

Chapter 4
Green Belt and Rural Area Beyond the Green
Belt

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4.1 Green Belt

4.1.1 The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

4.1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the five main purposes of the 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.

4.2 Local Context

4.2.1 Hertfordshire County Council first designated the south of the County as Green Belt as part of the Hertfordshire County Development Plan, published in 1951 and approved by the Minister of Housing and Local Government in December 1958, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1947.

4.2.2 The extent of the Green Belt in East Herts was originally limited to a small area south of Hertford and Ware. However the 1979 County Structure Plan extended the area of Green Belt northwards along the A1 to Stevenage and beyond, and along the M11 to the southern limits of Bishop's Stortford.

4.2.3 The 1986 County Structure Plan Review included the extension of the Green Belt to surround Bishop's Stortford, with the inner Green Belt boundaries being defined through the East Herts Local Plan Review, adopted in 1993.

4.2.4 The broad extent of the Green Belt was carried forward in the 2007 East Herts Local Plan and as such contains the settlements of Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware, together with several villages.

4.3 Exceptional Circumstances

4.3.1 The NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries can only be amended in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of a Local Plan. There is no definition in the NPPF of what constitutes exceptional circumstances, as this will vary for each locality.

4.3.2 In East Herts there is a combination of factors that exist locally that together constitute the exceptional circumstances that require the Council to amend its Green Belt boundaries. This includes the high level of housing need, including affordable homes, exacerbated by a significant backlog of unmet need, and the lack of suitable alternative locations to the north of the District.

4.3.3 Chapter 3 (The Development Strategy) therefore sets out that the challenging level of housing need cannot be met in a sustainable way without undertaking a carefully planned review of the Green Belt. As such approximately 6% of the District's Green Belt has been removed in order to help meet a significant proportion of the housing need, both within this Plan period and beyond. The revised Green Belt boundary is shown on the Policies Map.

4.4 Planning Applications in the Green Belt

4.4.1 When considering any planning application for development, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt is by definition harmful and should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

4.4.2 There are however some uses that are appropriate in the Green Belt and these are listed in the NPPF.

4.5 Neighbourhood Planning

4.5.1 The villages of Hertford Heath, Stanstead Abbots & St Margarets, and Watton-at-Stone are inset from the Green Belt. These villages will be encouraged to consider accommodating development in their Neighbourhood Plans, especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits. Where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District Council will consider making these amendments either through the next Review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document if necessary.

Policy GBR1 Green Belt

I. Planning applications within the Green Belt, as defined on the Policies Map, will be considered in line with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

II. The villages of Hertford Heath, Stanstead Abbots & St Margarets, and Watton-at-Stone will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate through the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits. Where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District

Council will consider making these amendments either through the next Review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document if necessary.

4.6 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

4.6.1 Green Belt in East Herts covers approximately one-third of the District. The remaining two-thirds of the District are located in the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt'. This Rural Area is highly valued by the District's residents and visitors alike, particularly for its open and largely undeveloped nature. As such it forms an important part of the character of the District. It is a considerable and significant countryside resource, which Policy GBR2 seeks to maintain by concentrating development within existing settlements.

4.7 Planning Applications in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

4.7.1 When considering planning applications in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, sustainable development will be permitted in accordance with Policy GBR2.

Policy GBR2 Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt

I. In order to maintain the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt as a valued countryside resource, the following types of development will be permitted, provided that they are compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area:

- (a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- (b) facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, including equine development in accordance with CFLR6 (Equine Development), and for cemeteries;
- (c) new employment generating uses where they are sustainably located, in accordance with Policy ED2 (Rural Economy);
- (d) the replacement, extension or alteration of a building, provided the size, scale, mass, form, siting, design and materials of construction are appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding areas;
- (e) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings) in sustainable locations, where appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or surrounding area;
- (f) rural exception housing in accordance with Policy HOU4 (Rural Exception Affordable Housing Sites);

(g) accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with Policy HOU9 (Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople) or Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, in accordance with Policy HOU10 (New Park Home Sites for Non-Nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople);

(h) development identified in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

