

REPORT TO: Planning Committee
Cabinet

DATE: 15th September, 2010
30th September, 2010

SUBJECT: The Green Belt Study

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Andy Wallis
Planning and Economic Development Director

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**EXEMPT/
CONFIDENTIAL:** No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

To inform Members about the findings of the draft Green Belt Study, the outcomes of which will be incorporated into the Preferred Options stage of the emerging Core Strategy. The results of the draft Study will be consulted on later this year, at the same time as the Preferred Options stage of the Core Strategy.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

To indicate Council support for the findings of the Green Belt Study.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. That Planning Committee:
 - (1) delegates to the Planning and Economic Development Director the authority to make necessary changes to the draft Study resulting from consultation with Counsel and as a result of the draft Study's validation by Envision, the consultants appointed to carry out this role
 - (2) notes the contents of the report, including the implications relating to how Sefton's future housing and employment land requirements may be met to 2031; and
 - (3) requests Cabinet to adopt the draft Green Belt Study and Detailed Boundary Review for consultation purposes.

2. That Cabinet:
 - (1) notes the implications of the Study in relation to potential future development in Sefton. These will be set out in the Preferred Options paper which will be the subject of a further report in the October cycle: and
 - (2) adopts the draft Study and Detailed Boundary Review for consultation purposes.

KEY DECISION: Yes

FORWARD PLAN: Yes

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Following expiry of call in period after Cabinet meeting on 30th September 2010.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

The only alternative option would not to have undertaken the study. This would run the risk of not being in a position to identify sufficient land to meet the Borough's development needs over the period of the plan and the Core Strategy therefore being found 'unsound'.

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework:

Financial:

In December 2009, Members were informed that the estimated costs of carrying out Sefton's share of this study would be in the region of £30,000 (£60,000 including Knowsley Council). The combined cost of carrying out the Study is now expected to be £39,840 of which Sefton's share is £19,920 with the balance being met by Knowsley Council. This does not include any costs which may be incurred should the consultants be required to attend any relevant sessions of the Examination in Public of the Core Strategy in 2012, which would be charged at the current day rates. Sefton's share of the above costs will be met out of the Local Plans Budget held by Planning (£27,400).

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2009/ 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal: No comments

Risk Assessment: Without a Green Belt Study it would be difficult to identify sufficient land to meet the development needs of the Borough for the 15-year period of the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy would be likely to be found unsound at examination. In addition, if Sefton fails to maintain a 5-year supply of housing land, the Borough leaves itself open to development in the Green Belt being allowed on appeal. This would result in unplanned development in locations that the Council may not welcome.

Asset Management: N/a

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

The Finance and Information Services Director has been consulted and has no comments on the previous reports relating to this Study. (Ref. No. FD 197, FD 262 & FD 358).

FD 493 - The Interim Head of Corporate Finance & Information Services has been consulted and his comments have been incorporated into this report.

The appointment of consultants to validate the Study was approved by the Vacancy Management Panel on 13th January 2010.

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		√	
2	Creating Safe Communities		√	
3	Jobs and Prosperity	√		
4	Improving Health and Well-Being		√	
5	Environmental Sustainability			√
6	Creating Inclusive Communities		√	
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy		√	
8	Children and Young People		√	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Reports to Planning Committee in October & December 2009 referred to the need to carry out the Green Belt Study & set out the draft methodology, whilst the report to Planning Committee in April 2010 related to the appointment of consultants to validate the Study.

1. Background

- 1.1 In October 2009, Planning Committee considered a report which set out what the Council needed to do in order to meet its future housing and employment needs for the whole of the period to be covered by the Core Strategy. At the time those needs were established by the Regional Strategy which has now been revoked. There is nonetheless a need to build more homes because although the population is forecast to remain roughly the same as now, and may indeed decline in some areas, the underlying trend is for household growth which generates a need for more new homes. Similarly, there is a need to provide additional employment land to allow existing employers to grow, and to cater for changing employment requirements in the future in order to enable the economy of the district to continue to flourish.
- 1.2 Based on the evidence behind our housing requirement set out in the (revoked) Regional Strategy, current projections indicate that we should build on average 500 new homes each year. Over the plan period (to 2027) this would equate to a need for about 9,500 new homes from a base date of 2008). The conclusions of the housing and employment land supply studies were that on this basis the district could only meet about half of our future housing requirements from land in the urban area. Even if the household projection figure is revised in the future, there will still be a requirement for land outside of the urban area, unless household and economic growth were to be constrained.
- 1.3 There was also an identified need for a successor site to the Southport Business Park to be provided after about 2018. Again, it is not anticipated that this site could be accommodated in the built up area due to a lack of suitable undeveloped land of the requisite size.
- 1.4 Members were informed that, having investigated all options in the urban area and those of our neighbouring authorities (by means of the 'Overview' Study which is nearing completion), it was probable that we would need to identify 'broad locations' that indicate where development might occur in the latter part of the period covered by our Core Strategy (to 2027). This is necessary if we are to produce a 'sound' Core Strategy. If the release of Green Belt is proposed, the plan should look even further into the future (to at least 2031).
- 1.5 However, the need to carry out a Study did not mean that land would be necessarily be released from the Green Belt, except if the Core Strategy determined that this was the most appropriate location to meet identified local needs. The Study would identify 'broad locations' where development could take place if required. The Core Strategy would also include a policy which sets out where and when land in the Green Belt could be released to meet locally generated needs.
- 1.6 The only exception to this would be a small number of minor adjustments around the edge of the built-up area, to correct anomalies arising from when

