

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Green Belt Boundary Study (Proposals for New Green Belt Land)

March 2009

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Maidenhead
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1 Introduction

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1.1 The Council is committed to protecting the role and importance of the Green Belt. Notwithstanding this, the Council faces increased development pressures and will be seeking to have an open debate with our community on how to address these.

1.2 The Council has been strongly advised by a Government Inspector to adopt a more proactive stance towards a review of Green Belt boundaries. As part of this the Council has undertaken a review of the Green Belt boundaries around the Borough's Excluded Settlements⁽¹⁾ to rectify any inconsistencies and to assess areas with potential for land to be included in the Green Belt.

1.3 This process also involves a holistic review of the methodology set out in the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire. It includes recommendations for potential Green Belt boundary amendments which would be subject to consultation and examination by a Government Inspector as part of the LDF.

1.4 This report sets out the context, and study approach and methodology that was followed in assessing areas of Green Belt potential. However, it should be noted that the conclusions contained in Section 4 of the report set out **initial findings only** and are subject to change. Further assessments need to take place following consultations with key landowners.

Context

1.5 National planning policy on Green Belt is contained in Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts (PPG2). It outlines five purposes of including land in the Green Belt, namely:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns from 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 urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other land.

Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire: RBWM Context

1.6 Green Belt was first included within the Borough as part of the Berkshire County Development Plan (1962) as part of the "proposed Green Belt." This was not formally adopted but was treated, with the approval of Whitehall, as if it had been approved. The area of Metropolitan Green Belt in East Berkshire received the formal approval of the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1974.

1.7 Precise boundaries were originally established by the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire, which was adopted in 1985. These boundaries have been retained in the Royal Borough except for correcting minor inconsistencies through the RBWM Local Plan that was adopted in 1999.

1.8 Section 4 of the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire utilised four criteria for defining boundaries around Excluded Settlements. These were:

1. *The existing planning boundaries of the settlements should be used as the starting point in defining the Green Belt boundaries around the Excluded Settlements;*
2. *Changes to the established planning boundaries should only be made where those boundaries are unsatisfactory **either** because development, or a commitment to development, has spread beyond the established boundary, **or** because the present boundary does not accurately reflect the true boundary of the wholly urban area;*
3. *The Green Belt boundaries should be drawn tightly against the edge of the developed area (actual or committed) of the Excluded Settlements;*
4. *The Green Belt boundaries should be clear on the ground and defensible.*

1.9 Criteria 3 and 4 concern the detailed definition of the Green Belt boundary.

¹ 'Excluded Settlements' are the towns and villages in the Borough which are not included within the Green Belt.

Introduction

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1.10 Paragraph 4.3.7 of the Green Belt Local Plan clarifies that criteria 3 for defining the boundaries was included on the basis that new 'white areas,' or undesignated areas on the edge of Excluded Settlements, would not be needed for future housing growth to take place as adequate provision existed elsewhere to accommodate the housing needs of the area for the foreseeable future. This rationale is no longer relevant as the Council is now expected to provide high levels of housing locally that is putting pressure on undeveloped areas at the edge of settlements. The accompanying explanation for the third criteria also stated that:

"...small sites on the edges of settlements which, although not built on, relate more closely to the adjoining settlement than to its open or rural surroundings have been included within the Excluded Settlements."

1.11 On a number of occasions these open spaces at the edge of settlements result in a lack of definition between the areas in the Green Belt and areas in the settlement. By including these areas within the Green Belt, where appropriate, a more defensible and recognisable boundary would be created.

1.12 The Council considers that the explanation accompanying the fourth criteria is now somewhat out of kilter in relation to the current Green Belt boundaries. In essence in the Royal Borough there are Green Belt boundary inconsistencies that may not be as defensible as they could be. The accompanying explanation from paragraph 4.3.9 of the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire states that:

"...boundaries around the Excluded Settlements should, so far as possible, be clear on the ground, and follow recognisable and permanent features. However, since the main aim is to ensure that these boundaries correspond to the edge of the built-up areas, they may sometimes have to follow features – such as fence lines or other plot boundaries – whose accessibility and permanence may not seem to be quite as assured...Such features...are considered to be satisfactory for defining Green Belt boundaries around the Excluded Settlement."

