

## **6. The Green Belt**

## 6. The Green Belt

### Local Plan Aim

To protect the openness, and to conserve and enhance the character and appearance, of the Borough's Green Belt.

### Key Objectives

- 2 To protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development that would compromise its open nature.
- 3 To ensure that the re-use or adaptation of existing rural buildings for commercial, recreational and residential uses does not compromise the open nature of the Green Belt, nor cause undesirable environmental, traffic or amenity impacts.
- 4 To encourage greater public access to the Green Belt and promote its use for outdoor sport or recreation.
- 5 To enhance the Green Belt through active management and advice.

### 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 To protect the character of Dartford's countryside and to ensure that major growth is restricted to the northern part of the Borough, most of the southern part of the Borough and Dartford Marshes lies within the Green Belt. A number of villages and dormitory settlements within this rural area are, however, excluded from the Green Belt.

6.1.2 The open and attractive appearance of much of the Green Belt is in some respects the result of the stringent application of policies that curb inappropriate development. As PPG2 states at para 1.4: 'the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness'. It is important that the Local Plan should continue to express and implement the objectives of Green Belt policy. The boundary of the Green Belt shown on the Proposals Map has been drawn with the principal intentions of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up areas and safeguarding the surrounding countryside from further encroachment. It also provides an area where agriculture and open air recreation can take place and plays a role in the retention of attractive landscapes.

### 6.2 Policy Context

6.2.1 The Secretary of State sets out guidance on Green Belts, in PPG2 'Green Belts'. This defines the purposes of including land in Green Belts as follows:

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

6.2.2 Green Belts also have positive roles to play, and PPG2 identifies the following objectives for land use in the Green Belt:

- a) to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- b) to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- c) to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- d) to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- e) to secure nature conservation interest; and
- f) to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

6.2.3 PPG2 advises however, that, “the extent to which the use of land fulfils these objectives is however not itself a material factor in the inclusion of land within a Green Belt, or in its continued protection. For example, although Green Belts often contain areas of attractive landscape, the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a Green Belt or to its continued protection. The purposes of including land in Green Belts are of paramount importance to their continued protection, and should take precedence over the land use objectives”.

6.2.4 Many of these considerations are relevant to Dartford, particularly those relating to recreation and access to the countryside, given the Borough’s location on the south-east fringe of London. These aspects are especially important in the context of the Green Grid concept which the Plan seeks to promote (as specified in policies DD5 and DD6).

6.2.5 In Kent one of the specific effects of the Green Belt is to preserve the open country between the edge of Greater London and the urban areas of the Medway Towns, the Medway Gap and Tunbridge Wells (1996 Structure Plan, para. 6.3).

### **6.3 Historic Background**

6.3.1 London’s original Green Belt - established in the 1950’s - included much of what is now Dartford Borough, extending as far east as the southern side of Swanscombe, to Betsham, to Westwood, and to the western side of Longfield. The former North West Kent Town Map (1978) extended the Green Belt deeper into Kent, but east of the original area and south of Gravesend it showed the enlarged area not extending further north than the line of the A2.

6.3.2 Green Belt boundaries in Dartford were drawn tight up against the urban area and left little room for the town’s subsequent growth. The former Town Map’s Green Belt notation covered the three hospital sites which lie at the town’s edge - Darenth Park, Joyce Green and Bexley - together with the former Mabledon Hospital to the south of Darenth Park. The Town Map Green Belt notation also overlaid all the Borough’s villages, with the exception of New Barn.

6.3.3 Whilst Green Belt boundaries in the Borough have largely remained fixed, there have been some revisions; for example the North West Kent Town Map drew back the boundary from the Littlebrook power station, and the 1980 Structure Plan did likewise for the Stone Marshes area (Crossways). The 1990 Structure Plan excluded land north east of Dartford, including Joyce Green, from the Green Belt, and provided for the revision of Green Belt boundaries to allow for the development of a regional shopping centre at Western Quarry (Bluewater). The comprehensive review of Green

Belt boundaries carried out for the Adopted Local Plan excluded further areas from the Green Belt, including Central Park and land at Stone Lodge.