the Green Belt was first identified in 1983, or as a result of subsequent development. These are identified in a 'detailed boundary review'. It is intended that the Review's on detailed boundary changes recommendations would only be capable of being implemented through the LDF process – in this case when the Site Allocations DPD is prepared following the Core Strategy.

- 1.7 A further report in December 2009 outlined the timescale and proposed methodology for carrying out the Study, and the intention to consult on the draft results.
- 1.8 The Green Belt Study was undertaken in house by members of the Planning Department. However, in order to ensure that a robust study was produced that would withstand the inevitable and determined scrutiny by a wide range of interests, Envision (independent consultants) were appointed in March 2010 to validate the Study. Members were informed of this appointment in April.
- 1.9 The December report also noted that Knowsley & West Lancashire would also be carrying out an identical study in the same timescale, but that whilst Knowsley's Study would also be assessed by Envision, Lancashire County Council would be validating West Lancashire's Study. Whilst Knowsley has carried out its Study in parallel to Sefton, progress in West Lancashire has not dovetailed as well. As a result it is possible that there may be inconsistencies both in the way its Study was carried out, the weight given to different factors to reflect local priorities, and in the recommendations emerging from their external assessment. However, the crucial aspect is that it has been carried out using the same methodology.
- 1.10 The Study has now been completed, and has been validated by Envision.
- 1.11 A sample of the areas assessed were visited by Planning Committee on 16th August, as part of their regular schedule of visits, to help familiarise Members with some of the issues and the areas of land both where development could be accommodated, and where it should not take place because of constraints or other factors.
- 1.12 A workshop was also held for Planning Committee Members and substitutes on 25th August, to explain the methodology and draft results in some detail, as well as how this would link into the preparation of the Core Strategy's Preferred Options, which are due to be considered by Members in October.

2. The Study methodology

- 2.1 Whilst the Study largely followed the draft methodology reported to Planning Committee in December, a number of changes inevitably arose during the carrying out of the Study. This was because we could not identify any Study that had been carried out that exactly matched our needs, so the methodology was based on an amalgam of several studies, tailored to suit Sefton's,

Knowsley's & West Lancashire's specific needs. Some of the changes arose as a result of workshops facilitated by the consultants as part of the validation process, and some were as a result of Envision challenging our assumptions throughout the preparation of each stage of the Study.

- 2.2 However, the most significant changes resulted from the decision of the Coalition Government to revoke the Regional Strategy in July 2010. This has had a major impact on the final stage of the study. This was because the proposals outlined in the methodology for identifying non-strategic Green Belt, which could be released through the Core Strategy & Site Allocations DPD, no longer applied. As this concept did not replicate national planning policy guidance contained in PPG2, there was no longer a need to identify such land in the Study.
- 2.3 Progress on the preparation of the Core Strategy has also not proceeded as quickly as was anticipated. In part this has been determined by the need for more evidence to support the Plans' strategy (and in particular the 'Overview' Study which seeks to determine whether any of our neighbours can meet any of our anticipated unmet needs), but also as a result of having to address changes to the national planning policy approach. Specifically, it has been necessary to decide how the Council should respond to the revocation of the Regional Strategy in July.
- 2.4 Because we were unable to define what impact development in any area might have on future regeneration schemes and initiatives, this has meant that we have not attempted to include any triggers or mechanisms in the Green Belt Study about when and where land in the Green Belt may be required. However this will be included in the Core Strategy.
- 2.5 The delay in preparing the Core Strategy has also meant that the relationship with the Study has also changed. As no decisions have yet been taken about the appropriate amount of development that would be required to meet locally arising needs in both the main and smaller settlements, the location and indicative capacity of the areas not discarded at the end of the Study is unlikely to correlate exactly with where the Core Strategy prescribes that development should take place. For example, considerable capacity has been identified around some of the villages, but the Core Strategy may very well decide that these are not suitable places for growth, or that the scale of development that could be accommodated would be out of proportion to the current size of the village, and would adversely impact on its character.
- 2.6 This has also meant that the Study has had to rely on the results of the other background studies in deciding whether any area should be developed for housing (the over-riding need as identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)), or employment (to meet post 2020 needs in the north of Sefton identified in the Employment Land & Premises Study (ELPS)). The need for other uses will be dependent on the scale and location of new development so cannot be assessed at this time.