1.13 Although this explanation is necessary to address how it was intended to mark the Green Belt boundary, the Council considers that it lacks a clear order of priority to show how a boundary should be drawn.

1.14 As further commentary on criteria 4, Paragraph 4.3.10 of the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire addresses sites adjoined to the Excluded Settlements that are in non-rural use, such as:

- *Short or fragmented ribbons of development straggling along main roads leading out of towns;*
or
- *Small groups of houses on the 'far' side of a road where the road itself marks the clear limit of the main solidly built-up area.*

1.15 It has also been noted that these factors have not been followed on a number of occasions around the Borough, leading to further boundary inconsistencies.

1.16 The problem of how to deal with open land uses on the edge of the Excluded Settlements is discussed in paragraph 4.3.11 of the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire. It is therefore apparent that the decision of whether or not to include these sites was, at the time, considered on its own merits in terms of contribution to the Green Belt or to the urban character of the settlement. The Council considers that this has ultimately led to a lack of consistency across the Borough.

1.17 According to the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire it was the aim to strike a balance between the above four criteria. The plan states that the aim of Green Belt policy in preventing the spread of development into open or undeveloped areas has been taken as the guiding principle in boundary definition. Paragraph 4.3.12 of the plan states that on occasions:

"...it has been necessary to make the boundary follow no clear feature on the ground, where to do otherwise would either misrepresent the true boundary of the area of wholly urban character, or would involve the exclusion from the Green Belt of substantial areas of open or undeveloped land."

1.18 It is therefore clear that there are a number of inconsistencies that need to be addressed in order to strengthen the RBWM Green Belt boundary. This process will involve addressing the methodology used in the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire as set out in Section 2 of this report.