## **6.4 Definition of the Green Belt**

- 6.4.1 53% of the total area of the Borough of Dartford is covered by Green Belt notation. The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and their protection must be maintained as far ahead as possible. Once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. Similarly, detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted Local Plans should be altered only exceptionally. Current advice (PPG2) states that, where local plans are being revised, existing Green Belt boundaries should not be changed unless alterations to the Structure Plan have been approved or other exceptional circumstances exist. As PPG2 states in para 2.6 'Detailed boundaries should not be altered or development allowed merely because the land has become derelict'.
- 6.4.2 Most of Dartford's countryside lies within the Green Belt and there is therefore a close interrelationship between the issues dealt with in this chapter and those in the Countryside and the Villages chapter. Indeed, in much of the Borough the policies in both chapters will apply. In broad terms, the Green Belt chapter deals with the policies covering the definition of the Green Belt and development within it, while the Countryside and The Villages chapter has policies covering rural land use and development, environmental and landscape issues.
- 6.4.3 The 1996 Kent Structure Plan allows for the release of Eastern Quarry from the Green Belt for major development. It is a matter for the Local Plan to define the new Green Belt boundaries in this area. In defining these new boundaries, it is clear that the removal of Eastern Quarry would have left St. Clement's Valley as an isolated narrow wedge of Green Belt. This would not be consistent with the policy intentions for Green Belts set out in PPG2. Also of importance is the opportunity this land provides in terms of location and accessibility to provide a significant employment node, as part of a mixed housing and employment development at Stone Castle, thus contributing to the principles of sustainable development. Taken together, these factors justify its removal from the Green Belt, together with Eastern Quarry. These changes are shown on the Proposals Map. Section 15.5 and Policy MDS3 deal with St Clement's Valley in more detail. Section 15.7 and policy MDS5 deal with Eastern Quarry in greater detail.
- 6.4.4 Based on current information, the Green Belt boundaries will not need further alteration during the Plan period. The major development sites, including Eastern Quarry, are expected to provide sufficient land to accommodate anticipated development pressures up to and beyond 2011. As a result, there is no case for safeguarding land between the urban area and the Green Belt to meet longer-term development needs. There is no identified requirement for safeguarding land in the Green Belt in the 1996 Kent Structure Plan.

### **GB1 Definition of the Green Belt**

**The area and boundaries of the Metropolitan Green Belt, to which the Green Belt policies of the development plan will apply, are shown on the Proposals Map.**

## **6.5 New Buildings in the Green Belt**

6.5.1 Government Guidance in PPG2 establishes a general presumption against inappropriate development in Green Belts. Great importance is attached to the long-term future of the Green Belt. Accordingly development will be strictly controlled within it so as to protect its open character and the rural environment.

#### **GB2 New Buildings in the Green Belt**

**The openness of the Green Belt defined on the Proposals Map will be preserved. Within the Green Belt inappropriate development, as defined, will not be permitted. The construction of new buildings is inappropriate and planning permission will not be granted unless it is for the following purposes: -**

- 1. agriculture or forestry (unless permitted development rights have been withdrawn);**
- 2. small, unobtrusive, essential facilities for outdoor sport or recreation, for cemeteries, or for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes;**
- 3. limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings provided it is in accordance with policies GB4 and GB5; and**
- 4. limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites as specified in policies GB7, GB8, GB9 and GB10.**

**In addition, planning permission will only be granted where it is demonstrated that the use is viable and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The Council may impose conditions or seek to secure a legal agreement requiring the removal of the building upon cessation of the original permitted use.**

6.5.2 “Essential facilities” should be genuinely required for uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In relation to new buildings in the Green Belt generally, there have been instances where proposals for an acceptable use have been approved and implemented (for example for recreation) but where that use has ceased in a relatively short period, to be followed by an application for a change of use to a commercial use, which may be acceptable within the terms of PPG2 and PPG7, but would not have been approved as an application in its own right as a new building. The effect of this is to add to the stock of new buildings in the Green Belt and to reduce its openness. In considering applications for any new building in the Green Belt, therefore, the Council will look closely at the viability of the use proposed, and its prospects for continuing beyond the short term, and may impose conditions or seek to secure a legal agreement requiring the removal of the building upon cessation of the original permitted use.

