding-off within well-defined limits to the Clinkham Wood area of the town. They point out that this site does not form part of any important buffer strip as Carr Mill occupies a long frontage on the north side of the East Lancashire Road. The Green Belt boundary should be drawn along the line of Moss Bank Road to the west.

5.116 The County Council believe that the Green Belt in this area restricts the outward expansion of St Helens and retains attractive countryside near the East Lancashire Road. The site, although small, forms something of a wedge, bringing rural character into an area otherwise dominated by housing and factory development. The boundaries as now drawn were clearly defined and further development here would be particularly intrusive.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

5.117 I saw that this land was at the edge of a wide stretch of Green Belt land extending westwards on the north side of the A580 to Kirkby and Knowsley, and northwards to Rainford, so that the loss of this area could hardly be said to affect the strategic value of the Green Belt. However, I do feel it is important to retain the main part of the town of St Helens on the south side of the A580 and not encourage what can only be regarded as "sprawl" to the north of this important physical feature. I noted that countryside to the west, including a wooded dell near the objection site, was a pleasant environment and the site continues this right up to the limits of the present built-up area. It thus has value as part of the Green Belt and I therefore recommend that the land at the junction of Moss Bank Road and the East Lancashire Road (Site 10D) be retained within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 11D - SAND LODGES, "BURGY BANKS", ST HELENS

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Rural Preservation Association, St Helens Branch

H3

5.118 This objection relates to 2 quite large areas of elevated land formed by former sand tipping, north-east of the centre of St Helens but wholly within the urban area. The Association believe they should be conserved as a nature reserve and would form a welcome lung or tongue of the Green Belt within the urban area. They say that St Helens lacks natural woodland, which this land now is, and that the County Council have previously come down in favour of a recreational use for these areas.

5.119 The County Council have said that although no longer needed for waste tipping the exclusion of the site from the Green Belt does not carry an automatic assumption in favour of housing, though they recognise that the regeneration policy looks toward the redevelopment of such areas in favour of peripheral sites. They think that the correct balance between the requirements for further development and the needs for open land and recreational pursuits, so far as this land is concerned, should more appropriately be taken in the light of a local study.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.120 While I agree that some of this land has value for nature conservation, I do not consider it a suitable addition to the Green Belt because of its isolation from the main part of the rural area. To designate it as Green Belt would not assist in achieving the main aims of the Subject Plan and I therefore consider that a local study, during which the claims for development could be weighed against the benefits conservation, would be the best solution. I recommend that the Sand Lodges and Burgy Banks area (Site 11D) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

PART 6 - REPRESENTATIONS ON SPECIFIC SITES - BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

6.1 The representative for the Wirral Borough Council told the inquiry that negotiations on particular aspects and policies had proceeded between the Borough and the County during the earlier stages of the Subject Plan and there were now no outstanding differences of opinion between the 2 Councils. Local plans were proceeding and in the M53 Corridor strict development control policies would be applied until a full evaluation of future land uses and planning aims had taken place. The Council were confident that there was sufficient land outside Green Belt areas both to meet the needs of new industry and fulfil the Structure Plan policies on housing and the requirements of Circular 9/80.

SITE 25E - LAND AT HOLMWOOD DRIVE, BARNSTON

Objection to Green Belt designation and policies, by

reference

Romac (Housebuilders) Limited

W114

Support for retention within the Green Belt, by

Mr E Connolly, on own and other residents' behalf

6.2 Barnston is an area washed over by the Green Belt and the objection relates not to the exclusion of a particular area but to the wish that the settlement be defined as a locality within which some housing development could take place, eg as infill. The objection site is about 1.5 ha of land at the rear of properties in Holmwood Avenue, with a narrow frontage to Holmwood Drive. The land had been allocated to public open space in the Birkenhead Town Map.

6.3 For the objectors it was said that while Policy 3 of the Subject Plan Written Statement dealt with inset villages, it made no allowances for "washed over" villages as is provided for in Circular 50/55. Development had been permitted in Barnston in the past, despite the definition of a proposed Green Belt, and a limited amount of further building within existing gaps should be acceptable. This could be achieved if the word 'INSET' were deleted from the heading of Policy 3 and by the addition to Policy 4 of the village of Barnston.

6.4 The County Council advised that an appeal had been dismissed in May 1981 in which the Inspector had referred to the importance of the (then draft) Green Belt in the locality. It was intended to prevent further urban development in the stretch of countryside lying to the east of the built-up areas of Irby and Heswall and the consolidation of the rather scattered areas of housing between Barnston Lane and Storeton Lane. It was not practicable to inset only the objection site itself and it would be necessary to inset the whole area between the 2 roads. The Borough Council had not considered this a suitable village for inseting which would be against the general objectives of the Green Belt in this locality.

6.5 The residents supported the inclusion of this area within the Green Belt as they were concerned at the rate at which beautiful areas of the Wirral were being lost to development. This was part of Barnston Dale, a uniquely beautiful area, much enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The status of the community would change if it were taken out of the Green Belt and further development would only increase traffic through the locality. A petition with 550 signatures of residents had been collected supporting the County Council.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.6 When visiting the area I saw that it has a well wooded character in contrast to some of the other suburban sites, and thus it adds to the attraction of the Green Belt in this part of the Wirral. I note also from the evidence that the former Cheshire part of Barnston had been included in the West Cheshire Green Belt proposals and not inset in that map. I believe that this land is too close to the main urban area of Thingwall to justify it being specifically excluded, even if further development here had been proved to be desirable. I do not consider it necessary or desirable to change the policies as suggested.

RECOMMENDATION

6.7 I recommend that the land at Holmwood Drive, Barnston (Site 25E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan and that no alterations be made to the policies therein.

SITE 23E - LAND AT YEW TREE FARM, IRBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

F Whitmore and Company Limited

W39

6.8 This is about 10 ha of agricultural land within a tongue of Green Belt between Irby and Pensby, reduced at the inquiry from a larger area which had been the subject of the initial objection. The site is bounded on the south by a footpath and agricultural land, on part of the north by the backs of houses fronting Thingwall Road and to the east by Harrock Wood through which a stream passes.

6.9 The objectors view was that with the Green Belt drawn tightly around the urban area of Irby, very little flexibility was provided. Here, the Green Belt had been drawn very close to the village centre of Irby and there was no room for rounding-off or limited expansion. This would inhibit the formation of a symmetrical, logical and sensible village structure. Limited development here would result in the village hall, library and shops achieving their true worth as a focal point. The separation of Irby and Pensby would still be maintained by Harrock Wood and the land to the east and south.

6.10 The County Council said that the land had been included as within the former West Cheshire Green Belt, not formally approved and it had been the subject of several refusals of permission for housing over the years. It was thought that the boundaries now chosen for the Green Belt were easily recognisable and well related to the land form which was elevated. There were footpaths and the area was an attractive amenity and a working piece of countryside. To exclude this land from the Green Belt would seriously reduce the gap between the 2 settlements, materially alter the character of the area and lead to further pressures for the release of farmland. The National Trust, who own Harrocks Wood, had written supporting the Council.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.11 While this land is not in the narrowest part of the gap between the 2 settlements, which is to the south at Thurstaston Road, the loss should development take

place would make serious incursions into this rural wedge in my opinion. I think that the arguments in favour of maintaining the wedge and separation of Irby from Pensby must override the benefits from development advocated by the objectors, and this would be in line with the Structure Plan policies. The boundary, following the backs of property and Thingwall Road, is easily understood and seen.

RECOMMENDATION

6.12 I recommend that the land at Yew Tree Farm, Irby (Site 23E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 30E - LAND AT VINEYARD FARM, POULTON

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by reference

Broseley Estates Limited

W96

Support for inclusion within the Green Belt, by

F E Willis and Sons, tenants of Vineyard Farm*

W116

Poulton and District Ratepayers' Association

W63

Mr D S Waller, local resident*

W47

Note: *written representations

6.13 The subject land is about 15 ha of farmland in the gap between Poulton in the north, Bromborough to the east and Bebington to the south. Poulton Road is the western boundary and there is recent housing to the north. The Dibbin Valley passes to the east and south, separated from the objection site by land included in the original objection but withdrawn at the inquiry. Vineyard Farm and buildings lie at the south of the objection area which is generally flat but falling slightly to the east.

6.14 The objectors had acquired this land as a long-term reserve of building land when it was white land outside the former Green Belt. An application in 1965 for development on 260 acres had been called in by the then Minister who had approved Phase 1; Phase 3 had been approved by the Council in 1971 but Phase 2 which included the subject site had been refused in 1975, the reasons being that the proposal was contrary to Structure Plan strategic policy and would involve the loss of good agricultural land. Following a subsequent appeal the Inspector had recommended in favour of the development but the Secretary of State had disagreed and dismissed the appeal.

6.15 It was intended now to submit a revised planning application on the reduced area of the objection site which would provide a buffer zone between the houses and Dibbin Valley to the east, at the same time minimising the impact on the agricultural holding. It was thought that the objections which the Secretary of State had to the earlier application had now been overcome, although the Green Belt had not been an issue at that time. The existence of the Dibbin Valley had the effect of ensuring that Bebington would never coalesce with Bromborough and the buffer strip would be an extra safeguard. The objectors had paid a full development price for the land in the early 1970's and it was believed that the Green Belt could not be prejudiced by the exclusion of this reduced area.

6.16 In written representations the Tenant Farmer says he would be faced with almost insurmountable problems were he to lose this land. It had the highest yield per acre of any land in the North of England and was surpassed only by land in Lincolnshire. Any further development would increase the risk of trespass on the balance of the farm. Other representations in writing referred to the value of the land as a link with and setting to the Dibbin Valley which was of importance as an ecological preserve.