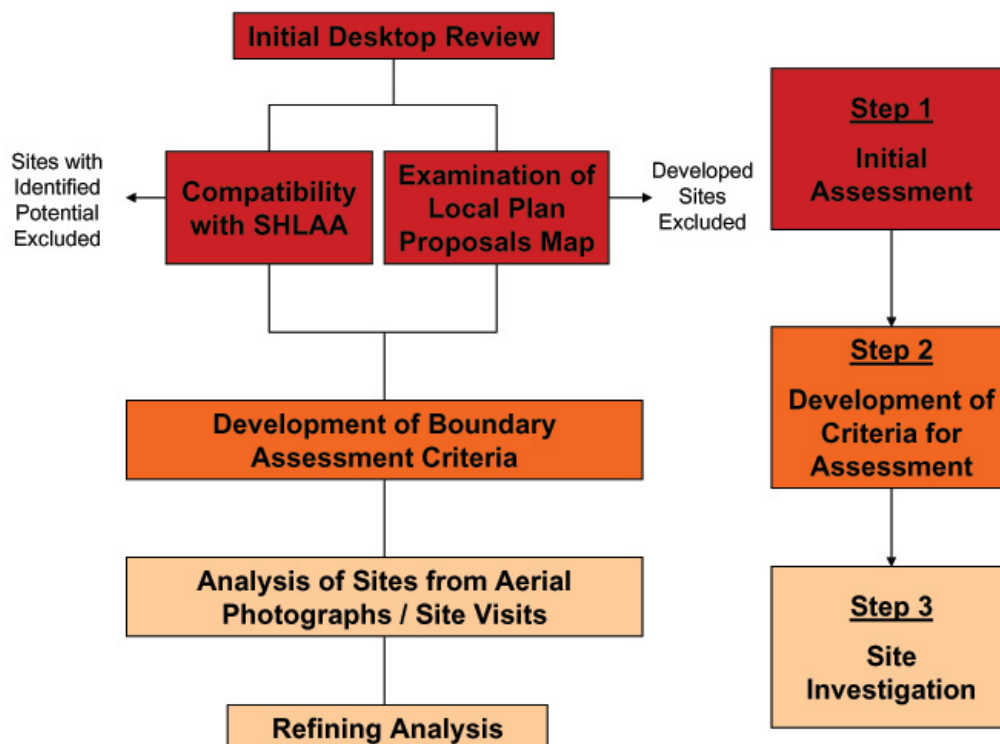
2 Study Approach

2 Study Approach

Key Steps

2.1 The steps taken in performing this review of locations with potential for designation as Green Belt are set out in **Figure 1** below:

Figure 1 Key Steps



2.2 The analysis began by looking at Local Plan Proposals Maps to identify sites on the edge of Green Belt with potential for Green Belt designation. These sites were then investigated to see whether their inclusion in Green Belt would be appropriate by looking at whether they had been developed. Sites were also cross-referenced with the RBWM Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2009) (SHLAA) to check if they made up any of the identified urban potential for the Borough.

2.3 The sites were analysed using both aerial photographs and ordnance survey maps to assess the potential for further inclusion in the study. Visits were made to a number of sites where it was unclear from maps and photographs whether or not they would be suitable to be placed in the Green Belt.

2.4 Other Council departments were consulted at an early stage to ensure that any Green Belt designation would not hinder any Council aspirations for the future.

2.5 Following the initial analyses of the current Green Belt boundary it was found that there were a number of inconsistencies. Therefore it was clear that the main objectives of the above initial desk top study were:

1. To regularise certain anomalies and to form consistent edges of Green Belt boundaries;
2. To recommend boundary amendments in specific locations on the edge of settlements where it is considered appropriate to put land in the Green Belt.

2.6 In order to achieve these objectives, it was clear the methodology used in the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire needed to be refined so as to achieve a more consistent and defensible Green Belt boundary. The results of this refinement are set out in Chapter 3 of this report.

Boundary Assessment Methodology

3 Boundary Assessment Methodology

3.1 Following the review of the methodology used in the Green Belt Local Plan for Berkshire it was decided that a more robust methodology should be drawn up in order to regularise Green Belt boundaries around the Excluded Settlements.

3.2 The methodology used for the purpose of recommending potential Green Belt boundary amendments followed 2 key steps or principles:

STEP 1) Boundaries should always try to follow a permanent physical feature on the ground that creates a logical, strong and defensible boundary. The order of preference of these features are:

- a. A road edge, typically the road should be included within the settlement unless a more logical line would include the road in the Green Belt;
- b. A building line that provides a straight logical line and clearly represents the edge of the urban area;
- c. A pathway, stream, ridge, car park, playground or other physical feature;
- d. An ownership boundary marked by physical features such as hedgerow or a fence-line; or
- e. In the absence of any physical features to follow on the ground to provide a straight line between two permanent physical features.

Where a lower preference is chosen for the boundary there must be a logical reasoning for this; for example the higher preferences fail to protect open spaces, or create irregularities in the overall boundary of an Excluded Settlement.

STEP 2) Where there is an open space at the edge of a settlement it will generally be incorporated into the Green Belt, but only where a new logical boundary can be drawn using the features in STEP 1 of the methodology. If the space is dominated by a building or would replace a strong, logical boundary with a weak, illogical one this change will not be appropriate.

3.3 These factors have been chosen as they will only seek to amend minor irregularities to the boundary, and will not alter large areas. They will also ensure that areas that would not be suitable for inclusion in the Green Belt will not be designated as such.

3.4 Locations were assessed against this methodology to identify the scope for further consideration and analysis. Please refer to section 4 of this report.