#### **6.6 Re-use of Buildings in the Green Belt**

6.6.1 PPG2 states that the re-use of buildings in the Green Belt is not inappropriate development subject to the criteria included in policy GB3. With suitable safeguards the re-use of buildings should not prejudice the openness of Green Belts, since the buildings are already there. However, the levels of activity generated by new uses and any associated urbanisation will be taken into account in considering proposals.

#### **GB3 Re-use of Buildings in the Green Belt**

**The re-use of buildings within the Green Belt will be permitted, provided that:**

- 1. the proposed new use will not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the Green Belt or on the fulfilment of its purposes;**

2. the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;
3. the form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings and respect local building styles and materials;
4. any proposed structural changes to the buildings secure an improvement to their external appearance and are in keeping with the inherent character and original design purpose of the building; and
5. it does not include any building extension or any associated uses of land around the building that might conflict with the openness of the Green Belt or the purposes of including land in it.

## **6.7 Extensions to, and Replacement of, Dwellings in the Green Belt**

- 6.7.1 PPG2 states that the extension of existing dwellings is not inappropriate providing that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The replacement of existing dwellings need not be inappropriate, providing the new dwelling is not materially larger than the dwelling it replaces.
- 6.7.2 The extension of an existing dwelling beyond those limits prescribed in the General Permitted Development Order requires planning permission. In the countryside, outside the defined confines of the villages, the maintenance of the open character of the Green Belt and of landscape quality constitute prime objectives. Consequently, whilst any proposal to extend or replace dwellings in the Green Belt will be assessed on their individual merits, relative to the established residential use, weight will be attached to minimising the intrusion of additional built form within the rural scene. Large new buildings or extensions will not be permitted.
- 6.7.3 The size of the existing dwelling and the visual impact of the built form are key factors to be taken into account in assessing the size of the replacement dwelling or any proposed extension. In comparison to these considerations, the size of other properties in the locality or the size of the curtilage are of little significance.

## **GB4 Extensions to Dwellings in the Green Belt**

**Proposals to extend or alter an existing dwelling in the Green Belt will not be permitted unless the following criteria are met: -**

1. the existing dwelling was designed and originally constructed for permanent residential use and is built on permanent foundations. Extensions to mobile homes and buildings not designed for permanent residential use will not be permitted;
2. the 'gross floor area' of the extension or alteration does not result in an increase of more than 25% of the 'gross floor area' of the original dwelling, or does not exceed the 'gross floor area' of any extensions that are to be replaced, whichever is the greater;
3. the proposed extension or alteration does not have a visual impact prejudicial to the open character of the Green Belt or the visual amenities of the surrounding countryside;
4. the proposed extension or alteration does not facilitate the creation of a separate dwelling; and
5. the appearance, massing and scale of any extension or alteration respects and reflects those of the existing dwelling and any adjoining or nearby dwellings.

**The removal of permitted development rights will be considered where such development will prejudice the objectives of this policy or Structure Plan policy MGB3.**

**Proposals to further extend a dwelling previously extended will not be permitted,**

unless the cumulative total floor area of the extensions is no more than 25% of the original 'gross floor area'.

For the purposes of policy GB4 'gross floor area' of the original dwelling will be calculated by external measurement of all floors and will include any garage or domestic outbuilding (incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling) within the curtilage of the dwelling, if any part lies within 5m of any part of the dwelling. All habitable floorspace of the building, which is usable as such will be included.

'Original' means the dwelling and domestic outbuildings within 5m as existing on 1st July 1948; or if no dwelling existed on that date then 'original' means the dwelling as first built after 1st July 1948 excluding any alterations, extensions or outbuildings built after completion of the dwelling.

### **GB5 Replacement of Dwellings in the Green Belt**

Proposals for replacement dwellings in the Green Belt will not be permitted unless the following criteria are met: -

1. the existing building is a dwelling and its residential use has not been abandoned;
2. the existing dwelling was designed and originally constructed for permanent residential use and is built on permanent foundations;
3. the 'gross floor area' of the replacement dwelling does not exceed either the 'gross floor area' of the original dwelling by more than 25%, or the 'gross floor area' of the original dwelling plus any extensions built after completion of the dwelling, whichever is the greater;
4. the proposed dwelling is intrinsically well designed, sympathetic to the open character of the Green Belt and is sited and designed so as to minimise visual intrusion into the landscape;
5. the appearance, massing and scale of any replacement building respects and reflects those of the existing dwelling and any adjoining or nearby dwellings; and
6. the existing dwelling on the site is removed before the new dwelling is first occupied, or within such period as may be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

The removal of permitted development rights will be considered where such development will prejudice the objectives of this policy or Structure Plan policy MGB3.

