

Briefing note and FAQs: Green Belt and Countryside Study

What is the Green Belt and Countryside Study?

It is a comprehensive review of all Green Belt and countryside beyond the Green Belt. We published four volumes in summer 2013. In April 2014 we published additional work which is explained further below. The study assesses each piece of land against the main purposes of the Green Belt as set out in national planning policy. The main purposes are to:

- safeguard the countryside from encroachment
- prevent towns merging
- restrict sprawl of urban areas
- preserve setting and character of historic towns.

This information, together with other considerations, helped inform the identification of potential development areas (PDAs) across the borough. The other considerations include sustainability criteria (such as the walking distance to schools or shops) and environmental capacity (such as whether it is in the flood plain).

Following publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), we undertook further work to compile Volume IV. This assesses whether each of our villages should remain washed over by the Green Belt or if they should be inset instead. To inset is to draw a boundary around the village and exclude this area from the Green Belt.

What new information has been published (April 2014)?

We have now published the following pieces of additional work:

- Volume II addendum – this is additional work that has been done following the Joint Scrutiny Committee
- Volume IV – this is additional work that has been done following the Joint Scrutiny Committee
- Volume V - this is further work that has been commissioned in order to explore further options for growth as we progress our new Local Plan

What does Volume II addendum include?

The addendum is intended as an addition to Volume II, rather than the replacement of it. However, its content will supersede some elements of the previously prepared Volume II, as set out below.

Volume II scores each land parcel according to the main Green Belt purposes. The addendum amends the way in which the following two purposes are assessed.

- Purpose 3 – To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- Purpose 4 – To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

The Green Belt purposes schedule in Appendix 1 of the addendum supersedes the schedule set out within Chapter 8 of Volume II. The addendum also now includes a Green Belt purposes sensitivity plan for those land parcels surrounding the urban edge.

Volume II included a sieving process whereby only those land parcels that scored two or less were taken forward to the next stage of assessment. This excluded further consideration of some urban edge parcels. The addendum assesses the environmental capacity, and if appropriate the sustainability credentials, of the remaining urban edge land parcels not previously assessed. The addendum also includes reference to Landscape Character Assessment (2007) and Agricultural Land Classifications.

What does Volume IV include?

Following feedback at the Joint Scrutiny Committee, Volume IV has been re-issued in its entirety and replaces the previously published version. Specifically the additional work carried out for Volume IV includes the following:

- re-consideration of how woodland / tree belts and so on impact upon openness of the villages in Green Belt terms
- reference has been removed to the specific development footprint calculations, due to the complication previously generated in the interpretation of such data
- re-consideration of the appropriateness of inseting Effingham, due to part of the settlement lying in adjoining authorities

What does Volume V include?

Volume V assesses potential options that we included in the Issues and Options document that required further work. These are:

- potential expansion of settlements located in adjoining boroughs with Guildford borough
- potential expansion of villages located within or bordering the Surrey Hills AONB
- further consideration of Countryside Beyond the Green Belt (CBGB)
- potential expansion or redevelopment of major previously developed sites
- potential major expansion of the most sustainable villages
- potential creation of a new settlement at Wisley airfield

Where can I find out details about land near where I live?

The GBCS consists of:

- Summary document - overview of the study (volume I – IV only)
- Volume I - summary, introduction and background to the study (volume I – IV only)
- Volume II - Green Belt and 'Countryside beyond the Green Belt' within the surroundings of the urban areas at Guildford, Ash and Tongham
- Volume II addendum
- Volume III - Green Belt surrounding villages across the borough
- Volume IV - inseting of villages from the Green Belt
- Volume V

To help you to easily find summary information, there are three separate maps which show:

- potential development areas surrounding urban areas and villages
- potential major expansion areas surrounding villages
- proposed inset boundaries for the villages and major previously developed sites

Why do we need it?

We are currently producing our new Local Plan (up to 2031) which will replace the current Local Plan (2003). The NPPF states that we should meet our objectively assessed housing need where this is consistent with the rest of the framework. All our existing research suggests that our housing need is very high. The GBCS, alongside other studies, will help us demonstrate to an inspector what level of housing we are able to meet sustainably.

The NPPF also states that we should establish Green Belt boundaries in our Local Plan. When doing so we must ensure that we have regard to their intended permanence in the long term and that they are capable of enduring beyond the plan period. The GBCS will help us to fulfil this requirement.

Can we create new Green Belt land?

The study uses the same methodology to assess both Green Belt and Countryside beyond the Green Belt land. This helps provide justification should the findings suggest there is merit for some of the latter to be re-designated as Green Belt land. Volume II does identify possible additional Green Belt land south of Ash and Tongham. This would serve to protect an area of high landscape value, part of which is located in the AONB, and prevent Tongham and Ash Green from merging.

Does this mean we will be building on all the potential development areas and in inset villages?

We did not give the consultants a target number of homes to find and neither did we ask them to rank the PDAs. As part of producing our new Local Plan, we will need to define our housing figure. We will also need to set out our spatial strategy, namely how we will distribute the sites across the borough. Together these will help determine which sites we should allocate through the Local Plan. There will also be other considerations such as whether a site is available for development.

It is also important to stress that the inseting of villages within the Green Belt does not automatically imply that development within such villages is appropriate. Development proposals would remain subject to other local planning policies and we can continue to protect the character of such villages through other means, such as conservation area status, as required by the NPPF.

How will the information in this document be used?

- this study does not look at whether sites are available or viable for future housing development (see the [Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment \(SHLAA\)](#) for further assessment)
- the site boundaries do not take into account landownership and may be altered for the purposes of a planning application or Local Plan allocation
- applicants/landowners are advised to carry out their own constraints and sustainability analysis for the purpose of a planning application
- the estimated number of homes that each site could accommodate is for illustrative purposes only
- planning applications will continue to be determined on their own merits rather than on the information contained in this study.

How can I view these volumes?

You are able to view a hard copy at our planning helpdesk or at Guildford library.

Alternatively should you wish to purchase a hard copy, they are priced as follows:

- Volume I £24.50
- Volume II £58.20
- Volume II Appendix III £108.00
- Volume II Addendum £49.50
- Volume III £49.50
- Volume III Appendix VI £43.00
- Volume IV £37.30
- Volume V £87.20

To ensure your copy is available, we would advise you let us know of your order three days before you wish to collect it (collection only from the planning helpdesk).

The study is also available on DVD. To ensure it is available, please contact us in advance should you wish to request a copy.