6.17 The County Council said that the chosen Green Belt boundary recognises the importance of the landscape lying to the east of the ridge of higher ground and provides a combination of farmland and woodland which creates a valuable wedge penetrating into the urban area on the eastern side of the high ground to the railway. Beyond that the open area continues as Brotherton Park, a public open space. It was thought that the amenity value of the Dibbin Valley would be greatly diminished should further development take place on the remaining area of agricultural land which overlooks it; it would assume the appearance of an urban park.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.18 I believe that the exclusion of this land would diminish the valuable gap between the settlements and if developed it would, of course, extend the sprawl of urban development into fine agricultural land. In the absence of urgent need for further development here, I am convinced that its contribution to the aims and objectives of the Green Belt are worth conserving at present.

RECOMMENDATION

6.19 I recommend that the land at Vineyard Farm, Poulton (Site 3OE) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 8E -- LAND BETWEEN TELEGRAPH HILL AND MONTGOMERY HILL, CALDY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by reference
The Trustees of the Mabel de Renzy Jones Settlement W109

6.20 This is about 3.5 ha of grazing land in a triangle near the junction of Montgomery Hill and the A540 road between West Kirby and Heswall. It is in the Area of Green Belt which skirts the eastern side of Caldý and washes over existing development on road frontages to the south. The land has a pleasant appearance with hedges and a good belt of trees on the Montgomery Road frontage.

6.21 The objectors consider that the Green Belt boundary has been drawn in an illogical and arbitrary fashion in this area, ignoring existing longstanding uses whereas it should exclude the houses centred on the crossroads. Such an exclusion would not prejudice the aims of the Green Belt but would properly reflect the current use of the land and include the objection site which was entirely suitable to accommodate the undisputed demand for development land in this part of Wirral.

6.22 On behalf of the objectors it was said that Caldý was a particularly exclusive area in which to live and persons interested in coming here were unlikely to be satisfied by properties in the inner city areas. The loss of the land would not be

significant in agricultural terms and there was no question of coalescence of the settlements taking place, should the site be excluded from the Green Belt.

6.23 The purpose of the Green Belt here, said the County Council, was to prevent the outward spread of the built-up parts of Caldby and West Kirby in order to retain the attractive character of the landscape, which consisted of a combination of sandstone hills covered in woodland and heath with intervening pasture. Although ribbon development had taken place in the past, further development would seriously intrude into this landscape and the objection site was prominent. Development here would almost close the gap between Caldby and West Kirby and amount to a precedent.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.24 I agree that it does seem somewhat illogical to terminate the Green Belt leaving an area of development south of the crossroads, but I note that there is in fact a gap between houses in the south side of the road leading into Caldby. There are quite important and pleasant views of the countryside from the roads in the area and I consider that these are worth saving, so that the washing over of some of the more scattered developments does appear justified in my opinion. The Green Belt makes an important re-entrant between Caldby and West Kirby in the vicinity of Stapledon Wood and this would be seriously bitten into should the boundary advocated by the objectors be adopted. While I have no reason to doubt that houses built on the objection site would prove popular, the evidence was that there was no shortage of high quality sites in the locality at the present time.

RECOMMENDATION

6.25 I recommend that the land between Telegraph Hill and Montgomery Hill, Caldby (Site 8E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 10E - LAND NEAR BIRKENHEAD ROAD, MEOLS

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by reference

Ianglen Limited W95

Support for inclusion within the Green Belt, by

The Rycroft and Birch Road Residents' Association W5

6.26 This is about 8.5 ha of unused and neglected land skirting a detached residential development at Rycroft Road and Birch Road, to the south of the railway line at Meols. There is agricultural land to the south-west and a larger area of housing to the south-east focused on the junction between Birkenhead Road and Heron Road.

6.27 For the objectors it was explained that the subject land had been refused planning permission for residential development in 1981 and was now the subject of an appeal to the Secretary of State. It was the opinion that not only should the Green Belt issue be considered but that to arrive at a sensible decision on that required discussion of the issues of housing land supply and the urban regeneration policies. This land was ideally situated for development, it could be sewered easily and an

access to the Birkenhead Road would be acceptable to the highway authority. The plan under appeal at present had been an attempt to satisfy all the objections made previously by the local authorities.

6.28 Birch and Rycroft Roads were incomplete, and it was apparent that when built development had been clearly intended to extend into the subject land. Originally used for horticultural purposes, the land had been unused since 1960 and was acquired by the present objectors 2 years ago. It had been zoned for residential development in the Hoylake Town Map of 1961 and was excluded from the proposed Cheshire Green Belt. Earlier refusals of development had been for reasons of inadequate drainage and other reasons but since then a new trunk sewer had been laid through the land, to which connection was now possible. An application to raise ground levels to improve site drainage on the subject land had been refused in 1980 on Green Belt grounds and conflict with the Open Land Rural Economy Policy of the Structure Plan.

6.29 The first ground of refusal on the most recent application had been the Green Belt, but the circulars suggest that land not intended for early development but which may be required later, should be excluded. While Chapter 11 of the Structure Plan dealing with the Green Belt sets out the reasons for it, the Key Diagram indicating the extent of the Green Belt appears to omit the subject land. The subject land was part of the Meols/Hoylake township and development would not amount to an "outward spread" or constitute "further growth of a large built-up area". There is no question here of the merging of neighbouring towns, nor is the surrounding countryside being safeguarded by designation as Green Belt. So the objectives of the Subject Plan would not be furthered by the retention of this land in the Green Belt.

6.30 The objectors believe that their proposals under appeal, which included environmental improvements and a garden centre, would be compatible with Policy 11.6 of the Structure Plan in providing recreation and tourist facilities. No special character of Meols or Hoylake would be harmed and a more logical boundary to the Green Belt would be possible. The Urban Regeneration Strategy, the second reason for refusal of the application, does not mean that the authority must refuse any new development in the outer suburban areas of the County. The words used are "concentrate" investment and "restrict" peripheral developments; this land is not on the edge of the urban area but is more readily described as sandwiched within it. It was inconsistent that the subject land should be denied development when land to the east at Moreton, more correctly described as on the edge of the built-up area, had been approved for 500 houses. It has been advised that houses should be provided where people are prepared to live and not everyone wishes to be within the urban area; a choice should be possible. This site would minimise the need for new services and it is as convenient as land could be to the nearby railway station at Meols, giving easy and quick access to the main centres.

6.31 The objectors gave a full appraisal of the housing land supply position in the Wirral and concluded that development on the subject land would not conflict with the approved housing policies, but it would provide an attractive and convenient opportunity for house buyers in an area of the Wirral with very little other housing land availability, offering a higher quality of life to occupiers than many of the other sites which had been advocated. Evidence was also given as to the poor quality of the land for agriculture owing to waterlogging in winter and drying out in summer. The drainage had been damaged by the blocking of a ditch to the north and the consequence was sour vegetation and very low fertility. Real improvement could only come from an expenditure of about £400 per acre on the drainage and the additional cost of lowering the culvert under Birkenhead Road by 3 ft. No existing farm structure would be eroded by development here.

6.32 The local Residents' Association said they had been against all the applications which had been made for development of the subject land and firmly believed it was

correctly designated as Green Belt. It could and should be used for agriculture and new development in Hoylake should be contained to the north of the railway line.

6.33 The County Council said that the built-up area here lies generally to the north of the Liverpool-West Kirby railway line, except south of Hoylake Station and at Meols where there were 3 pockets of houses; elsewhere the land was in fairly intensive agricultural use. The allocation of the subject land for residential use in the 1961 Town Map arose from a desire to consolidate the pockets of housing and prevent ribbon development linking Meols with Moreton. The position now was quite different, the regeneration strategy emphasising concentration in the existing built-up areas and the safeguarding of agricultural land; thus there was no longer a need to release this land for residential purposes. Sufficient land had been identified elsewhere to accommodate requirements at least until the end of the Structure Plan period.

6.34 The railway line was seen by the Council as a clear and easily identifiable boundary between the built-up area and the open countryside. The Green Belt boundary had been drawn around the existing pockets of development as islands of housing in an agricultural area. The Green Belt line suggested by the objectors was completely arbitrary and not a firm line on the ground, following as it did only an ownership boundary. As to the proper use for the subject land, 3 local farmers had written offering to cultivate the land, subject to satisfactory terms being arranged.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.35 If there was a real need for further housing here the advantages offered by the development scheme submitted (the subject of the appeal hearing) are fairly clear to see - easy access to the rail network for commuters, a general tidying up and rounding-off to the existing unfinished roads and the consolidation of a locality containing pockets of scattered development. While such factors may have led the planners to allocate this land originally for residential purposes, the situation today embodied in the aims and objectives of the Subject Plan and the Structure Plan is quite different. I am not satisfied that a need for this site to be released has been proved, nor am I convinced that the boundaries now suggested for the Green Belt are in any way superior to those shown on the Subject Plan; it is true that a footpath between Fornhalls Green Lane and Leighton Avenue could be adopted as a line, but that has much less impact on the surface than the railway has.

6.36 While there may be a need in the longer term to re-assess the situation, and this land would no doubt be looked at again along with other land elsewhere, my site inspection and the photographs submitted have convinced me that the subject site does make a contribution to the Green Belt in permitting the rural area to flow up to and encircle the pockets of existing development.

RECOMMENDATION

6.37 I recommend that the land near Birkenhead Road at Meols (Site 10E) be retained within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 6E - LAND NEAR SAUGHALL MASSIE ROAD, NEWTON, WEST KIRBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Ianglen Limited

W50

6.38 This land is a roughly triangular area of agricultural land to the north-east of a large campus school, with Saughall Massie Road to the north, the remaining boundary being farmland. The residential areas of Newton, part of West Kirby, lie to the south.

6.39 For the objectors it was said that this land had been included as Green Belt in the proposed West Cheshire Green Belt of 1961 and was white land on the Hoylake Town Map of the same year. Various applications had been refused over the years.

6.40 The subject site was a modest area of land on the fringe of a small, attractive township, West Kirby, which was certainly not a "large" built-up area which might merge with other towns. There was no question of reducing the gap between West Kirby and Greasby or Hoylake, and about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the land was already in the urban area. It was thought that there could be a potential future shortage of housing land within Wirral and there was certainly a need for a flexible range of housing of types and housing form to satisfy the demand. The strategy will require some modest opportunities for new housing in the older and more attractive outer suburbs if people from a wide range of backgrounds are to be encouraged to remain in and others be attracted to work in Merseyside. That was one of the aims of the Structure Plan.