For the purposes of policy GB5 'gross floor area' of the original dwelling will be calculated by external measurement of all floors and will include any garage or domestic outbuilding (incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling) within the curtilage of the dwelling, if any part lies within 5m of any part of the dwelling. All habitable floorspace of the building, which is usable as such will be included.

'Original' means the dwelling and domestic outbuildings within 5m as existing on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1948; or if no dwelling existed on that date then 'original' means the dwelling as first built after 1<sup>st</sup> July 1948 excluding any alterations, extensions or outbuildings built after completion of the dwelling.

### **6.8 Engineering and Other Operations and Any Material Change in the Use of Land in the Green Belt**

- 6.8.1 The statutory definition of development includes not only built development as dealt with above but also other engineering and other operations, and the making of any material change in the use of land. The carrying out of such operations or the making of material changes in the use of land is inappropriate development unless it maintains the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with its purposes.

**GB6 Engineering and Other Operations and Any Material Change in the Use of Land in the Green Belt**

**The carrying out of an engineering or other operation or the making of any material change in the use of land will not be permitted unless it maintains the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with its purposes.**

- 6.8.2 Policies applying to proposals for mineral working and waste disposal in the Green Belt are dealt with in the Kent Structure Plan and Minerals and Waste Local Plans prepared by the County Council.

**6.9 Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt**

- 6.9.1 Annex C to PPG2 recognises that Green Belts contain some major developed sites such as factories, power stations, water and sewage treatment works, military establishments, civil airfields, hospitals and research and education establishments. Where a major developed site is identified in a Local Plan, limited infilling or redevelopment, which meets the criteria in paragraph C3 or C4 of PPG2, is not "inappropriate development". Only four such sites in the Borough are of such a scale and meet the criteria and are thus identified: Bexley Hospital site, Oakfield Lane campus, Mabledon Hospital site and Axton Chase School. Proposals for limited infilling at major developed sites in continuing use should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site.

**GB7 Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt**

**Proposals for redevelopment at Bexley Hospital, the Oakfield Lane Campus, Mabledon Hospital and Axton Chase School, identified as major developed sites in the Green Belt, should:**

- 1. have no greater impact than the existing development on the openness of the Green Belt or on the fulfilment of its purposes and, where possible, have less;**
- 2. contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts;**
- 3. not exceed the height of the existing buildings; and**
- 4. not occupy a larger area of the site than the existing buildings (unless this would achieve a reduction in height that would benefit visual amenity).**

**The relevant area for the purposes of (4) is the aggregate ground floor area of the existing buildings (the "footprint") excluding temporary buildings, open spaces with direct external access between wings of a building, and areas of hardstanding.**

- 6.9.2 Proposals for the redevelopment of a site must take full account of the character and disposition of the buildings so as to minimise impact on the Green Belt and must include appropriate Green Grid provision and links.
- 6.9.3 Any proposal for partial redevelopment should be put forward in the context of a comprehensive, long-term plan for the site as a whole. Buildings of architectural or historic interest, private gardens and grounds of special historic interest are generally to be retained and a suitable re-use found.

## 6.10 Bexley Hospital

6.10.1 Part of Bexley Hospital remains operational, with a mental health unit on site. It lies close to existing residential areas and to Dartford Heath. The existing built development is set within a mature landscaped context. It affords a development potential within which landscape elements - rather than buildings - should predominate. The Council has granted planning permission for a predominantly housing development (454 units). The existing buildings, except for that which is listed and those on the northern edge of the site, will be demolished as the operational use of the remainder of the site ceases.