2.7 Notwithstanding these changes, it is still considered that the methodology could be used by the other Merseyside authorities if they need to review their Green Belt boundaries in the future, and to inform any sub-regional Study to determine where strategic Green Belt release should take place in the future.

2.8 As set out in the draft methodology and the report to December's Planning Committee, the Study was carried out in 4 stages. The overall methodology and the individual stages have each been validated by Envision. The stages were:

- Stage One – Identification of parcels (small areas) for analysis at the subsequent stages of the Study
- Stage Two – Testing against the 5 purposes of including land in the Green Belt as set out in PPG2 (the Government's guidance on Green Belts)
- Stage Three - Assessment against identified constraints and development opportunities
- Stage Four – Assessment of capacity & establishment of triggers for future release

2.8 As set out in the methodology, a number of parcels were discarded at the end of each Stage, and were not assessed at subsequent stages. However, where a parcel was not discarded, this did not necessarily mean that the whole of the parcel would be suitable for development. Decisions on the scope of development that could take place were based on the relationship of the parcel with the urban area, the extent of any constraints such as land subject to higher flood risk or international or national nature conservation designations, or whether there were any natural or strong physical boundaries that would contain the extent of any development within a parcel.

2.9 Decisions were not taken on whether the resultant capacity from any parcel, individually or collectively, was appropriate for any adjacent settlement. It is the role of the Core Strategy to determine each settlement's future place in the settlement hierarchy, and hence what would be an appropriate level of growth.

3. The draft results

3.1 The Study identified approximately 375 hectares of land in the Green Belt as having potential for meeting future housing and employment needs. This represents about 4.75% of the total Green Belt in Sefton. This could accommodate over 10,000 homes and over 25 hectares of potential employment land. This is more than is required to meet our needs for the plan period (see paragraphs 1.2 – 1.4 above). After all land in the urban areas

identified in the urban areas has been developed, there is an unidentified need for about 6,250 homes and 20 hectares of employment land to be accommodated outside the urban area.

- 3.2 This potential excess is important for three reasons.
- 3.3 Firstly, as no contact has taken place with any landowner, it is not known what the owners' intentions will be, or what impact the proposal will have on farm viability. We are aware that some landowners have already been contacted by developers, but we also know, through consultation on the SHLAA and other contact, that other landowners have no intention whatsoever of letting their land be developed.
- 3.4 Secondly, no decisions have been taken yet through the Core Strategy process about where development should take place, or indeed, whether the aspiration to meet locally generated needs in the local area is feasible. For example, the potential adjacent to Southport is severely restrained because the town already occupies most of the space between the coast and the boundary with West Lancashire, and most of the undeveloped land in the Green Belt is constrained to various degrees. In Bootle & South Sefton, there is similarly nowhere for future development to take place without compromising one of the 5 purposes of national Green Belt policy – that of preventing settlements from merging, which could be the case if Netherton was allowed to expand across the Northern Perimeter Road towards Sefton village and Maghull.
- 3.5 Thirdly, some of the areas identified are in an existing use, or may be affected by physical and other constraints eg land which has a higher risk of flooding. There are also areas in the Green Belt which are in use as parks and other open space, including school playing fields, or as cemeteries or waste water treatment works. Although some of this land is 'developed', the uses they are in are nevertheless appropriate in the Green Belt, as they have little impact on it overall openness. If development were to take place on these areas, then alternative provision would need to be made in the local vicinity. This will not always be possible. If the use cannot be relocated, then it is likely that any development potential will not be able to be realised.
- 3.6 Other land may have been tipped, or could be in Flood Zones 3a or 2 and thus should not be developed unless no land with a lower flood risk is unavailable. Land has also been identified which is classified as being the best & most versatile agricultural land (grades 1 – 3a) or as a Local Wildlife Site (Site of Local Biodiversity (SLBI)). The Core Strategy will need to determine what importance should be given to these attributes, as they were not identified as prohibitive constraints during the assessment at Stage 3 of the methodology (see paragraph 2.6 above).
- 3.7 If all the areas such as these were excluded, then not only would insufficient land would be identified to meet our future needs, but also there would be no

flexibility about where development could take place. This may mean that development would be concentrated in the least constrained parts of the Borough, with less in the more constrained parts. However, such an approach would also mean that locally generated needs could not be met locally, because of the different factors affecting the west and the east of Sefton.

3.8 The following table sets out the maximum capacity for each settlement, assuming that many free-standing existing uses can be relocated. In some case, only part of a use is in the Green Belt with the remainder in the urban area (often designated as urban greenspace), it is assumed that re-location is not an option. These are usually playing fields and recreational uses, both publicly and privately owned.