6.41 As drawn the Green Belt boundary, it was said on behalf of the objectors, represents a long-term and rigid restriction of development around the town. The ability of the market to provide even a very small extra amount of land for a future peak demand in housing would be severely limited. A plan was handed in showing sites available elsewhere in West Kirby. The subject land was appropriate to be developed when the need arises without detriment to the objectives of the Green Belt.

6.42 For the County Council it was said that the purpose of the Green Belt in this locality was to prevent the outward expansion of the built-up part of West Kirby into open countryside separating it from Greasby and Hoylake. The boundary chosen, along the rear of existing development, follows that of the West Cheshire Green Belt and was easily recognisable. At present the built-up area was contained by a low ridge which screened it from views from the east, but if this site were to be developed it would spread across the ridge, changing the character and appearance of the rural landscape. The boundary suggested by the objectors would intrude into a general area of farmland and thus lead to a precedent for further extensions.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.43 I have not been convinced that further land is likely to be needed in West Kirby area in the foreseeable future, and when it is I believe that this land would have to be re-examined along with other land around the town and its merits and defects weighed before a decision was taken. I agree with the objectors that part of the land could be taken from the Green Belt and a more regular boundary without the re-entrant by the school playing field would result. But other matters would also have to be considered, including access and agricultural land quality, before any decision could be taken about development here. In the meantime there would be no point, in my view, in changing the Green Belt boundary which is clear and well-defined.

RECOMMENDATION

6.44 I recommend that the land at Saughall Massie Road, Newton, West Kirby (Site 6E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 13E - LAND AT PUMP LANE, GREASBY

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Romac (Housebuilders) Limited

W115

6.45 The subject land is a roughly rectangular area of grazing to the north of an existing estate where a limited amount of new building is still taking place. It has a short frontage to Pump Lane and is bounded on the north side by a public footpath beyond which is a playing field. The area of the site is about 4 ha.

6.46 For the objectors it was said that although this land, together with the whole of the former RAF Camp which included the houses to the south, had been included within the submitted West Cheshire Green Belt, a much more logical boundary than the limit of present development would be the footpath to the north. This was marked by a good hedge. It would be a more secure boundary as it marked the line of land ownership and it was readily identifiable on the ground.

6.47 The Council said that the Green Belt in this locality prevented the outward spread of Greasby into the open countryside between Greasby, Saughall Massie, West Kirby and Hoylake. Recently new development had been restricted to the east side of Pump Lane where existing community services were concentrated. It was thought that to release this site would lead to an unacceptable intrusion into the rural area.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.48 I noted that the land was falling slightly to the north and that on the opposite side of Pump Lane the Green Belt boundary has been drawn more or less in line with the public path suggested by the objectors as a more reasonable boundary here. I am convinced that the suggested alteration in the boundary is a logical choice as it would regularise the position on both sides of the road. Although there may not be an immediate need for further housing here, should it ultimately be necessary to permit further new housing, this land seems to me less conspicuous than some of the other peripheral sites examined.

RECOMMENDATION

6.49 I recommend that the land at Pump Lane, Greasby (Site 13E) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan and the boundary be redrawn to follow the hedge against the public path and Greasby Brook.

SITE 22E - LAND AT THURSTASTON ROAD, IRBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

C E Fewtrell Esq, Rose Cottage
A Ellis Esq, Greenheys Nursery

W40

6.50 This is a roughly triangular re-entrant of about 3 ha of land with a frontage to Thurstaston Road, part formerly used for market gardening but now largely unused. A belt of woodland marks the west and south-western boundaries while there is residential development to the north and south-east.

6.51 The objectors believe that as the land is of low agricultural value and existing development already extends further into the rural area to north and south, this land may be suitable for development in the longer term if additional land was needed. The Green Belt boundary could more logically run along the western boundary of the land, and if in the future, development took place, larger and more valuable agricultural units could be saved from destruction.

6.52 The County Council said that this land was part of a Heritage Landscape and the Green Belt here was intended to resist the encroachment of the built-up area of Irby on the valuable heathlands of Thurstaston Common and Thurstaston Hill, to the west. The belt of farmland separating the common from the urban area would be reduced should development take place, and this would be to the detriment of the general character of the countryside.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSION S

6.53 While I agree that there might be some merit in straightening the Green Belt boundary here, as suggested by the objectors, I believe that the depth of land protected is critical and this would be reduced by the exclusion of this site. The existing residential development and Thurstaston Road do form a well-defined and easily seen boundary as now drawn in the Subject Plan. I noted that a small agricultural contracting business was being operated from Rose Cottage and the inclusion of the site in the Green Belt would not prejudice the continuance of that business, I am sure.

RECOMMENDATION

6.54 I recommend that the land at Thurstaston Road (Site 22E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 3E - LAND AT BIDSTON VILLAGE, BIDSTON MOSS AND THE M53 CORRIDOR

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr G Jones, resident, Wallasey
Cllr J Cocker, resident, Birkenhead
Mr D G Bigmore for Bidston Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Mr S R Davies, resident, Bidston Village

W36
W32
W117
W8

Representations in favour of later definition of the Green Belt boundary, by

Mr K A Whittacker, for the Viner Estate

Written Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

Mr R Huby, Wirral Green Belt Council

Mr D M Jaggar, resident, Wallasey

Mrs D E Mason, resident, Moreton

Mr C L Bibby, for The Wirral Society

Mr A D Hodgson, for Birkenhead History Society

W196

W22

W64

W66

6.55 This is an extensive tract of land between Wallasey, Birkenhead, Moreton and Upton, through which the Wirral motorway passes, and it includes Bidston Village at the north end of Bidston Hill. Bidston Village had not been included as Green Belt in any of the County Council's plans, but the motorway corridor had been notated as subject to special study on the deposited Subject Plan. Much of the area was recognised as being a degraded landscape in the approved Structure Plan which imposes Green Belt standards of development control until detailed local studies have been prepared and can be implemented. As the Subject Plan must confine itself only to land with full Green Belt status, the whole area is now without notation on that Plan.

6.56 With regard to Bidston Moss and the M53 Corridor, the main theme of the objections is that this whole area is a valuable separation between the developed areas of east and central Wirral into which no further building should encroach; therefore, it is argued, Green Belt status is appropriate and should be introduced now. Concern was expressed that some developments for industrial and commercial purposes had taken place fairly recently in the Bidston bowl and it was feared that if protection was not given, other developments might follow.

6.57 Bidston Village, although largely built-up, did contain some undeveloped land and many listed buildings. If its character was to survive and the setting of the buildings be preserved, it too, in many objectors opinion, should enjoy Green Belt status.

6.58 The Viner Estate, owners of land in the locality, supported the County and Borough Councils in deferring a decision about the Green Belt boundaries here until detailed studies had been completed.

6.59 Both the County and Borough Councils agree that this area is important as an open gap and lung between the built-up areas and both Councils are committed to giving priority treatment to improvement of the landscape, but it was believed that the precise boundaries of the Green Belt could not be defined until the likely restoration works and extent of any development for "rounding-off" purposes had been agreed. The Borough Council confirmed that work on a local plan for the Upton and Greasby areas was proceeding and this would include a landscape assessment.

6.60 As to Bidston Village, this was protected as a designated Conservation Area in addition to the listing of major buildings. To include a predominantly built-up area in the Green Belt was thought unnecessary in view of the safeguards already being applied. A further report seeking the enhancement and preservation of the character of the village had been prepared, and this would be reviewed as necessary.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.61 I really do not think that there is a great difference of opinions between the parties regarding the Bidston Moss and the M53 Corridor as all agree that the land

needs special treatment and eventual firm protection, in accordance with the Structure Plan policies. Having traversed the area and examined it on several occasions, I agree with many of the sentiments expressed by the objectors as to its importance as a rural lung and separation between the urban areas and I do not foresee any great difficulty in the eventual adoption of appropriate Green Belt boundaries. However, I am certain that these could only follow a proper study and appreciation of the area as a whole which would make provision for all the needs of the local population.

6.62 As to Bidston Village, I believe that it would be inappropriate to include it at this stage in the Green Belt, in view of the largely built-up character and the protection already afforded by Conservation Area status and the local study. The authorities are clearly very aware of the special character and importance of the village.

RECOMMENDATION

6.63 I recommend that Bidston Village, Bidston Moss and the M53 Corridor (Site 3E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan, pending further studies, as intended.

SITE 18E - LAND AT BIDSTON HILL

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr S R Davies, resident of Bidston Village

W2

6.64 Bidston Hill is a ridge of high ground capped by Bidston Observatory, prominent in the landscape and well clothed in woodland. To the north is Bidston Hall and village with residential development to the west and south beyond Taylor's Wood and a cemetery to the east.

6.65 The objector takes the view that although Bidston Hill is publicly owned and designated for open space purposes, it is such a valued asset to local people that it should be in the Green Belt. He draws attention to various residential developments around the Hill which have taken place in recent years and infers that this important open space might thus be threatened. By including Bidston Village and Bidston Hall within the Green Belt this land could be linked with intended Green Belt land at Bidston Moss, following the study now promised.

6.66 The County Council agreed as to the high amenity value of Bidston Hill and its importance in this part of the Wirral, but they believed that its allocation as open space and arrangements for a management plan to be implemented by the Borough Rangers should ensure its preservation. The land did not perform a Green Belt function in the Council's view.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.67 I agree about the importance of Bidston Hill as a local feature and amenity and if it were clearly adjacent to and could be seen as part of the main run of the Green Belt, I would not hesitate to recommend that it be included. However, because of its detachment at the narrow northern neck it must be seen as a major urban open space; I am confident that its value has been fully recognised and that the policies to be

applied will ensure its retention and protection. Following the completion of the study on the Bidston area and M53 Corridor, when the Green Belt boundary is again being considered, there may be an opportunity to re-assess the situation at Bidston Hill.

