

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
PRELIMINARY REVIEW PAPER
KEY GREEN BELT ISSUES**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper is intended to provide background information and an initial review of the areas of Green Belt. It will contribute to the evidence base of the LDF process.

2. NATIONAL POLICY

- 2.1 Government guidance in relation to Green Belts comes from PPG2 which was published in 1995 (amended 2001). It outlines that Green Belts have been an essential element of planning policy for some 4 decades and states:

“The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness (para 1.4).”

- 2.2 It then qualifies the five purposes of including land within Green Belts as being to:

- *check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;*
- *prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;*
- *assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- *preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- *assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land (para 1.5).*

- 2.3 When it comes to the actual use of Green Belt land the PPG comments that it has a positive role to play in fulfilling a number of objectives as follows:

- *to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;*
- *to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;*
- *to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;*
- *to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;*

- to secure nature conservation interest; and
- to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses (para 1.6).

2.4 However, the guidance makes clear that the extent to which the use of land fulfils the above objectives is not itself a material factor in the inclusion of land within a Green Belt, or in 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 objective.”* (Para 1.7)

2.5 The general extent of Green Belt within the Borough has been fixed through the Lancashire Structure Plan with the detailed boundaries being defined in local plans.

2.6 In defining detailed boundaries within local plans the PPG advises that:

“Once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved, it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances ... detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans or earlier approved development plans should be altered only exceptionally. Detailed boundaries should not be altered or development allowed merely because the land has become derelict.” (Para 2.6).

Where existing local plans are being revised and updated, existing Green Belt boundaries should not be changed unless alterations to the structure plan have been approved, or other exceptional circumstances exist, which necessitate such revision. (Para 2.7)

Where practicable a Green Belt should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable open zone all round the built-up area concerned. Boundaries should be clearly defined, using readily recognisable features such as roads, streams, belts of trees or woodland edges where possible. Well-defined long-term Green Belt boundaries help to ensure the future agricultural, recreational and amenity value of Green Belt, whereas less secure boundaries would make it more difficult for farmers and other landowners to maintain and improve their land (para 2.9).

2.7 PPG2 affords local authorities the opportunity to safeguard land from designated Green Belts which may be required to meet longer term development needs.

In preparing and reviewing their development plans, authorities should address the possible need to provide safeguarded land. They should consider the broad location of anticipated development beyond the plan period, its effects on urban areas contained by the Green Belt and on areas beyond it, and its implications for sustainable development. In non metropolitan areas these questions should in the first instance be addressed in the structure plan, which should, where necessary, indicate a general area where local plans should identify safeguarded land (para 2.12).

2.8 With regard to control over development within the Green Belt the PPG states:

“The general policies controlling development in the countryside apply with equal force in Green Belts but there is, in addition, a general presumption against

inappropriate development within them. Such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances.” (Para 3.1);

and

“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. It is for the applicant to show why permission should be granted. Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.” (Para 3.2)

- 2.9 By their very nature Green Belts are located in areas highly susceptible to development pressures but PPG2 does provide for a limited number of exceptions for permissible development. These are for the provision of local recreational facilities, diversification of the rural economy and an amendment in 2001 by annex E of PPG13 to include park and ride facilities.

3. REGIONAL GUIDANCE

- 3.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North west of England completed its Examination in Public in 2007 with the report of the panel issued in March 2007. Policy RDF5 and its supporting text set out the Green Belt policy for the region commenting that overall the general extent of the region's Green Belt will be maintained. The Panel's report goes on to say that:

“In our view the role of the RSS is to set the general extent of the Green Belt. Any strategic changes to the Green Belt which would impact on its underlying principles and functioning should be dealt with through the RSS. Smaller scale boundary changes that would not impact on the general extent of the Green Belt should be dealt with at the LDF level.” (Para 4.131).

- 3.2 Indeed the report of the panel recommends a change to Policy RDF5 of the RSS to include the following additional paragraph:

“Local Development Frameworks may provide for detailed changes in Green Belt boundaries to accommodate the expansion of Manchester Airport and Liverpool John Lennon Airport; and to provide for an inter-modal freight terminal at Newton-le-Willows. Subject to the agreement of NWRA, any other local detailed boundary changes should be examined through the LDF process.” (Para 4.139)

- 3.3 Again the supporting text to be amended in para 7.21 to state:

“Authorities considering the inclusion of such further changes in LDD's should consult NWRA who will determine whether they are matters which can be dealt with at local level. Such agreement will not be unreasonably withheld.” (Para 4.139)

4. STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

- 4.1 Existing Strategic guidance takes the form of Policy 6 of the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan (JLSP). This clarifies that the general extent of Green Belts

across Lancashire was first defined in the late 1970's/early 1980's. The reasons for defining its general extent still apply and there is no strategic case for altering its boundaries.