3.9 Residential capacities have been calculated on the following basis:

- Where the developable area is less than 0.4 hectares, the site could be fully developed;
- Where the developable area is between 0.4 - 2 hectares, 10% of the site should not be developed to accommodate other uses including open space and any requirements for buffer planting;
- Where the developable area is between 2 – 5 hectares, only 75% of the area should be developed;
- Where the developable area is over 5 hectares in size, only 50% of the area should be developed.

This allows for other uses such as open space, schools, shops and other services that may be needed to be located within any very large sites.

3.10 For all sites, an average density of 30 homes per hectares has been used, although it is acknowledged that any area could be developed at higher or lower densities.

Settlement	Preferred use	Capacity from less constrained sites	Capacity from more constrained sites
Southport	Housing	1219	696
	Employment	26.7 hectares	0
Formby	Housing	1439	133
Hightown	Housing	522	154
Ince Blundell	Housing	0	491
Crosby	Housing	1006	305
Maghull & Lydiate	Housing	229	2967
Aintree	Housing	381	0
Melling &	Housing	0	872

Waddicar			
Bootle & Netherton	Housing	0	0
TOTAL		4796	5618

3.10 The table shows that approximately 4,800 new homes could be built on the less constrained areas on the edge of settlements, with a maximum of an additional 5,600 homes built if some compromises are made in respect of the constraints affecting these areas. This may be different in the various parts of Sefton, depending on the extent of any unmet needs in each area.

3.11 The draft SHLAA (reported to Planning Committee last September) identified a yield of 4,399 homes in the urban area. The SHLAA figure is currently being updated and will be reported to Planning Committee in the near future, but even so there is still likely to be a gap between how much housing can be accommodated in the urban area, and what is required to meet Sefton's needs. This leaves an outstanding unidentified need for a further 6,371 homes if we are to build 500 additional homes a year to meet projected household growth.

4. Next Steps

4.1 Consultation on the draft results will take place later in the year, at the same time as consultation on the Core Strategy's Preferred Options. This will mean that people are able to see the results of the Green Belt Study in context, and see how its findings have informed the preparation of the Preferred Options. As well as the Study itself, individual sheets will be provided for each parcel of land showing how they were assessed at each stage of the Study, or at which stage they were discarded, with the reasons why. We will also be consulting on the Detailed Boundary Review (see paragraph 1.4) at the same time, although the recommendations from this Review will not be taken forward till we prepare the Site Allocations DPD, which is where changes to the UDP Proposals Map will be made.

4.2 The Green Belt Study, like the other studies that have been completed, will feed into the option development stage of the Core Strategy preparation. This will determine the role of each settlement over the next 15 – 20 years. It will also include how many homes and how much employment land is required in each part of Sefton to meet our needs. We will consult on the options this later this year.

4.3 The Core Strategy will contain a spatial strategy that sets out the settlement hierarchy. This will indicate what the role of each place should be in the future and what level of growth each settlement should accommodate. This will also establish what the appropriate level of growth for the smaller settlements is, if any. Whilst it is anticipated that as much investment as possible will continue to be directed to the urban areas of Southport and the south Sefton area, as

indicated in paragraph 3.4 above there is very limited scope to develop in both of these areas once the supply in the urban area has been exhausted.

- 4.4 The Core Strategy will also have to re-consider the role of the smaller settlements and villages. At present only Hightown and Sefton are identified as 'inset' villages in the UDP, which means that the village is considered for limited development or limited expansion. All the other villages are 'washed over' by the Green Belt, which means that no new development should be permitted. We do not have any villages where infill is permitted. Such decisions, which will be subject to public consultation as part of the preparation of the Core Strategy, will determine whether any village should be identified as an area where growth should take place, notwithstanding whether this Green Belt Study has identified any potential for expansion.
- 4.5 The Study identified a number of prohibitive constraints where development should not take place, and a number of other constraints where decisions would need to be taken as part of the Core Strategy preparation process about the relative weight to be given to each. This may vary across the Borough, depending on the need for land to meet each settlement's requirements.
- 4.6 The Core Strategy will also need to include a 'trigger' mechanism that will ensure that land in the Green Belt is only released when it is needed, and to meet specific, identified needs. Land in the urban area should be developed first. The 'Overview Study', which is nearing completion, will help to inform what the cross-boundary implications of development will be, and what scope there is for one authority to meet any of a neighbouring authority's needs. This should also be fully explored before any land in the Green Belt is released. The policy will also need to ensure that development in the Green Belt does not have an adverse impact on any regeneration proposals and initiatives that are in place when land is proposed for release.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Green Belt Study has identified areas where development might and should not take place. This will be used to inform the preparation of the Core Strategy Options about where and how our future needs could be met. It does not imply that any land identified in the Study as having potential will ever be developed.