
Wycombe District Council Local Plan Examination in Public

Hearing Statement – Matter 6 – Catesby Estates plc
(ID 1168)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Savills is the agent for Catesby Estates plc in relation to the draft allocation at Hollands Farm, Bourne End (Policy BE2). The allocation is in two ownerships; Jacksons Field and Hollands Farm. Catesby Estates Plc has been appointed as the land promoter for the larger, southern portion of the site and is working alongside the second landowner/developer to deliver the allocation. Hollands Farm, as referenced to in this document, refers to the southern portion of the allocation. This statement addresses the questions for Matter 6 set out in the Matters, Issues and Questions identified by the Inspector, dated May 2018.
- 1.2. Matter 6 - the main topic identified by the Inspector for this session is:
- 1.3. *“Do the exceptional circumstances exist to justify the proposed revision of the Green Belt boundaries and can the need for housing and employment development be accommodated without releasing land from the Green Belt?”*
- 1.4. Using the same numbering as in the Matters, Issues and Questions document we set out below a response to the questions that are relevant to our case. Representations were duly submitted to the Submission Draft Local Plan dated 1 December 2017. This statement should be read in the context of those representations. The comments set out below are in addition to those in the earlier representations.

2. Discussion of Matters

Question 1 – Are the Green Belt Assessments (GB1 and GB2) soundly based, justified and consistent with national policy?

- a) **Can the need for housing and employment development be accommodated on deliverable sites within settlements without releasing land from the Green Belt?**
- b) **Has the capacity of areas within settlements to accommodate growth been robustly assessed and what were the conclusions?**
- c) **How were the removal sites identified and assessed?**
- d) **Was an assessment undertaken of the contribution of each of the removal sites to the Green Belt purposes and what were the conclusions?**

- 2.1. As the Local Plan confirms, 48% of the district is covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt. Over 70% of the District falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and much of this land is also within the Green Belt and so much of the district is heavily constrained. Given the housing needs of the district, including affordable housing need, as outlined in the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), it was entirely appropriate and justified for the Council to undertake a Green Belt review.
- 2.2. This is particularly the case as the Council had already released its “reserve” greenfield sites from the current Core Strategy for development meaning that all of the sites previously assessed and found suitable for development were allocated as such.
- 2.3. This was one of the options subject to public consultation in 2014, alongside major expansion at Princes Risborough and a Green Belt review. Due to the level of housing need confirmed in the HEDNA, it became clear at an early stage of preparation of the new Local Plan that the Council would struggle to meet its objectively assessed need (OAN) within its boundaries. This is also the case for Chiltern and South Buckinghamshire districts. Ultimately, it was agreed the Aylesbury Vale would accommodate 2,275 houses as their share of Wycombe’s unmet need. To justify this approach of not meeting all of its OAN within its boundaries, it is entirely reasonable that the Council undertook a Green Belt review.
- 2.4. The PPG is clear that assessing the housing need of a district is only the starting point in developing a Local Plan. The PPG states: *“Once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to **establish realistic assumptions** about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period, and in so doing take account of any constraints such as Green Belt, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need.¹”* [Emphasis added]
- 2.5. It is crucial that the Council is only required to make realistic assumptions about the suitability of land when undertaking a Green Belt review.
- 2.6. Part 1 of the Green Belt Assessment assesses strategic parcels of land and the five purposes of Green Belt to reflect the strategic designation of the Green Belt. This Assessment reviews the entirety of Buckinghamshire and this is appropriate as the need for housing outlined in the HEDNA considers a much wider market area than just Wycombe district.

- 2.7. Part 2 of the Green Belt Assessment considers much smaller sites and focuses on sustainable locations for growth in line with the Settlement Hierarchy. As outlined in its Matter 2 statement, Catesby Estates is satisfied that Bourne End is a sustainable location for new housing and that the Council's approach to determining the most suitable locations for residential growth is sound. Ensuring sustainable development is achieved is one of the requirements outlined at Paragraph 85 of the NPPF for justifying new Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.8. The two parts of the Green Belt Assessment set out a detailed, step by step, process for assessing each site that had the potential to be removed from the Green Belt. Each site was assessed against the five purposes for including land in the Green Belt and also whether it was deliverable and could be relied upon to make a meaningful contribution to the OAN, which is the exceptional circumstance that justifies the release of the site from the Green Belt.

Question 2 – Is the approach to amending Green Belt boundaries to release sites for development soundly based and is it consistent with the conclusions of the review in respect of their contribution to Green Belt purposes?