- 4.2 However it should be noted that the JLSP will soon be replaced by the Regional Spatial Strategy and thus whilst its policy is of relevance at the time of drafting this report (September 2007) the weight to be attached to it will diminish over time.

5. LOCAL GUIDANCE

- 5.1 The Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan (Adopted June 1998) defines the extent of Green Belt within the Borough which runs along the southern fringe – south of Mellor, east of Wilpshire, West of Ramsgreave, south and east of Whalley, south of Read and Simonstone.

- 5.2 Prior to the Districtwide Local Plan the bulk of the Green Belt in the Borough, apart from the area south of Simonstone, which was contained within Green Belt defined by the Burnley District Local Plan 1985, was defined in the Southern Fringe Local Plan (adopted 1990).

- 5.3 In preparing the Districtwide Local Plan, boundaries were reviewed on the basis of no, or only limited change, to those previously defined in the Southern Fringe Local Plan. The plan stressed that the designation would not be altered until at least to the turn of the century and that the Green Belt boundary would be maintained beyond the timescale of that document.

- 5.4 The plan contains 2 policies of relevance to Green Belt – ENV4 and ENV5. Policy ENV4 is intended to ensure that the Green Belt is kept generally open and free from inappropriate development stating:

“Within the Green Belt, as shown on the proposals map, planning permission will not be given, except in very exceptional circumstances, for the erection of new buildings other than for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, cemeteries and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of the designation.

Proposals for the change of use of existing buildings other than for the purposes outlined above will be determined subject to policies H15, H16, H17, EMP9 and RT3 of the plan.”

- 5.5 Policy ENV5 of the Districtwide Local Plan safeguards 2 sites at Billington and Wilpshire from the Green Belt stating that:

“Until such time as those areas defined on the proposals map as open land at Billington and Wilpshire may be allocated for development in a review of, or alteration to this plan. planning permission will be refused for the erection of new buildings other than for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, cemeteries or other uses appropriate to a rural area.”

5.6 These two safeguard areas of land were brought forward from the Southern Fringe Local Plan acting as the local interpretation of paragraph 2.12 of PPG2 (see para 2.7 above), and have been saved under the provisions of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

6. RELEVANCE OF BOUNDARY DEFINITION

6.1 In order to assess whether the Green Belt boundaries as defined within the Districtwide Local Plan are in need of modification, it is appropriate to consider each area in turn as follows:

6.2 Land between Mellor Brow and Mellor Lane/Ramsgreave Road and the Ribble Valley/Blackburn Borough boundary as far east as the built up area of Ramsgreave and Pleckgate

6.2.1 This land prevents the further expansion of the northern Blackburn suburbs and merger of Blackburn and Mellor. It also prevents the westerly extension of Ramsgreave and sporadic urban development on the prominent south slope of Mellor Lane and Ramsgreave Road. This fulfils the purposes set out in PPG2 for Green Belt.

6.2.2 In terms of development pressures within this swathe of land since the adoption of the Districtwide Local Plan there have been a number of applications for residential extensions but also agricultural and stables development. Of these forms of development it is the latter two which have struggled to secure consent in part for lack of justification but also due to their impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

6.2.3 This section of Green Belt has also had two major developments within the lifespan of the Districtwide Local Plan at Woodfold Hall and Stanley House. Woodfold Hall is a Grade II listed building dating from 1798 with a 2001 application incorporating a package of proposals for restoration/conversion of the hall for residential use; restoration/conversion of buildings within the overall site for residential use; new build residential; new horse racing stables and gallops within parkland and off-site highway improvements. Whilst this scale of development may have been considered to be at variance with Green Belt policy the whole package was seen as enabling development without which it would not be possible for the restoration and long term maintenance of the Grade II building. In relative close proximity to Woodfold Hall is another Grade II listed building – Stanley House. A 2002 consent has again secured the restoration and renovation of that historic building dating from 1640 into ensuite bedrooms with existing barns redeveloped to create restaurant, function rooms and ancillary facilities. That scheme also involved the formation of a large car park and it was that element, together with extensions to the barn that could have been seen as contrary to Green Belt policy. However, it was concluded that given the built form was contained within a central core the visual impact was localised. These two schemes are clearly major developments which had exceptional circumstances to justify their approval.