RECOMMENDATION

6.68 I recommend that Bidston Hill (Site 18E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 14E - LAND AT "HAYMERE", MILL LANE, GREASBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr W Stothart, of West Kirby

W15

6.69 This relates to the curtilages of 2 small bungalows at the extreme south end of Greasby, on the west side of Mill Lane. Beyond this site there is an open gap succeeded by a length of ribbon development which has been included within the Green Belt.

6.70 The objector fears that the inclusion of the property in the Green Belt might well prevent additions or rebuilding of the small bungalow or at least raise difficulties which could have an effect on its value. He argues that its exclusion would not materially affect the objectives of the Subject Plan nor necessarily lead to inappropriate development.

6.71 For the County Council it was confirmed that the purpose of the Green Belt here was to prevent any further outward extension of Greasby towards Irby and the boundary had been drawn tightly around the existing built-up area. The land had been included in the Green Belt on the Hoylake Town Map.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.72 I noted that on the west of Mill Lane the boundary follows the rear of houses in an estate while on the east it skirts the school grounds. To redraw it around the site of the objection, would not, in my opinion, put at risk any other land on the edge of Greasby and it would have the merit of being a logical following of the existing built-up area. It would be unnecessary and inappropriate, of course, to exclude the scatter of development to the south which is separated by a distinct gap from the present urban area and is thus washed over by the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

6.73 I recommend that the land at "Haymere", Mill Lane, Greasby (Site 14E) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 17E - LAND AT WEST KIRBY ROAD, SAUGHALL MASSIE

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr J R Broster

W11

6.74 This is a little over 2 ha of land to the south-west of Saughall Massie village and with frontage to West Kirby Road and Barnacre Lane. It is grazing land and was occupied by a few caravans when inspected.

6.75 For the objector it was said that a bypass road which would have skirted this land had been included in earlier plans and thus the land had been suggested in the Conservation Area Report as suitable for low density development as it was intended to be cut off from the rural area. Although the bypass was at present shelved it was thought likely that such a road would be needed in the future and it was believed that the land was being safeguarded. The Green Belt took no account of the former zoning of the land and it fails to allow for the consolidation and development of Saughall Massie in line with draft local plans.

6.76 Letters were received from 2 residents of Saughall Massie, supporting the inclusion of the land in the Green Belt.

6.77 The Council said that the local plan had been prepared in 1973 when further growth had been intended in west Wirral, but there was now no justification for further development or for the bypass road as circumstances had changed. The Green Belt here prevented the outward spread of Moreton into the open landscape separating from Hoylake/West Kirby and this site assisted in retaining the rural setting of Saughall Massie village. The boundary was clear cut and provided an appropriate approach to the village from this side. The Borough Council had refused to permit housing on this land.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.78 I saw that the whole of the older part of Saughall Massie village together with a tongue of land to the north have been included within the Green Belt; I agree with this as the village has a distinctive rural character which distinguishes it from the more suburban developments to north and east. To exclude this site it would be logically necessary to exclude the whole of the village and the tongue of open land to the north and I do not think that would be appropriate or desirable. In the absence of a real and urgent need for development I consider that the boundary is satisfactory and that this land makes a contribution to the aims of the Green Belt.

RECOMMENDATION

6.79 I recommend that the land at West Kirby Road, Saughall Massie (Site 17E) remain in the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 26E - FARM COTTAGE, DOWNHAM ROAD NORTH, THINGWALL

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr C Jones, of Little Neston

W30

6.80 This is a house and triangular garden on the east side of the road, the west side being the edge of the developed area of Heswall, apart from some houses including a small crescent around which the Green Belt has been drawn, a little way to the north. The site is a little above the road which is falling to the south towards the junction with Whitefield Lane where there is a school.

6.81 For the objector it was claimed that the property was a long established residence within an area of substantially mixed residential and even light industrial use and the Green Belt would be an unnecessary restriction, devaluing the property and removing any potential it might enjoy.

6.82 The County Council said that the boundary had been drawn along the backs of the ribbon of development to the north because that area had been allocated for residential purposes in the Town Map whereas the subject land was within a white area. The purpose of the Green Belt was to prevent the outward spread of Heswall towards Barnston. If this land was removed from the Green Belt a precedent would be established for the remainder of the frontage to be developed.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.83 I noted that there had been no proposals to develop the garden land or extend Farm Cottage, and I am confident that should applications arise in the future they could adequately be dealt with by the approved development control policies being operated. Thus I consider that the fears expressed about precedent need not arise. As a conscious decision has been taken to exclude the houses to the north from the Green Belt and allow the boundary to follow the back fences, I am sure that it would be logical to redraw the boundary in similar fashion around this property, as the width of the Green Belt is by no means critical here.

RECOMMENDATION

6.84 I recommend that Farm Cottage, Downham Road North, Heswall (Site 26E) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 12E - LAND TO THE EAST OF PUMP LANE, GREASBY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Sir Robert Lloyd and Company Limited
Kethcombe Properties Limited

W17
W149

Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by

The National Farmers' Union (written representation)

6.85 This is an irregular area of about 27 ha of farmland to the immediate north-west of the developed area of Greasby and east of Pump Lane. The land is in

2 ownerships, both held with the prospects of future development. The original objections included an area to the west of Pump Lane and south of Greasby Brook, and that land is also being considered and will be dealt with in this report, although the objectors agreed to rely on the arguments advanced respecting the land on the east side of Pump Lane.

6.86 The objectors argue that there is no clear and distinct physical boundary to the residential development to the south, the most distinctive feature within the objection site being the northern boundary formed by the Arrow and Greasby Brooks which are now advocated as the logical Green Belt boundary. While of intermediate agricultural quality, the land occupation was fragmented and it could not be used intensively.

6.87 The site enjoys major services such as foul and surface water drainage, is underused not being part of a farm of good structure, has good access to transport and does not rank for preservation of landscape, woodland or any conservation interest; it thus meets the criteria for release for future development. However, once in the Green Belt it was thought that the boundary would become rigid for many years beyond the present end date of the Structure Plan, namely 1986. The brooks would be a natural barrier to further development but a landscaped belt could be established, up to 150 ft wide within the site to provide an attractive walkway linking to the present footpath system.

6.88 The quality of the land was said by the National Farmers' Union to be good, and they were concerned about its possible future loss.

6.89 The County Council said that an appeal had been heard in 1975 into residential development here and while permission had followed for developments now taking place to the east and south, the subject land had been refused. The aim of the Green Belt here was to prevent any further major expansion into this central part of Wirral and the present boundary, which had been allowed by the Secretary of State, was considered the most logical. Other sites elsewhere in Wirral provided an adequate choice of housing types, in line with the strategy.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.90 While in a westerly direction the Green Belt is quite wide here, the more northern and eastern parts of the objection site, if developed in the future, would substantially reduce the gap between the main part of Greasby and Saughall Massie village to the north. I therefore think that the present boundary which follows the limit of present development at the south of the objection sites is the most appropriate in the absence of overriding need to release this land. In respect of the land to the west of Pump Lane, I have recommended that the Green Belt boundary should follow the well-established footpath, and I remain of that opinion; to exclude that part of the objection land from the Green Belt would create a needless tongue stretching out into the rural area.

6.91 I am conscious that at some date in the future, depending largely on the success of the Structure Plan strategy and economic recovery, it may be necessary to look beyond the present Green Belt boundaries and decide on the release of other major areas for development. The choice of land will depend on many factors which I am not now able to specify, but should this land be chosen I would regard the brooks to the north as a reasonable alternative boundary.

RECOMMENDATION

6.92 I recommend that the land at Pump Lane, Greasby (Site 12E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 20E - LAND AT PRENTON DELL, BIRKENHEAD

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

The Prenton Brick and Tile Company Limited

W94

6.93 This is about 5.8 ha of land to the south of the CEEB substation at Prenton, adjacent to a railway line which is on embankment and with a residential area to the north-east. There is a rugby football ground to the east and a golf course to the south and some tipping of refuse is taking place.

6.94 For the objectors it was said that the area was actively being worked for the extraction of clay and enjoyed planning permission for that purpose. An average annual tonnage of about 30,000 tonnes of clay was being taken from the site and it was inaccurate to describe the land as being ready for reclamation. The objection site has been and still is one of the main production areas for puddling clay for work in the dockland areas of Merseyside, although formerly the clay was used at Prenton Brickworks in the manufacture of bricks, pipes and tiles. The brickworks site was now to be developed for housing and it was clear that the remainder of the objection site could be adequately served, if required in the future. The CEEB had taken land for the substation and the whole of the remainder of the objection site was under option to them, although not likely to be taken up because of technological improvements in distribution. The natural Green Belt boundary was thought to be the Prenton Dell, the rugby ground and the golf course.

6.95 The County Council said the boundary here had been drawn along the rear of properties in Prenton Dell Road and the southern boundary of the substation, to prevent the further expansion of the built-up area. Industrial development on the objection site was considered inappropriate and even residential development would be difficult to link to the existing residential area.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.96 I noted that to the west of the railway the Green Belt boundary follows the M53 motorway around the Prenton industrial estate, so that this objection site pushes a tongue of Green Belt into the urban area. Having regard to the authorised use of the land and some uncertainty about its future, I am persuaded that the boundary suggested by the objectors is the most logical and easily recognisable. In my opinion the existing character of the area adds nothing to the concept of the Green Belt, and while its future is in doubt, if it were to be eventually reclaimed and tidied up consideration could then be given to an extension of the Green Belt boundary.

RECOMMENDATION

6.97 I recommend that the land at Prenton Dell (Site 20E) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 29E - LAND AT GAYTON HALL, HESWALL

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

reference

B Howard-Baker Esq, of Llansilin

W107

Support for inclusion in the Green Belt, by

Mr A J Wilson, on behalf of local residents

The Heswall Society (written representation)

W99

6.98 This is about 8 ha of land at Gayton Hall at the extreme southern end of the urban area of Heswall, of which the objector owns about 5 ha. It is parkland with tree belts and a lake, very close to the old village of Gayton with woodlands and agricultural land to the south.

