

Stevenage Borough Local Plan

Public Examination

Matter 5 Statement

January 2017

Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031 - Public Examination

Statement by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)

Matter 5 – Green Belt

NB: SBC responses set out in blue font

1. Do the exceptional circumstances, as required by paragraph 83 of the Framework, exist to justify the plan's proposed revision of the boundaries of the Green Belt?

- 1.1 Much of the land around Stevenage forms part of the Metropolitan Green Belt that surrounds London. This serves an important function in terms of fulfilling the Green Belt purposes outlined in the NPPF, but often also in providing valuable open countryside for residents.
- 1.2 Due to the small, under-bounded nature of the Borough, we have limited land available for development. The urban area is built right up to the boundary and the Green Belt boundary is drawn tightly around the edge of the urban area in many places. This makes our identified development needs much more acute than in areas where land is more readily available.
- 1.3 This means that difficult decisions have to be made in order to ensure a sustainable balance is achieved between meeting the development needs of the Borough and preserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment. The SBLP recognises that meeting our OAN is fundamental to underpinning the economic growth ambitions and regeneration aims of the town, which are key priorities for the Borough Council and for the LEP, whose Strategic Economic Plan identifies Stevenage as a major growth area. It is also key to achieving government ambitions for housing delivery and economic growth.
- 1.4 The Council have produced a Green Belt Technical Paper ([TP3](#)), which demonstrates the Exceptional Circumstances that exist to justify revising the Green Belt within the Borough.
- 1.5 There is no definition of what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances' in the NPPF, or in the accompanying guidance document. However, it has been considered in the courts. A number of recent cases have concluded that the question of whether circumstances are exceptional for these purposes requires an exercise of planning judgment.
- 1.6 In the case of *Calverton Parish Council v Greater Nottingham Councils* [2015] EWHC 10784, the Hon. Mr Justice Jay, sets out a number of matters that should be identified and dealt with in order to ascertain whether 'exceptional circumstances' exist to justify rolling back the Green Belt.

- 1.7 The Technical Paper provides evidence on each of the matters identified in the Calverton case and concludes that exceptional circumstances do exist in Stevenage.
- 1.8 A revision of the Housing Technical Paper ([ED123](#)) provides the most up-to-date position in terms of 5 year housing land supply. This demonstrates that, without the release of Green Belt sites, the Council cannot demonstrate that it has sufficient deliverable sites to meet the 5 year housing land supply requirement. Our housing land supply would be just 3.5 years. Green Belt sites offer the only solution to meeting this requirement, as all other sites carry constraints that could not be overcome to enable development within the 5 year period.

2. Do the exceptional circumstances, as required by the Framework, to justify the plan's proposed revision of the boundaries of the Green Belt (both the removal of land from the Green Belt and inclusion of additional land in the Green Belt)? Are these sites and their boundaries clearly shown on a map?

- 2.1 Evidence that exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated is provided under question 1 (above).
- 2.2 Areas of Green Belt to remain within the Borough, including areas to be added, are clearly shown on the Policies Map that accompanies the Local Plan.
- 2.3 Additional maps already provided to the Inspector ([ED122](#) – documents D & E) show the changes in Green Belt designation between the existing District Plan and the emerging Local Plan.