- 2.9. As outlined below and in Catesby Estates' earlier representations to the Publication version of the Local Plan in December 2014 (attached at Appendix 1 for ease of reference), it is clear that Hollands Farm correctly passed all four stages of the Council's Part 2 assessment. Therefore, its release from the Green Belt should be supported.
- 2.10. It should be noted that there is no requirement within national policy that would require the Council to test each emerging allocation against potential alternatives. It is clear that the Green Belt is a strategic designation and should, as the Council have correctly done, be assessed and reviewed at a strategic level against the overarching aim of achieving a sustainable and delivering spatial strategy. The proposed boundary amendments reflect a comprehensive boundary review.

Question 3 – Do the exceptional circumstances exist to justify the proposed revision of the Green Belt boundaries?

- 2.11. Catesby Estates is wholly satisfied that exceptional circumstances do exist to justify the proposed revision of the Green Belt.

Question 4 – What are the exceptional circumstances, as required by the NPPF paragraphs 79-86, that justify the Plan's proposed revision of the boundaries of the Green Belt?

- 2.12. Exceptional circumstances as required by the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') (paragraphs 79 - 86) do exist to justify the plan's proposed revision of the boundaries of the Green Belt. In this case the exceptional circumstances stem from a need for the Council to meet the objectively assessed need (OAN) for the district, as required by paragraphs 14 and 47 of the Framework. On the basis of the evidence available, Catesby Estates is satisfied that the overall strategic approach adopted by the Council in formulating the Plan is informed by an objective assessment of need that complies with the requirements of the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). As a consequence, Catesby Estates is persuaded that the targeted release of Green Belt land is wholly appropriate and representative of the exceptional circumstances envisaged by national policy.

- 2.13. A Green Belt review at this time is considered essential if the Council is to deliver the growth requirements for the area and to plan proactively for the escalating rise in population. Relatively recent case law including Hunston² and Gallagher³ provide further support for the supposition that housing need constitutes an exceptional circumstance that justifies the proposed review of the existing Green Belt boundary; we would reiterate our corresponding view that it is entirely appropriate to undertake to do so as part of the emerging Local Plan (paragraph 83 of the Framework refers). The approach taken by the Council therefore represents a sound, policy compliant route to necessary Green Belt alterations.
- 2.14. It is commonly accepted, and it is a fundamental facet of national planning policy that where necessitated by the development requirement for the area, local plans should identify land for development in the most sustainable locations, unless this is outweighed by the overall integrity of the Green Belt according to an assessment of the whole of the Green Belt and according to the five purposes set out at paragraph 80 of the Framework. Paragraph 84 of the Framework is clear that when defining boundaries, LPAs should not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open, and should define boundaries clearly, using features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 2.15. The Council has undertaken a comprehensive Green Belt review as part of its strategy for meeting growth requirements, which seeks to appraise the Green Belt as whole and various parcels of land for potential release with reference to Green Belt policy enshrined in the Framework. The methodology and approach to the Green Belt Review is considered sound and Catesby Estates' detailed reasoning for this conclusion is contained within its representations to the Publication version of the Local Plan in December 2014.
- 2.16. As matters currently stand, the Council's formal position in respect of growth at Bourne End and Wooburn includes the proposed allocation of the land at Hollands Farm for at least 467 dwellings, a primary school, public open space and a new link road.
- 2.17. Catesby Estates considers that the principle of Green Belt release at Hollands Farm is entirely appropriate. Catesby Estates would refer to the EDP preliminary appraisal in respect of this site, which concludes:

"... rather than being a high functioning part of the Green Belt which contributes highly towards the main function of keeping land 'permanently open', it is an enclosed site, characterised by existing built form and urbanising elements, which is seen by relatively few receptors in close proximity to it. EDP's review supports the findings of the [Council] which identifies the site as being within the settlement and concludes that the site "scores relatively weakly against NPPF purposes". EDP's initial findings suggest that by virtue of the site's visual and physical association with existing built form surrounding the site, its development would not give rise to significant harm to the purposes of the Green Belt."

² R (Hunston Properties Ltd) v SCLG and St Albans City and District Council [2013] EWHC 2678 (5th September 2013) [2013] EWCA Civ 1610 (12th December 2013)

³ Gallagher Estates Ltd v Solihull MBC [2014] EWHC 1283 (Admin) (30th April 2014)

Roger Smith
Head of Planning

+44 (0) 1865 269 057
+44 (0) 7967 555 603
rasmith@savills.com

Peter Brampton
Associate

+44 (0) 1865 269 092
+44 (0) 7970 479 044
peter.brampton@savills.com