6.99 The objector claims that there is a shortage of houses in the area with sufficient land to satisfy present day needs to accommodate families who wish to keep a pony. This site could provide small paddocks with new houses at a very low density which could meet the unsatisfied demand, without harm to the local environment. If the land remains in the Green Belt it was likely that it would become derelict as it served no useful purpose at present. A plan was submitted showing 6 housing plots within the objection site, with an area of retained woodland and the lake remaining.

6.100 The County Council said that in 1979 Gayton Hall and Village were accorded conservation area status, many of the buildings dating back to the 17th century and the guidelines prepared recommended that no further development be permitted as the cobbled street known as Gayton Farm Road would be damaged by additional traffic. Applications for development had earlier been refused. The Green Belt boundary here followed the rear of properties in Well Lane and Dee Park Road and this was considered a well defined, clear boundary leaving the parkland and woodland at Gayton Hall with the protection of the Green Belt.

6.101 Local residents felt that the Green Belt boundary would secure the area from further residential development. The natural woodland, although not maintained, acted as a buffer zone between the housing areas and the open agricultural land. Eighty signatures had been given in support of the Council's proposal.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.102 Gayton and the Hall grounds are something of an oasis at the edge of the predominantly urban area, although much of the hinterland also has a park like quality. While I can fully understand and support the views against further indiscriminate development here, which could easily spoil the setting and affect Gayton Village, I am not fully persuaded that this land needs the protection of the Green Belt over and above the protection already afforded by the Conservation Area and the other development control policies in operation. From the open land within the Green Belt to the south this site has a wooded appearance and thus makes only a marginal contribution as the woodland would be retained in the Green Belt even if the objectors suggested boundary were adopted.

RECOMMENDATION

6.103 I recommend that the land at Gayton Hall, Heswall (Site 29E) be excluded from the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 1E - THE NEW BRIGHTON COASTAL AREA

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr S J M Stark, on behalf of the Save New Brighton Action Group
Mrs J Hockey, Wellington Road Conservation Area

W86W13

And written objections from

Mr H C Reynolds, Mrs G M Culshaw, Mr G G Jones, Mr H A McQueen
Mrs S A White, Mrs R Batterbury, Miss J P Reynolds, Mr W H Windsor
Miss M L Grainger, Mr H W Jones, Mr Geoffrey Jones

W8, W31, W37
W45, W46, W60
W88, W89, W93
W119, W37

6.104 This is the coastal strip stretching westwards from the Perch Rock as far as Wallasey Golf Links and including the Warren and Harrison Parks. It is a fine, generally open recreational area from which there are excellent views of the Mersey Channel towards Crosby and Formby. The whole area amounts to in the region of 100 ha and includes grassed areas and extends up to the sea wall and beach.

6.105 The burden of the objections is that this is a valuable and well-used area giving essential facilities to many local residents, sports associations and visitors alike, and it has been threatened by a decision to invite a lease from the Council to a business syndicate. The objectors foresee the erection in the future of exhibition pavilions, hotels, casinos, arcades and fairgrounds and if that happened Wallasey would have lost a unique and considerable amenity. The exclusion of the open land to the west from the Green Belt exposes it to the risk that the land would be developed on a commercial level and its value for informal recreation would be lost.

6.106 The objectors say that much of the land is covered by or has been covered by covenants in favour of the owners of adjoining properties and the covenants restrict the uses to which the land could be put. To include the objection land in the Green Belt would ensure that earlier policies to extend the Coastal Park were adhered to.

6.107 The Borough Council confirmed that it was believed that the assets New Brighton possessed could be exploited to meet the demands of present day society and it was important to create jobs through tourism and recreation to reduce unemployment rates. The Council had been approached by a developer, but a feasibility study was awaited. Any scheme would be subject to normal planning procedures and relevant consents and licences would need to be obtained; the Council had not given any undertaking to accept the proposals. It was thought that if flexibility was to be retained it would be inappropriate to include the land within the Green Belt, contrary to Structure Plan Policy 14.17 which requires the enhancement of tourist and leisure facilities.

6.108 The County Council agreed that this was a valuable amenity area for New Brighton which is still well placed to retain and develop its attraction to visitors. It had been earmarked in the Structure Plan for special attention and the County Council felt that any proposals for resort activities should be confined to the east of Wallasey Golf Links, hence this land had been excluded from the Green Belt, pending further studies.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS

6.109 I agree that this land is of great value in its open state and I can fully understand the high local feeling that decisions should not be taken which might seriously erode the character of the locality or lead to a loss of amenity. I understand that such decisions have not yet been made and any proposals in the future will

clearly have to be the subject of careful examination and discussion. In the meanwhile, I cannot agree that this land would be appropriately described as true Green Belt. It is clearly within the urban area, in the nature of an urban open space, and is already protected to an extent by its allocation in the Town Map for open space, golf course, railway and residential purposes. Any local plan or new policy document would have to be the subject of full public debate, so safeguards do exist.

RECOMMENDATION

6.110 I recommend that the land in the New Brighton Coastal Area (Site 1E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ON SITES IN THE BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

SITE 4E - THE ROYAL LIVERPOOL GOLF COURSE, HOYLAKES - WEST KIRBY

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr J A Noble, of West Kirby
Cheshire Conservation Trust
Mrs J Speirs, Hoylake Civic Society
Mr S E Pemberton, of Wallasey
The Nature Conservancy Council

W6
W25, W
W44
W53
W62

6.111 The Golf Course is situated at the extreme west of the Wirral and is divided from the main part of the Green Belt by a ribbon of low density housing and a school fronting Meols Drive, the road linking Hoylake with West Kirby. To the north a narrow strip of residential development links Hoylake to Hilbre Point where the Red Rocks, an SSSI, is situated.

6.112 The objectors claim that the site provides a valuable Green Belt function in separating Hoylake from West Kirby, it is of recreational importance and it is an intrinsic safeguard for the Red Rocks SSSI.

6.113 The County Council point out that the land is entirely enclosed, apart from the seaward side, by residential allocations and thus is detached from the Green Belt. They agree it is of importance as a recreational amenity and in conservation terms consider that if the Golf Course were to close, a planning study would be needed to decide future uses.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.114 I noted that the properties on the east side of Meols Drive, opposite the fringe area of the site to the road, were houses in particularly large grounds, giving an arcadian effect. I agree that this land is a very important separation between the 2 towns and to that extent I am convinced that it performs a real Green Belt function and could be linked to the Green Belt proper across the few houses I have mentioned. With its present status as a Golf Course and education and residential uses it clearly has not figured in any calculations about the urban regeneration strategy, so that its inclusion in the Green Belt seems to be appropriate and desirable. I therefore

recommend that the Royal Liverpool Golf Course (Site 4E) be included within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 5E - GRANGE HILL AND CALDY HILL, WEST KIRBY

Objections to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Cheshire Conservation Trust (Wirral Group)
Mrs J Speirs, Hoylake Civic Society
Keith Davidson and Partners, The Wirral Society

W25, W26
W43
W55

6.115 These are 2 areas of about 17 and 31 ha of scrub woodland and heath within West Kirby, generally surrounded by residential development, Caldý Hill being just to the north-west of Caldý village.

6.116 The objectors say that both these areas are valuable for recreation and as wildlife habitats and they separate parts of the urban area, in particular Caldý Hill and Stapledon Wood divide Caldý from the rest of West Kirby. Stapledon Wood is within the Green Belt and almost adjoins Caldý Hill.

6.117 The County Council agree that these are important elements of open space providing valuable breaks within the built-up area, but they believe that the land does not perform a Green Belt function because of its urban location. Both areas are protected by public open space notation in the development plan so that further development would be strongly resisted.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.118 I agree about the amenity value of these 2 areas which give this part of the District a great deal of character and attraction. However, they must be seen as primarily urban open spaces which can be adequately protected by the existing approved policies, and I therefore see no reason for a duplication of restrictive powers here. I recommend that Grange Hill and Caldý Hill (Sites 5E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 7E - AREA NEAR CALDY MANOR HOSPITAL

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Wirral Green Belt Council

W23

6.119 This is the area just north of Caldý village adjoining Site 5E (dealt with above). It is predominantly already developed by dwellings in large grounds and has a well wooded aspect.

6.120 The objectors consider that the high amenity of the area is at risk by the possibility in the future of higher density development taking place within the

extensive grounds of the existing houses and hospital. Some planning permissions have recently been granted. They see this area being added as a natural extension of the open Green Belt land on the east.

6.121 The County Council agree that Caldy Hill and this general area is attractive and should be protected from inappropriate building. In choosing the Green Belt boundary the residential allocation on the Town Map was followed and the Council were confident that the locality could be adequately safeguarded by present policies, including Policy 11.10 of the Structure Plan dealing with developments on the edge of the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.122 There is no doubt as to the visual attraction of this area but it is largely occupied by domestic development - large properties in extensive grounds - and would thus, in my opinion, be inappropriately included in the Green Belt. To consider it a separation between Caldy and West Kirby would be merely fanciful. I therefore recommend that the land near Caldy Manor Hospital (Site 7E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 9E - LAND AT SHORE ROAD, CALDY

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr and Mrs J B Hillman, of Shore Road, Caldy

W1

6.123 This is a strip of land on the coast of the Dee Estuary with open space to the north and south and the Wirral Way footpath, on the line of a former railway, to the east.

6.124 The objectors agree that the inclusion of the golf course to the south and Cubbins Green to the north within the Green Belt are appropriate, but they say that the 9 houses fronting onto Shore Road are long established and should be excluded; the houses are not generally visible whereas other land to the east which was attractive and open is now being developed with new dwellings. The Shore Road houses were already part of the built-up area and can not possibly be described as separating the urban area from the Dee Estuary.

