
ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN INNER GREEN BELT BOUNDARY STUDY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members will recall that a report detailing the progress of the Council's Inner Green Boundary Study was reported to this Committee on 4 January 2001.
- 1.2 The study is now complete, and the purpose of this report is to appraise Members of its conclusions. The results of the study complement those of the Urban Capacity Study, and both will be fed into the review of the Local Plan.
- 1.3 The preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory function for the authority.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 RPG9 (Regional Planning Guidance for the South East) advises that, *'where settlements are tightly constrained by the Green Belt, local circumstances may suggest the need for a review [of existing Green Belt boundaries] after urban capacity studies have been undertaken and the local planning authorities have considered all other alternative locations for development in their area.'*
- 2.2 In Rochford's case, the Urban Capacity Study demonstrates sufficient land within the district's urban areas to accommodate new housing up to 2011. Thus, following RPG9 to the letter, there is no overriding need to carry out a review of inner green belt boundaries at this time. There are, however, a number of reasons why it makes good sense to carry out such a review now, rather than later.
- 2.3 Clearly, the key objective of such a study is to assess the appropriateness of the existing Green Belt boundaries and, in the few cases where it is necessary, to amend them, in order to produce boundaries that are logical, realistic and defensible in the long term. Ultimately, the strength of the Green Belt as a whole is likely to be undermined if land is included that does not truly meet Green Belt objectives. However, in producing a list of sites that make a lesser contribution to the Green Belt, the question must be asked whether such sites should rightfully be developed. The second part of the study seeks to establish the suitability of all sites for housing and/or employment purposes.
- 2.4 It is anticipated that a number of Local Plan representations will be made by landowners, developers, etc., contesting the conclusions of the Urban Capacity Study, in order to better their cases for the

exclusion of certain parcels of land from the Green Belt. The existence of an Inner Green Belt Boundary Study will enable the Council to provide a considered view regarding any parcel of land surrounding the District's urban areas. Thus, rather than consider the merits, and otherwise, of sites in isolation, the Council will be able to demonstrate that it has considered all sites sequentially, in accordance with national guidance. The Council will be better placed to rebut the release of various objection sites if it can:-

- a) argue that the site does not meet various criteria; and, moreover,
- b) highlight other sites that perform far better, and which could be brought forward for development, should the need arise.

2.5 In addition, the conclusions of the Urban Capacity Study rest upon various assumptions that will be extensively tested as the replacement Plan emerges. The Green Belt boundary study will be closely linked to this testing process in that it will provide a robust methodology for examining the sites put forward by objectors.

2.6 The completion of a study accords with Policy C4 of the Essex Replacement County Structure Plan, and the views of the Inspector presiding over the last review of the Local Plan.

3 THE STUDY

3.1 An appendix detailing the various criteria to be used to evaluate sites accompanied the earlier report on this issue. These included criteria to assess whether a site met Green Belt objectives, but also criteria to consider whether a site would provide a sustainable location for new housing/employment, etc. During the course of the study, a number of the tests have been refined, and others have been introduced.

3.2 Several tests have been impossible to complete because key information simply isn't available, and others make assumptions that may or may not be borne out. For example, whilst PPG3 requires that new housing be located in sustainable locations, it is impossible to guarantee that local services and facilities that make a site sustainable for new housing now will be in existence in 10 or 20 years time. Nevertheless, it is considered that the final set of criteria provide a robust test for the retention or otherwise of sites in the Green Belt.

4 DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Appendix 1 comprises a list of the criteria used to consider sites, together with brief explanations showing how the tests were carried out. It is clear from this that a significant number of factors have a bearing upon a site's appropriateness in the Green Belt and, indeed, its appropriateness, or otherwise, for housing/employment purposes.

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- 4.2 The study can be used to create different scenarios, and highlight different sites, dependent upon the weight attached to different factors.
- 4.3 The confidential report on this agenda draws attention to a number of cases where it is recommended that the existing Green Belt boundary be subject to a minor modification, and a number of other cases where the exclusion of land from the Green Belt might be explored, though subject to future housing needs.

5 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That the revised criteria for assessing Green Belt sites be approved. (HPS)

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