

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

Q1. What is the Green Belt?

Land is designated as 'Green Belt' by the Council in a locally prepared statutory land use planning document known as a Local Plan.

Just under half (45%, 7,317 hectares) of the land area of Wirral is currently designated as Green Belt and the designation applies to the majority of the Borough's remaining countryside outside the existing urban area.

The designation and protection of Green Belt is controlled by national policy and the fundamental aim is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

National planning policy sets out five purposes for including land within a Green Belt:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Once designated, new development is severely restricted in the Green Belt.

Q2. When was the current Green Belt boundary established?

The Green Belt in Wirral was last defined by the Council in February 2000, in the Council's Unitary Development Plan¹.

Q3. Why is it necessary to review the Green Belt?

An initial review of the Green Belt in Wirral is part of a wider review of the development options that must be considered as part of the preparation of the Council's latest Local Plan

The Council has to review all the available options for meeting its assessed development needs for housing and other land uses to be able to demonstrate that the Plan is the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives.

¹ The existing Unitary Development Plan can be viewed on the Council's website at <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans>

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

The review must be undertaken to demonstrate that all the available alternatives have been properly assessed.

Q4. Has the Council already decided to take land out of the Green Belt?

No decision has yet been taken on whether the Green Belt boundary will be changed or on the sites that will be included in the Local Plan.

The initial review does not commit the Council to any future land releases but will enable the Council to more precisely determine the environmental and other constraints that may apply.

Q5. Who will undertake the initial review?

The review will be undertaken by Council officers guided by the proposed methodology and the requirements of national policy and legislation.

Q6. What will the initial review include?

The initial review will need to:

- assess every part of the existing Green Belt in Wirral against the five purposes for including land within a Green Belt in national policy (which are listed under Question 1 above);
- identify any physical or environmental constraints, which may also indicate that a particular site might be unsuitable for development; and
- take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development.

Sites that have been submitted by landowners and developers will also need to be assessed for their likely impact on national Green Belt policy and the environment.

Q7. What is the status of the sites that have already been submitted by landowners and developers?

The sites that have already been submitted by landowners and developers are not planning applications and have not been allocated for development by the Council.

None of the sites that have been submitted by landowners and developers could be developed without planning permission (with any planning application advertised in

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

the normal way) and none of the submitted previously undeveloped greenfield sites could be developed unless they had first been allocated for development in a Local Plan (see also Question 14 below).

Q8. What is the purpose of consulting on the methodology for the initial review?

The Council wants to make sure that the work that it proposes to undertake will be correct and that nothing will be missed or overlooked.

The Council also wants to make sure that any future decisions will be based on a complete picture of the potential impacts and facts about each site and location.

Q9. Who will be included in the consultation?

The consultation will be widely advertised and will include local residents and businesses; local community groups; the providers of infrastructure for transport, water, power, education, health, emergency and other essential services; Government agencies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency; and landowners and developers.

Q10. What will the responses to the consultation be used for?

Consultation responses will be used to revise the methodology and to inform the way the initial review is undertaken.

Q11. What sort of comments is the Council expecting to receive?

Comments can be made on any part of the consultation document.

The Council is particularly looking for comments that would help the Council to identify any additional issues that it should consider.

Q12. When will the results of the review be available?

The results of the review will be reported to the Council's Cabinet in July 2018 and are expected to be published for public comment in September 2018.

The results of the initial review of the Green Belt will be reported alongside the results of the re-assessment of the urban land supply, including a Pitch Strategy Update; Employment Land and Premises Study Update; revised Viability Baseline Report; and the results of the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Market

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

Assessment (SHELMA) prepared by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, copies of which will be placed on the Council's website as they become available (see Question 16 below).

Q13. When will a final decision be taken?

The sites to be included in the Council's Local Plan will ultimately be decided by a Planning Inspector, appointed by the Government to check that national policy is being followed.

Before then, there will be four main stages:

- the Council will need to decide on the final amount of development that will need to be provided for, to meet the Borough's need for housing, jobs and other uses (currently expected to take place in July 2018);
- the Council will need to consider the sites that are available and capable of being delivered and decide on the sites that it thinks should be included in the Local Plan (currently expected to take place in July 2018);
- the Council will need to publish the sites that it thinks should be included in the Local Plan for public consultation alongside the evidence for the decisions that it proposes to take (currently expected to take place in September 2018); and
- finally, the Council will need to publish a full draft Local Plan, for public comment and submit it, with the comments received, for examination by a Planning Inspector appointed by the Government (currently expected in September 2019 and January 2020).

The Council will only be able to adopt the final Local Plan, if the report of the Planning Inspector recommends that they should do so.

Q14. Will developers be able to submit planning applications in the meantime?

Developers can submit planning applications at any time but to be approved any proposal will have to meet the requirements of national policy and guidance.

National policy currently states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the Local Plan and that inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances (NPPF paragraphs 83 and 87 refer).

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

National practice guidance currently indicates that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute the very special circumstances justifying inappropriate development on a site within the Green Belt (NPPG Paragraph: 034 Reference ID: 3-034-20141006).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012) and its associated Planning Practice Guidance can be viewed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

Q15. How will the proposals set out in the recent Housing White Paper affect the review?

The Government will need to decide which parts of the White Paper published in February 2017 will be taken forward into national policy and legislation.

The main proposals include a new national approach to assessing housing requirements; a new 'delivery test', to ensure that further land is brought forward where targets are not being met; and a proposal to clarify that local authorities must demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified housing requirements, including on previously developed sites, before considering land in the Green Belt.

The White Paper (February 2017) can be viewed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-white-paper>

Further consultation on 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' (September 2017) can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-right-homes-in-the-right-places-consultation-proposals>

Q16. Where can I see the documents that will be included in the review?

All the documents related to the wider review of development options will be placed on the Council's website at <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-plans/core-strategy-local-plan-6>

They will also be available for public inspection at public libraries during their normal opening times and in the Forward Planning section at the South Annexe of Wallasey Town Hall CH44 8ED, Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm (excluding bank or public holidays). Please contact forwardplanning@wirral.gov.uk or 0151 691 8110 to arrange a booking.

Frequently Asked Questions – Initial Review of the Green Belt

Proposed Methodology for Public Consultation

Public library opening hours can be viewed on the Council's website at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/find-library>

Q17. What is the deadline for comments to be received on the proposed methodology?

The deadline for comments to be received on the proposed methodology for the initial review of the Green Belt is **5pm on Wednesday 6 December 2017**, to forwardplanning@wirral.gov.uk or to Forward Planning, Wirral Council Environmental Services, PO Box 290, Brighton Street, Wallasey CH27 9FQ