6.125 The County Council say that Cubbins Green to the north had been incorporated into the Wirral Country Park and as this coastal strip was part of a heritage landscape, an application for infilling at Shore Road had been refused. The Green Belt here was intended to prevent further extension of the built-up area towards the Estuary and the boundary had been drawn to follow the landward side of the Wirral Way footpath.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.126 The logic of including the Shore Road properties is that a strip of reasonably wide Green Belt is retained along the shore line as far back as the footpath, and as the "washing over" of residential properties is not uncommon and some owners do not complain, it can add value to their property. In this case the occupiers of one of

nine properties have objected and while this may not be significant, it does suggest to me that in general the Council's proposals here are acceptable.

6.127 While it would be possible to retain the link between Cubbins Green and the golf course simply by the narrow strip of the Wirral Way, such a boundary in my view would be much less satisfactory and not so credible. I therefore recommend that the land at Shore Road (Site 9E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 11E - LAND AT GARDEN HEY ROAD, SAUGHALL MASSIE

Objections to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Mr Clegg, Mrs Povall, Mr Gardner, Mr Baxter, Mr H W Underwood,
Mr G B Underwood, Mr Emnyon

W29

6.128 This is about 14 ha of grazing and horticultural land to the west of Garden Hey Road and south of Hoylake Road with the village to the south and agricultural land to the west.

6.129 The objectors maintain that the land had been zoned "white" as a buffer between the urban area and the original West Cheshire Green Belt, on to which future residential expansion could take place. They suggest that the land should be retained for that purpose and that the boundary of the Green Belt should follow the old urban District boundary to the west.

6.130 The County Council say that applications for development here had been refused and the purpose of the Green Belt was to prevent the coalescence of Meols and Saughall Massie, a conservation village. It was believed that the former Green Belt merely stopped at the County boundary of Cheshire, a much less well-defined boundary than that now chosen along Garden Hey Road.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.131 In the absence of proven need for land for early development, and bearing in mind the character of Saughall Massie village, this land does seem to me to qualify as real Green Belt. Its release would considerably reduce the gap between the Moreton-Saughall Massie development areas and Meols to the north-west, as well as affecting the village itself. I therefore recommend that the land at Garden Hey Road, Saughall Massie (Site 11E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 15E - LAND SEPARATING UPTON AND GREASBY

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Wirral Society

W67

6.132 This is about 44 ha of mainly open land between Greasby and Upton, bounded on the south by a factory estate and on other sides by predominantly developed areas. The

majority of the objection site is identified in the Structure Plan as an out-of-centre office, research and development site (Policy 7.52).

6.133 The objectors appreciate that although this site has a valid planning permission for development as a science park, they believe that it is needed as a separation between Greasby and Upton. The avowed policy is to develop the inner city areas and there are ideal sites for the development contemplated existing along the waterfront of Wirral. This land should be Green Belt.

6.134 The County Council explained that planning permission had been obtained in 1981 for a science park on this site which was now actively being marketed in Britain, Europe and the USA. Phase 1 of the Upton Bypass Road, which crosses the land, was due to start at the end of 1982. While agreeing that this land formed an attractive gap between Upton and Greasby, it was thought to be uniquely located to accommodate special economic developments considered essential to implement the regeneration strategy. It would not compete with other initiatives in the inner areas.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.135 While I agree that this is an attractive separation between the 2 urban areas at the present time, it is quite divorced from the Green Belt proper by the factory sites at Arrow Brook Road. To be successful in the role of science park, it will be essential that some amenity in the way of open green area and tree screens is attained in the laying out and development of the land, so that although I could not recommend that Green Belt status should be involved, because of the separation, I am confident that the area can be retained as something approaching a major urban open space. I recommend that the land separating Upton and Greasby (Site 15E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 19E - THE WIRRAL LADIES GOLF COURSE, BIRKENHEAD

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by
The Wirral Society

reference

W65

6.136 This Golf Course of about 30 ha is near Noctorum within an area of low density housing development and it occupies relatively high ground. It has an aspect of park-land with good tree belts at the perimeter.

6.137 The objectors say that this land is important as a "lung" within the urban area and it must be preserved. It is suggested that the Green Belt need not be continuous and that the few, large remaining open areas within the town should be designated to prevent future development.

6.138 The County Council point out that the land is shown for open space purposes in the approved Town Map and agree that the Golf Course fills a valuable role as an open space. They consider, however, that as the land lies entirely within the built-up area it would be inappropriate to include it in the Green Belt. The trees largely have the benefit of preservation orders.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.139 I agree that this is an important open space but I noted that it is somewhat distant from the nearest land which may be considered as Green Belt, namely the M53 Corridor. While the official advice is against including such areas in the Green Belt because it does not perform a true Green Belt function, I am confident that the development plan zoning and control policies will provide sufficient safeguard for the future. I therefore recommend that the Wirral Ladies Golf Course (Site 19E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 21E - LAND AT ROCK FERRY AND NEW FERRY

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The New Ferry and Rock Ferry Conservation Society

W56

6.140 This is a riverside area between the Trammere Oil Terminal and Bromborough Dock, consisting of open space and some housing, many trees at the northern end giving the locality a parkland aspect. It is to an extent cut off from the main urban areas by the A41 Bypass Road.

6.141 The objectors believe that this area needs protection from future development, it has value for conservation, wildlife and recreation and should be treated as a whole as a heritage landscape. A major riverside walk could be established easily accessible to persons living and working not far away. Without protection the area was under threat whereas it seemed to meet many of the criteria for declaration as Green Belt.

6.142 The County Council say that the Town Map allocates residential, civic, cultural and open space uses here and that the northern part had been designated as a Conservation Area. It is agreed that a riverside footpath with public access to the Mersey is desirable but this is a matter for detailed local planning. The location of this land within the urban area does not justify its inclusion within the Green Belt.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.143 When visiting this area I was impressed with the tranquility and attractiveness of the place and I can fully understand the enthusiasm for its preservation. However, it is quite divorced from the Green Belt proper and does not, in my opinion, fulfil a true Green Belt role. I recommend that this land at Rock and New Ferries (Site 21E) remain outside the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 24E - LAND EAST OF LOWER THINGWALL LANE, THINGWALL

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Sir Robert Lloyd and Company Limited

W18

Support for inclusion within the Green Belt, by

Mrs M L Pollard, of Barnston, (with petition signed by local residents)

W138

Mr J M Hogg, Mr A J Lewis, Mr J B Clegg, Mr A E Swinnerton,
Mr R A Fordham, Mrs A Lyons, Mr P Frazer - all local residents and tenants

W132, W125, W127,
W135, W136, W139
W142

6.144 This is about 12.5 ha of mainly grassland with an irregular boundary to the east of Thingwall and north of Barnston. There is land used for the storage of caravans to the north-east while the attractive Prenton Brook Valley passes to the south-east.

6.145 The objectors say that this land had been acquired in the early 1960's with the intention of development for residential purposes, although at that time such development had been considered premature. The inclusion of the land in the Green Belt would now prevent development in the future and for that reason it should be excluded.

6.146 Many residents had signed a petition and others had written in supporting the Council's decision to include the land which was regarded as an important amenity in the District. Nearby footpaths and the country lanes were used for recreation and the hedgerows and vegetation supported a certain amount of wildlife. These things would be lost if development eventually extended onto this land.

6.147 The County Council say that the site is within the swathe of land separating Thingwall from Prenton and Birkenhead, and its loss from the Green Belt would mean a major exclusion if a reasonable alternative boundary were to be drawn. More land would have to be released as only a small part of the site is adjacent to existing housing on Barnston Road.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.148 This is part of the main Green Belt area passing up the middle of the Wirral peninsular and in the vicinity of this site the width of the separation is critical, in my opinion. It would be reduced to a considerable extent by the exclusion of this site. In the light of the present strategy and changed circumstances since the land was acquired, the need for further development here has not been proved and as the land makes an important contribution to the objectives of the Green Belt, I cannot recommend that it be excluded. I therefore recommend that the land east of Lower Thingwall Lane (Site 24E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 27E - LAND AT PIPERS LANE, HESWALL

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Mrs E Matthias, of Heswall

W49

6.149 This is a small hillside site facing towards the Dee Estuary with existing estate development to the east and south. It is uncultivated heathland with bracken and gorse.

6.150 The objector says that this land is quite unsuitable for agriculture and is used as a private open space without permission. In summer it is a fire hazard and has

been tipped on in the past. The exclusion of this land with a new Green Belt boundary following the agricultural land to the north-west is suggested, releasing the site for eventual development for low density houses.

6.151 The County Council pointed out that the land had been included as Green Belt in the earlier Cheshire proposals and it was now important here to prevent the encroachment of the built-up area into the fine heritage landscape sloping down to the Dee Estuary. The boundary chosen follows the rear of the housing properties in this area.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.152 This site is at the periphery of the built-up area and its development would be contrary to the present strategy where provision has been made on sites elsewhere for essential new building. It is a particularly attractive part of the Wirral and the retention of this site within the Green Belt would assist in maintaining this attraction, in my opinion. I recommend that the land at Pipers Lane, Heswall (Site 27E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 28E - THE DALES, HESWALL

Objection to exclusion from the Green Belt, by

reference

The Cheshire Conservation Trust (including Wirral Branch)
Mr G L Broster, of Heswall

W25, W26
W75

6.153 The objectors say that the Dales physically separate Heswall from its lower village and logically should be in the Green Belt. It has special value as an SSSI and is one of the few remaining areas of lowland heath within Wirral.

6.154 The County Council say this land is within the built-up area and thus had not been considered suitable for inclusion in the Green Belt. It was enclosed on 3 sides by housing and by the Cleaver Hospital to the north, the latter separating the Dales from the Green Belt proper. As the land was now being protected as a heritage landscape by a draft management plan and had SSSI status, Green Belt designation was not necessary.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.155 In isolation I accept the Council's view that this does not qualify as an enclosed site. However, I also inspected the curtilage of the Cleaver Hospital to the north and found that it had a distinct parkland appearance, not out of keeping with the concept of the Green Belt. Together with the open land of Dale Farm, the hospital grounds link the Dales directly with the Green Belt, and would in my opinion provide a welcome permanent separation between these parts of the built-up area.