6.3 North of Ramsgreave Road to the urban development south of Ribchester Road, Salesbury as far west as the tack linking Ramsgreave Hall and house call "Meadowside" and the track leading from Ribchester Road to the sewage works and as far east as the urban development of Wilpshire

6.3.1 This area of land prevents sporadic urban development in a westerly direction from Wilpshire. It also prevents the possible merger of Ramsgreave and Wilpshire across land which provides the setting for each village.

6.3.2 An analysis of planning applications received within the area reveals that development activity in this area through the lifespan of the adopted Districtwide Local Plan has been very limited. In the main applications have been for household extensions but again a number of proposals from telecommunications operators.

6.4 East of Wilpshire, and public right of way no 25, south of the Blackburn to Clitheroe railway line and the urban area of Whalley as far south as the Borough boundary and a far east as the River Calder

6.4.1 The main function of this stretch of Green Belt is the prevention of sporadic urban development moving northwards from Blackburn to Great Harwood. It also assists in the separation of Wilpshire and Langho and Langho and Billington which are villages that depend on surrounding land to preserve their individual character.

6.4.2 Both areas of 'safeguarded land' are contained within this swathe of Green Belt.

6.4.3 Since the adoption of the District-wide Local Plan development in this area has been associated with agricultural buildings, domestic extensions and telecommunications development in the form of additional antennas. There have been applications submitted for replacement dwellings within this stretch of Green Belt with some being subject of departure procedures and others not. Such schemes are permissible under PPG2 but regard needs to be had to their size to ensure that they do not result in developments which are significantly larger than existing built form. This is the reason that such schemes have failed in that overlarge replacement dwellings have been suggested which were considered beyond the scope of national policy.

6.4.4 The most significant area of development within the section of Green Belt is at a site named Carr Hall which includes the redevelopment of an existing site for garden/garden crafts centre. However, the principle of that scheme relates back to a consent granted in 1991 for the conversion of a number of redundant buildings which was held to fall within the categories of permissible development in Green Belt. Recent applications have been to revise the fine details of the earlier consent which had commenced.

6.5 North of the built up area of Wilpshire to the hedgerow alongside the path linking Ribchester Road and Palmers Green, the track from there to Ashes Farm and the northern limit of fields number 2412, 2528, 3036, 3700 and 4700

6.5.1 This area of Green Belt prevents the northern expansion of Wilpshire.

6.5.2 Development pressures in the last 10 years have been associated with the needs of the school to provide additional classroom accommodation, extensions to a public house and enhanced facilities at a cricket ground, all of which are appropriate forms of development within Green Belt as defined in PPG2.

6.6 South of the A671 and the built up part of Read and Simonstone to the Borough boundary

6.6.1 This land prevents the continued expansion of the urban areas of Hyndburn and thus assists in preventing the merge of Great Harwood, Accrington and Padiham/Burnley.

6.6.2 Since the adoption of the DWLP there do not appear to have been any significant development pressures within this area. Applications have been associated with tourism (relocation of touring caravan pitches at Bridge Hey Wood), domestic extensions and extensions at employment sites. Of the latter, some have followed formal departure procedures, others not.

6.6.3 The DWLP had the line of the proposed Read/Simonstone bypass safe guarded and that has subsequently been abandoned. Therefore the precise boundary of the Green Belt may need a re-examination at this location and will be discussed later in this report.

6.6.4 Lancashire County Council are working on a proposal to create a greenway along the route of the former railway between Great Harwood, Padiham and Rose Grove, Burnley and whilst this is within this section of the Borough's Green Belt, it should not compromise it.

7. BOUNDARY CHANGES

7.1 It is evident that whilst some of the distinct areas of Green Belt outlined above have been subject to development pressures, these have in the main been limited to a number of clearly identifiable 'groups' namely:

- agricultural;
- telecommunications;
- household extensions;
- sports;
- replacement dwellings;
- expansion of existing employment sites;
- enabling development to facilitate the restoration of a Grade II listed building identified on the Buildings At Risk Register.