### **GB8 Bexley Hospital**

**Bexley Hospital is identified for predominantly housing development within a landscape setting. Proposals will be subject to a comprehensive scheme for the layout and phasing of the development of the whole site occupying a footprint no larger than the existing buildings, and which will:**

**1. include the following elements:**

**(i) a major housing development, based on the existing gross area of buildings to be demolished, predominantly of family houses of 3 to 5 bedrooms, subject to section 106 planning obligations on transport matters, affordable housing, open space and community facilities provision;**

**(ii) ancillary uses to meet community needs;**

**(iii) substantial areas of landscaping, taking full advantage of the mature planting existing on the site;**

**2. incorporate appropriate vehicular access arrangements that safeguard the environment of housing areas to the west and the south;**

**3. include appropriate access by sustainable methods of transport such as public transport, walking and cycling;**

**4. include provision for a new primary school on a site to the south of the existing hospital buildings (policy CF7);**

**5. retain existing sports and social facilities to the present level of provision;**

**6. include appropriate Green Grid provision and links; and**

**7. include the provision of a mental health facility on land to the east of the existing hospital buildings, subject to the provision of a suitable vehicular access.**

## 6.11 Oakfield Lane Campus

6.11.1 The Council regards the Oakfield Lane campus as an important higher educational facility, and wishes to see it continue in this role. Locally accessible higher education is important in its own right but is central to the development of Kent Thameside as a 'learning region'. As a major developed site in the green belt, infilling or redevelopment for educational purposes may take place within the existing campus in accordance with Annex C, PPG2. Such proposals should be based on the aggregate ground floor area of the existing buildings (the "footprint"). Development proposals should conform to a planning brief, either prepared or agreed by the local planning authority, and be accompanied by a masterplan prepared by the applicant.

6.11.2 The campus contains many of the sports facilities that formed part of the original physical education college established by Swedish sports pioneer, Martina Bergman-Osterberg ('Madame Osterberg') in 1895. There is also an archive of her effects and other mementos. The preservation of these features must be taken into account in any proposals for reuse or redevelopment of the campus.

## **GB9 Oakfield Lane Campus**

**Planning permission will be granted for further educational buildings and/or extensions of existing buildings, provided that the proposals:**

- (a) do not reduce the openness of the Green Belt,**
- (b) respect the historical integrity of the original buildings, grounds and other features,**
- (c) will not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site, and**
- (d) do not include structures which exceed the height of those already on the site.**

## **6.12 Mabledon Hospital**

6.12.1 The site of the former Mabledon Hospital lies to the south of the A2 and is divorced from the main urban area. Although the buildings have been demolished the footprint of the site (9485 sq m) has been registered and it therefore qualifies as a Major Developed Site under Annex C of PPG2. However, the manner in which the footprint may be developed should be informed by the locational sustainability criteria set out in PPG3. In these terms, the site does not perform well as a location for housing:

- it is not well located in relation to jobs, shops, and services by modes other than car
- the site is not of a sufficient capacity to build a new community or to significantly improve the viability of Lane End
- there are enough previously developed urban and strategic sites available elsewhere to meet housing needs

Notwithstanding Annex C of PPG2, the sustainability arguments therefore militate against any residential use or other development that might generate significant volumes of traffic on this site. However, the site is suitable for other built development that is appropriate to a semi-rural environment and does not generate significant sustained volumes of activity or traffic. The site could accommodate a crematorium or a residential home, or a combination of similar uses.

## **GB10 Mabledon Hospital**

**Proposals for development at Mabledon Hospital site must:**

- **not exceed the registered footprint**
- **not generate significant sustained volumes of activity and traffic**
- **not detract from the residential amenity of Lane End**
- **be appropriate to its semi-rural setting and must not damage the local landscape**
- **take account of nature conservation interest, including its relationship with the adjoining Darenth Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest, and make appropriate provision for its management**
- **provide green grid spaces and links, and community woodland**
- **be based on an agreed planning brief for the site**

**Proposals may include a crematorium or residential care home.**

## **6.13 Axton Chase**

6.13.1 The site of Axton Chase School lies to the south of the B260 in Longfield and is enclosed on two sides by the built-up area of the village. Kent County Council have indicated that in the event that it is decided to relocate the School, this site will be declared surplus. Should this be the case, and in the event of it not being re-occupied by another educational user, a predominantly residential redevelopment scheme

would be appropriate and this should include an element of keyworker housing. Due to its size, function and location, the site qualifies as a Major Developed Site under Annex C of PPG2.

**GB11 Axton Chase**

**Should the Axton Chase School site become redundant, a predominantly housing development on a “footprint” basis will be permitted. Proposals will be subject to a comprehensive scheme for the layout and phasing of the development of the whole site. The form of development should be at a density in keeping with its village location.**

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