6.156 Because of access difficulties I am not able to suggest firm boundaries to an extension of the Green Belt here, but I recommend that the suggestion for linking the Dales by adding also the grounds of the Cleaver Hospital and Dale Farm be given further consideration.

SITE 33E - LAND AT EASTHAM RAKE

Objection to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

Wimpey Homes Holdings Limited

W41

6.157 This is approximately 3 ha of low-lying woodland and rough grassland between the M53 Motorway, the railway and an existing housing estate at the southern edge of Eastham, near the boundary with Cheshire. The motorway passes through the Green Belt here where it separates Eastham from Willaston to the south-west.

6.158 The objectors say that the regeneration strategy has led to the Green Belt boundary being drawn too tightly around the settlements leaving insufficient choice for housebuyers and no future choice of growth locations. They consider a better line for the Green Belt boundary would be found along the motorway, excluding the subject site which they hold for future building.

6.159 The County Council point out that to follow the motorway would take no account of landscape quality, this land providing a natural separation and screen to the existing development. Additional tree planting had been carried out at the margins and the area has amenity value. Permission had been withheld as there was no need for further housing sites here at present.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.160 I believe that this land does perform an important Green Belt function in separating the existing built-up area from the motorway and Willaston. The Green Belt is not especially wide here and the loss of the subject land would reduce its effectiveness, in my opinion. In the absence of proven demand for its early release, I recommend that the land at Eastham Rake, (Site 33E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

SITE 34E - LAND AT HOOTON PARK

Objections to inclusion within the Green Belt, by

reference

The Trustees of the R C Naylor Settlement

W9

The Manchester Ship Canal Company

W61

6.161 This is land formerly part of Hooton Airfield, about 16 ha, which is generally open but contains a large hanger, hardstandings and taxiways. It is close to storage installations at Eastham and factories at Ellesmere to the south.

6.162 The objectors say that this land is not used for agriculture and has been partly used for storage in the past, with planning permission. It is really part of the old airfield, the majority of which is now used in connection with the car factory, is served by a good road with easy access to the motorway network and does not have any amenity value which would qualify it as Green Belt. Agricultural land to the north, in the ownership of the Trustees, provides ample separation between the industrial complex and the village of Eastham.

6.163 The County Council refer to refusals of planning permission to use the land for open storage on Green Belt grounds. The boundary chosen was selected to allow for the expansion of nearby industry without encroachment into the rural area between Hooton and Eastham village. To release the land for any kind of industrial or commercial purposes would be contrary to the urban regeneration strategy.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

6.164 I noted that this land had been included in the original West Cheshire Green Belt and it does seem important to me that this belt of fairly rural land between Hooton and Eastham, through which the motorway passes, should be kept as free from further encroachment as possible. I recognise, however, that this land has attractions for industrial or commercial development, being adjacent to existing industry, having some infrastructure and enjoying excellent access. It is clearly land which would have to be examined should the need arise in the future for additional sites. For the present I am satisfied that the need has not been proved and that the Green Belt boundary is satisfactory. I recommend that the land at Hooton Park (Site 34E) remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan.

ADDENDUM

LATE REPRESENTATION - BOROUGH OF ST HELENS

LAND AT ELTON HEAD HALL FARM, ST HELENS

Objection to inclusion in the Green Belt, by

The Trustees of the Marquis of Salisbury (Jersey Settlement)

7.1 This written objection of 28 January 1983 (submitted by Messrs Dunlop Heywood and Company) relates to about 46 ha of farmland in a block to the south of Rainhill Hospital and lying between Elton Head Road and the main line railway. The objectors say that it is at the end of a tongue of Green Belt severed from the main part by the railway and that due to the shortage of good building land in St Helens this land is likely to be required in the foreseeable future.

INSPECTOR'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

7.2 I examined this land when considering Site 16D (Rainhill Hospital) and Site 17D (Elton Head Road). It is part of the main tongue of land separating Rainhill and Rainhill Stoops from the Sutton Heath-Sutton Manor locality, and as such, in my opinion makes a substantial contribution to the objectives of the Green Belt. An area intended for open cast mining and eventual environmental improvement adjoins the subject land to the east. While I agree with the objectors that it may be necessary to review the situation regarding the availability of development land in the future, believe that this must be a strategic decision, taken only after careful consideration of all reasonable alternatives. I am not able to say whether this land would necessarily be chosen and therefore I am satisfied that at present it should remain within the Green Belt in the Subject Plan and recommend accordingly.

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS

Site Ref

- Mr H Wolton,
 - of Queen's Counsel, instructed by Messrs Aldershaw Sons and Latham, Solicitors.

23D - For Total Group PLC

He called:

- Mr R F Kilsby FRTPI
 - of W R Davidge and Partners.
- Dr A S Hearne
 - Agricultural Economist, of Rural Planning Services.

They submitted Appendices to evidence, including maps and plans, statistical tables and soil survey data.

- Mr R Bruce-Martin
 - of Queen's Counsel, assisted by Miss J Tracey-Forster, of Counsel, instructed by Bullivant and Company, Solicitors.

10E - For Ianglen Limited

6E

They called:

- Mr C C Hubbard
 - BSc FRICS
 - of Pain and Charles Blease.
- Mr C P Dewhurst
 - BA FRICS
 - of Cooke Leathes and Bickerton.
- Professor J A Proudlove
 - CEng FIMunE FCIT

They submitted Appendices to evidence, including site, location and layout plans, photographs, copies of Committee and Planning Reports, statistical tables and copy letters.

- Mr Ian Trigger
 - of Counsel, instructed by Gothe and Company, Solicitors.

10A - For Messrs Albert Brothers Limited

He called:

- Mr D K Dixon
 - RICS MRTPI
 - of Owen Dixon Associates.

He submitted ownership and sketch layout plans, an open space map, and Appendices relating to housing land and open space provision in Formby.

- Mr David Holgate
 - of Counsel, instructed by Bremner Sons Correlli.

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

Site Ref

- 5D for: - The Earl of Derby.
- 30E - Broseley Estates Limited.
- 8bA - Mount Rule Land Company Limited.
- 15D - F B Cooper (Woodhead) Limited.
- 23E - Messrs F Whitmore and Company Limited.
- 8E - Trustees of Mabel de Renzy Jones Settlement.
- 21A - Mr R G Swift.
- 16A, 2B, 1C, 13A - Trustees of Estate of the Countess of Sefton.
9A, 23A, 15A

He called:

Mr B Trepess - of Edmund Kirby and Sons.
TD FRICS FRVA

He submitted site and location plans and statistical schedules.

- 16D - Mr J A Stannard - of Counsel, instructed by the Secretary to the Merseyside Regional Health Authority.

He called:

Mr G Sharrock CEng - Building Officer.
Mr H D Oakes - District Administrator.
Mr P J Hitchcock - of H H & J Robinson.
MA FRICS

They submitted site and estate plans, copies of reports and letters, and photographs of the Rainford Hospital sites.

- 8aA - Mr R H Dawson LLB - Solicitor, of Moorcrofts and Owen Dawson, for Larkhill Residents' Association.
- 11A - Mr J A Carter - Solicitor, of Morgan Norman and Company, for S Rostron Limited.
- 17A - Mr J W H Tournaford - Solicitor, of Davis Campbell and Company, for The Walton Commercial Group Limited.
- 20D - Mr C B Johnson - Solicitor to the Central Electricity Generating Board, for the Central Electricity Generating Board.

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

He called:

Mr K A Whittaker
CEng FIMunE MRTPI

- Planning Consultant.

He submitted site plans and panoramic photographs.

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| 17D | - <u>Mr S Ralph</u> | - Solicitor, of Black Davidson and Company, for Sherdley Estates Limited. |
| 5D | - <u>Mr M Bennett</u> | - Solicitor, for Ecclestone Residents' Group. |

He called:

Mr D P Lennon

- Resident.

Mr W R Crosby

- Parish Councillor.

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| 25E | - <u>Mr P Hosker</u> | - Solicitor, for Barnston Residents. |
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He called:

Mr E Connolly

- Resident.

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| 29E | - <u>Mr D I Hewitt</u> | - Solicitor, of Coff Roberts North and Kirk, for Mr B Howard-Baker. |
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He called:

Mr N E Kitchen
FRICS FSVA

- Chartered Surveyor.

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| - | - <u>Mr G A R Coleman</u>
BA DipTP MRTPI | - North-West Region Land and Planning Officer, the House-Builders' Federation, for the House-Builders' Federation, Liverpool and North-West Regions. |
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He submitted schedules of land availability and copies of reports.

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| 25E, 13E | - <u>Mr K A Whitaker</u>
CEng FRTPI | - Planning Consultant, for Romac (Housebuilders) Limited. |
| 22E | | - for Mr C E Fewtrill, of Irby. |
| 3E | | - for The Viner Estate. |

He submitted Appendices to evidence, including site plans and copies of reports.

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| 5A | - <u>Mr C J Nelstrop FRIBA</u> | - of Hulme Upright and Partners, Chartered Architects, for Trustees of Scarisbrick Settlement. |
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He submitted photographs, a site plan and sketch housing layouts.