- 7.2 The boundaries of the Green Belt are considered realistic and it is held that the only area for minor modification is the area outlined in paragraph 6.6 above ie south of the A671 and the built up part of Read and Simonstone to the Borough boundary.
- 7.3 The abandonment of plans for a Read/Simonstone bypass means that Policy T5 of the DWLP is no longer in force. Inset 21 of the Plan clarifies the extent of Green Belt in relation to this swathe of land as well as what was the proposed route for the road. There is an area above the Time Technology Park yet below a coal yard that not only has the former roadway route but also the green overlay depicting designation as Green Belt. Even if the proposed roadway route is ignored this would still leave a small band of Green Belt running across an area which the land immediately to its south and north is excluded from that designation. This would not be logical and thus for consistency it is recommended that the boundary of the Green Belt in this location be redrafted to that as shown on Plan 1. If this is done it also reverts back to the boundary of Green Belt as defined in the Burnley District Local Plan dating from 1985 – ie the plan area covering that land prior to it being transferred to Ribble Valley.
- 7.4 At the time of drafting this paper, discussions were still ongoing regarding the former Philips site to the west of Simonstone Lane and a Certificate of Lawfulness application seeking to establish that an area of land to the west of the existing built form is developable for employment use under a 1958 consent. Clearly this is not a 'normal' planning application but a legal determination as to whether a consent granted in 1958 is still valid today. It is not for this piece of work to redraft the extent of Green Belt in relation to that parcel of land in response to that application. If, however, a positive outcome is arrived at then this is only confirming something that was originally granted consent prior to the establishment of any Green Belt boundary. It is a case which is to be determined on its legal as opposed to planning merits as thus whilst recognised as part of this piece of work, is not considered to warrant a revision of the Green Belt boundary at this location within the scope of this review.
- 7.5 A similar position is offered in respect of the ongoing discussions about a potential racecourse site to the south of Blackburn Road. Should such an application be forthcoming in the future it will be treated on its own merits having regard to Green Belt policy as laid out in PPG2. It will also have cross Borough boundary implications and thus whilst acknowledging the public debate that has been ongoing, it would not be appropriate for this piece of work to pre-empt any future determination at this stage.

8. SAFEGUARDED LAND

- 8.1 There are two areas covered by this designation within the Districtwide Local Plan at Billington and Wilpshire (see paragraph 5.5 above).
- 8.2 These two areas have been protected from development for in excess of 15 years in both the Districtwide Local Plan and its predecessor the Southern Fringe Local Plan. Throughout that time the Borough has seen major housing developments granted permission on a range of sites as outlined below:

Brownfield

Greenfield

} Clitheroe {

Riverlea Gardens
Bus Depot
Former Council Depot
Former Milk Marque

Pendle Road
Knuck Knowles
Hawthorne Place
Chatburn Road

Land off Willows Park Lane, Longridge
Coppins, Whalley
Stonebridge Mill, Chatburn
Former Acewell Gas Site
Ribchester Hospital
Langho Colony
Brockhall Hospital
Calderstones Hospital

The Grange, Wilpshire
Showley Court, Clayton-le-Dale
Fieldens Farms, Mellor Brook
Littlemoor House, Sabden
Low Moor, Clitheroe
Abbey Corn Mill, Whalley
Petre, Billington

*NB This list is not exhaustive but to outline the larger sites developed or granted detailed consent throughout this period.