Conclusion

4 Conclusion

4.1 From looking at the present Green Belt boundaries and potential redrawn lines when using the methodology set out in chapter 3, and considering the value of including the extra land within the Green Belt, it was concluded that the following locations were considered appropriate to be subject to an amendment of the Green Belt boundary:

Site Reference No.	Location description ⁽²⁾	Area (hectares)
CK1	Open space, next to Holy Trinity Church, Cookham Village	0.978
CK3	Land at Cookham House, Cookham	0.534
MA1	Open space to rear of Thurlby Way, Maidenhead	0.355
MA2	Land south of the M4, west of Aygarth Park, Maidenhead	1.78
MA3	Land north of Aldebury Road, Maidenhead	0.185
MA4	Land north of Cookham Road, Maidenhead	0.230
MA5	Allotments at Breadcroft Road, Maidenhead	0.955
MA6	Area east of Somersby Crescent, Maidenhead	0.622
MA11	Land at Braywick Park, Maidenhead	0.384
MA13	Bridge Gardens, Maidenhead	0.498
MA14	Boulters Island, Maidenhead	2.97
MA15	Guards Club Park, Maidenhead	0.850
WI1	Alexander First School playing fields, Windsor	1.56
WI2	Land at Maidenhead Road, Windsor	5.56
WI3	Baths Island, Windsor	2.35
WI4	Land east of Regent Court, Windsor	0.902
WI5	Land north of Queen Anne's Cottage, Windsor	0.806
WI6	Spital allotments and Trevelyan School playing fields, Windsor	7.23
WI7	Spital cemetery, Windsor	4.24
WI9	Land south of St. Leonards Hill, Windsor	0.109
ET1	Land at Tangier Mill, Tangier Lane, Eton	0.818
ET2	Land at Headmaster's Garden & Fellows Garden, Eton	0.720
ET3	Land at Colenorton Field, Eton	0.389
ET4	Land south of Keats Lane, Eton	0.137
ET5	Playing fields at Eton Wick C of E First School, Eton Wick	0.585
DA1	Recreation ground, Datchet	9.01
DA2	Land west of Mill Place, Datchet	0.495
DA3	Land east of Penn Road, Datchet	0.156

² This list is not exhaustive and is subject to change as part of ongoing work.

Conclusion

Site Reference No.	Location description ⁽²⁾	Area (hectares)
DA4	Cemetery on Ditton Road, Datchet	0.738
OW1	Land north west of Tyle Place, Old Windsor	0.325
WR1	The Green, Wraysbury	2.20
SD1	Allotments and Holy Trinity C of E playing fields, Sunningdale	2.16
SD3	Land adjacent to Station car park, Sunningdale	0.299
SD4	Land east of Broomhall Lane, Sunningdale	0.198
SH1	South Ascot Primary School Playing Fields, South Ascot	1.60
SH2	Land north of Francis Chichester Close, Sunninghill	0.115
SH3	Land south of Ascot Station, South Ascot	0.578
SH4	Land south of Kinross Avenue, South Ascot	0.682
ARC	Ascot Racecourse, Ascot	1.42
	TOTAL	55.68

4.2 Table 1 above indicates that the areas with potential for inclusion in the Green Belt have amounted to 25 separate locations with an area in the region of **55 hectares** of land. These areas are not exhaustive and work is still underway to establish the potential of other locations that may be included in the study at a later date, and subsequently considered for designation as Green Belt.

4.3 Therefore it is concluded that from the sites that are currently recommended for inclusion in the Green Belt, an approximate total of **55 hectares** can be placed in the Green Belt.⁽³⁾

4.4 The designation of these sites as Green Belt would have the potential to help remove inconsistencies in the Green Belt boundary and to improve the defensibility of the boundaries; as well as applying a more logical approach to the boundaries themselves. A number of the locations also offer the opportunity to provide further protection to open spaces at the edge of the settlements that may otherwise be under pressure for development.

² This list is not exhaustive and is subject to change as part of ongoing work.

³ This figure is subject to alterations following discussions with land owners and parish councils.