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

Site Ref

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| 8aA | - <u>Mr B R Jackson FRICS FRVA</u> | - of Ellis and Sons, Chartered Surveyors, for New Ideal Homes Limited. |
| 7A | - <u>Mr P J Hitchcock MA FRICS</u> | - of H H & J Robinson, Chartered Surveyors, for Mr J C McDougall. |
| 12D | - <u>Mr Anthony Winters BA MSc MRTPI</u> | - Planning Consultant, for Mr A Wain |
| 7D | - <u>Mr J E Welsby FRICS</u> | - of Joshua Bury Earle and Company, Chartered Surveyors, for the Executors of Sidney Littler, deceased. |
| 10E | - <u>Mr A M Macdonald RIBA ARIAS</u> | - Chartered Architect, for Rycroft and Birch Road Residents' Association, Meols. |
| 3E | - <u>Mr D G Bignore</u> | - Chartered Architect, for Bidston Conservation Area Advisory Committee. |
| 17E | - <u>Mr J N Williams FRICS</u> | - of Jones and Chapman Harland and Company, for Mr J R Broster. |
| <p>He submitted a site plan showing road diversion.</p> | | |
| 26E | - <u>Mr P W Somerfield</u> | - of Somerfield and Parkhouse, for Mr C Jones. |
| 12E | - <u>Mr A S Green FRICS</u> | - of Airey Entwistle and Company, Surveyors and Valuers, for Sir Robert Lloyd and Company Limited and Kethcombe Properties Limited. |
| <p>He submitted site and ownership plans.</p> | | |
| 20E | - <u>Mr G R W Smith FRICS</u> | - of Geoffrey Smith and Partners, Surveyors, for Prenton Brick and Tile Company Limited. |
| | - <u>Dr R Graham</u> | - for Merseyside Cycling Campaign. |
| 25E | - <u>Mrs M L Pollard</u> | - of Barnston. |
| <p>She submitted a petition.</p> | | |
| 1A | - <u>Mr D A Alexander MA MSc</u> | - for the Council for the Protection of Rural England. |
| 1A | - <u>Mr I Brodie-Brown</u> | - for Friends of Crossens Marsh, Southport. |
| 1A | - <u>Councillor S G Shaw</u> | - Merseyside County Council. |

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

Site Ref

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| 1A | - <u>Mr S D Eades</u> | - for Save Our Shoreline Campaign. |
| | He called: | |
| | Mr J Ashorth
Mr S Riley | |
| 3A | - <u>Mr M P Braham.</u> | |
| 6A | - <u>Mr I G Masheder</u> | - for Lynton Road Residents' Association. |
| 10A | - <u>Mr M J Jenner</u> | - for Sixteen Acre Lane Residents. |
| 17A | - <u>Mr C Hubbard</u> | - Vice Chairman, Merseyside Civic Society, for the Society. |
| | He called: | |
| | Mr P H Morgan BA | |
| 22A | - <u>Mr W H Storey</u> | - Honorary Secretary to the Society.
- of Formby. |
| | He submitted a site plan. | |
| 9C | - <u>Mr Ian Tuson</u> | - for Ian Tuson Limited, of Widnes. |
| | He submitted site and ownership plans. | |
| 14D | - <u>Mrs Sylvia Chee</u> | - Resident of Haydock. |
| | She submitted a photograph of objection site. | |
| 14D | - <u>Mr K Pimblett</u> | - Resident. |
| 14D | - <u>Mr J Callion</u> | - Tenant Farmer. |
| 14D | - <u>Mr E G Sheldon</u> | - Resident. |
| 18D | - <u>Mr N Case</u> | - for the Executors of Fred Prescott, deceased. |
| 24D | - <u>Dr R Critchley</u> | - on behalf of Sutton Residents. |
| | He submitted a petition and site plan. | |
| 3E | - <u>Councillor J/Cocker</u> | - of Birkenhead. |
| 3E, 18E | - <u>Mr S R Davies</u> | - of Bidston Village. |
| 18E | - He submitted a petition and copies of press cuttings. | |
| 8E, 1E | - <u>Mr G G Jones</u> | - of Wallasey. |
| 14E | - <u>Mr W Stothart</u> | - of West Kirby. |

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

Site Ref

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| 29E | - <u>Mr A T Wilson</u> | - of Gayton, for local residents. |
| 1E | - <u>Mr S J M Stark</u> | - for Save New Brighton Action Group. |
| 1E | - <u>Mrs J Hockey BArch ARIBA</u> | - Secretary of Wellington Road Conservation Area Group. |
| She submitted copies of reports. | | |
| 1E | - <u>Miss J Reynolds</u> | - of Wallasey. |

FOR THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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| - <u>Mr N S McGinn</u> | - Senior Assistant Solicitor, Merseyside County Council. |
| He called: | |
| Mr J P Wesencraft | - Principal Planning Officer. |
| Mr P N Trewin | - Planning Officer, Knowsley Borough Council. |
| - <u>Mr G F Smith</u> | - Solicitor, St Helens Borough Council. |

He called:

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| 25D, 18D | Mr T G Welch BA MRTPI | - Planning Officer. |
| 20D, 14D | Mr G Hardy | - Planning Officer. |
| 24D, 17D, 16D | Mr B E Heneghan FRICS | - Estates Surveyor, St Helens. |

They submitted Appendices to evidence, including maps, plans, schedules, reports and the Sutton District Plan.

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| - <u>Mr M Scott</u> | - Deputy Solicitor, Sefton Borough Council. |
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He called:

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| 8aA, 11A, 17A, 9A, 23A | - Mr S J Byron | - Principal Assistant Planner. |
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He submitted schedules and plans.

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| 1A, 10A, 22A | Mr T M Cox | - Assistant Planning Officer. |
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He submitted copies of Committee Reports and housing land schedules.

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| 3E, 29E, 1E | - <u>Mr P Coffey BSc MRTPI</u> | - Principal Planner, Wirral Borough Council. |
| 1A | - <u>Mr J S O Lawson</u> | - Planning Officer, West Lancashire District Council. |

APPEARANCES AND SUBMISSIONS (Continued)

Site Ref

25D - Mr M Courcier BA MRTPI

- Senior Assistant Planning Officer,
Wigan Borough Council.

DOCUMENTS AND PLANS SUBMITTED AND REFERRED TO:

Merseyside Green Belt Subject Plan - Written Statement, October 1981

- Report on Publicity and Consultation.
- Summary of Responses from Public Bodies and Others consulted.
- Schedule of Respondents (by District).
- Schedule of Sites to which representations refer.
- Copies of Representations with Site Plans.

Merseyside Structure Plan - Written Statement with Key Diagram, 1980.

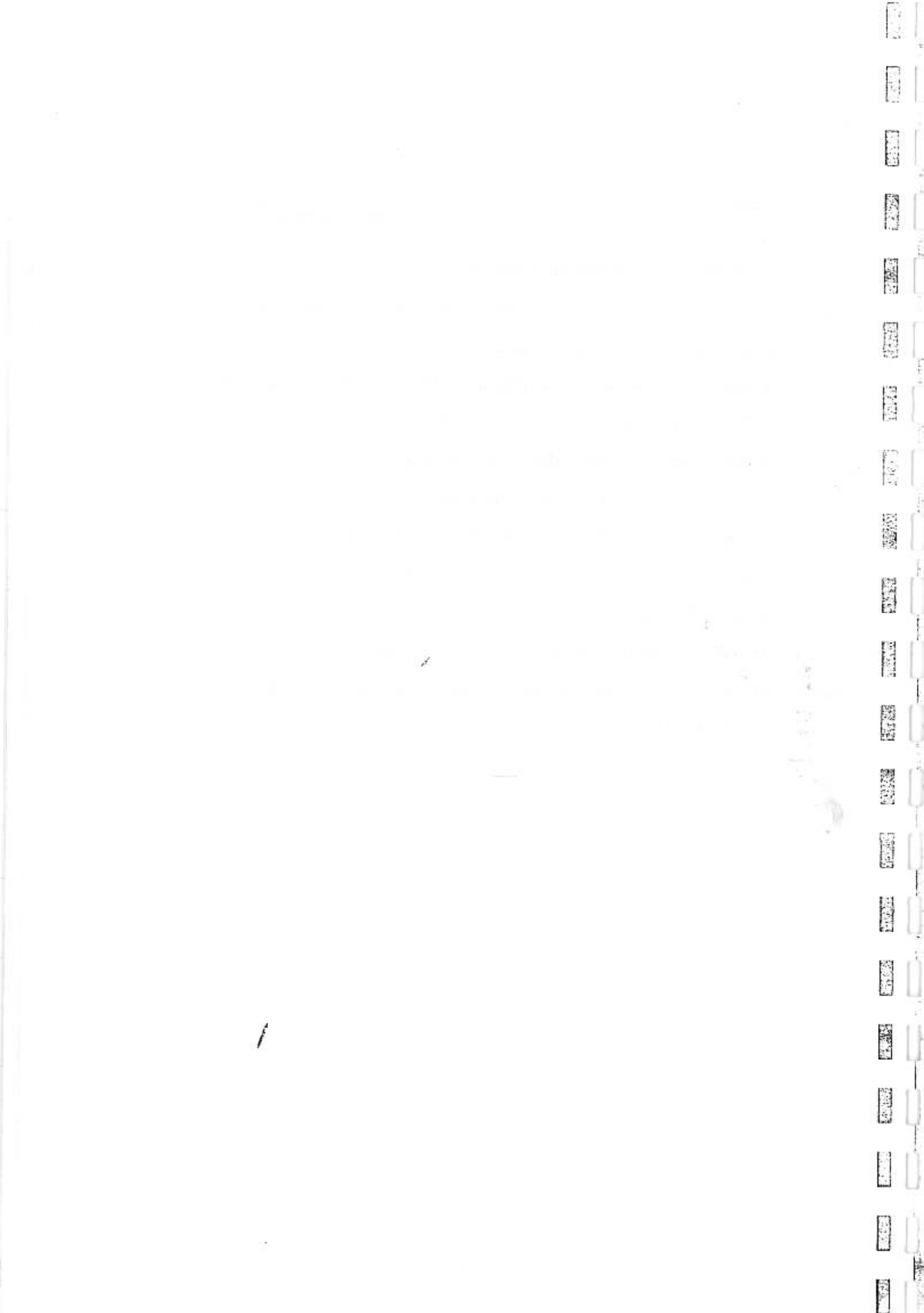
- Examination in Public, Report of the Panel.
- Housing Review, 1981.

Land for Private Housebuilding in Merseyside, 1981, Report of Joint Review.

The Merseyside Economy, Performance and Prospects to 1986, December 1981.

Circular No 42/55 (MHLG).

Circular No 50/57 (MHLG).



MERSEYSIDE GREEN BELT LOCAL PLAN
REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR ON OBJECTIONS AND
REPRESENTATIONS TO THE PLAN (JUNE 1983)

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MERSEYSIDE COUNTY COUNCIL
MERSEYSIDE COUNTY COUNCIL 1983