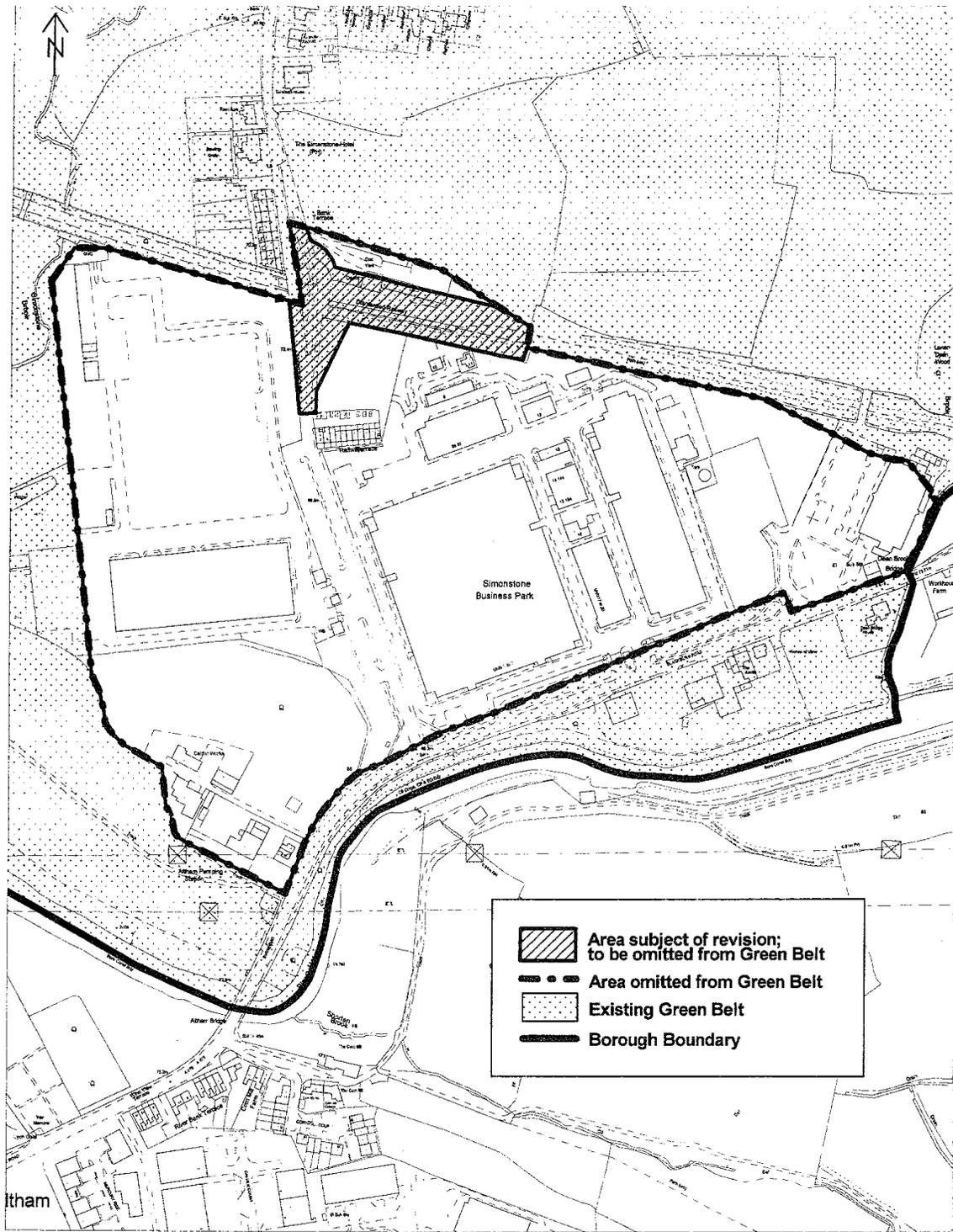
8.3 The availability and development of these sites has demonstrated that to date the Borough has had sufficient land to meet housing demand. However the Borough has been operating policies of housing restraint since 2002 in order to satisfy the requirements of Policy 12 of the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan – ‘Housing Provision’. The emergence of, and gaining weight attributed to, the Regional Spatial Strategy means that a revised housing figure will come into force at some stage in 2008. At such time the Borough will need to have in place a strategy and sites identified to meet anticipated housing growth.

8.4 As part of the LDF process, a number of potential housing sites will be identified and explored for development opportunities. Clearly not all sites brought forward will prove capable of accommodating development but they will all be vigorously tested.

8.5 The two safeguarded sites should be considered as potential development sites as part of the ongoing LDF process. The land resources of the Borough to accommodate this form of development will not be infinite. These two parcels of land may have advantages over other sites equally their development may have adverse impacts. Should further analysis reveal that they are capable of accommodating residential development an assessment would then need to be taken as to whether they were required in the short term over other suitable sites or indeed retained as safeguarded until further reviews of the LDF in subsequent years. Until such time as that work has been carried out, there cannot be a categoric answer as to whether or not these areas should be retained as safeguarded or not.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 In conclusion it is clear that the approach taken to date is realistic and in conformity with Government guidance. Development is not being unnecessarily restricted provided it meets the requirements of local and national policy.
- 9.2 There is a case to be made for revising the exact boundary definition of the Green Belt at Simonstone to remedy a minor drafting error in the Districtwide Local Plan inset map for the area which also defined a proposed link road route – now abandoned.
- 9.3 The two areas of safeguarded land at Billington and Wilpshire should have their development potential explored as part of the LDF site identification process to assess whether they are capable of accommodating residential development and if so does the availability of alternate sites affect the timescale of any release. As part of that evaluation the fundamental need to release the sites would be considered .This in turn would inform any consideration to be given to either continuing the safeguarded land designation or if it is preferable to extend the green belt across these areas.



Plan 1 Proposed revision to Green Belt boundary

Scale: 1:4000

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