



Elmbridge

Borough Council

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NPPF
Consultation
Housing
Options
Paper
Local Plan

Density
Green Belt
Sustainability
Performance
Constraints

**Elmbridge Local Plan
Policy Topic Paper**

December 2016

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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	KEY NATIONAL POLICIES	2
3	FORMULATING THE OPTIONS.....	9
4	IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED APPROACH & KEY STRATEGIC AREAS	12
5	NEXT STEPS.....	17
	APPENDIX 1 – THE THREE STRATEGIC OPTIONS.....	18
	APPENDIX 2 – LOCAL AREAS (PARCELS) MAP	19

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1 Introduction

Key Issues for the Elmbridge Local Plan

1.1 This paper has been prepared as part of the review of the Local Plan evidence base and published in support of the Elmbridge Local Plan: Strategic Options Consultation (December 2016)¹. As part of the preparation of a new Local Plan, one of the key considerations for the Council and its communities is how much growth and new development can be delivered within the Borough whilst, balancing a number of economic; social; and environmental factors.

1.2 In devising options for a new spatial strategy which, will ultimately inform future development targets, the Council has taken into account Government policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012)² alongside a number of thematic evidence base documents³. It is the purpose of this paper to explain how the Council has arrived at these options and why a Preferred Option has been identified including a number of Key Strategic Areas.

Structure of this Paper

1.3 This paper is divided into three key sections. The first (Section 2) sets out key national policies that provide the framework against which local planning authorities must consider their overarching strategic approach to the long term delivery of new development. This includes key references to the NPPF and also Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and Written Ministerial Statements (WMS) which are material considerations when preparing a new Local Plan.

1.4 Section 3 then explores how the Council formulated the Strategic Options based on the evidence on development needs, land supply and within the framework of national planning policy. The positives and negatives associated with each option is also set out, as considered against the Council's Sustainability Appraisal.

1.5 Section 4 then presents the preferred approach alongside Key Strategic Areas where potential development opportunities will be explored. This Section focuses on the process of identifying the three Key Strategic Areas from the 80 Local Areas established in the Council's Green Belt Boundary Review.

1.6 The paper then concludes with how the Council will proceed with the preparation of the Local Plan following the Strategic Options Consultation.

¹ Elmbridge Local Plan: Strategic Options Consultation (December 2016) – <http://consult.elmbridge.gov.uk/consult.ti>

² National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) March 2012 - <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/>

³ Elmbridge Local Plan Evidence Base - <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/sdps/evidence-and-supporting-docs/>

2 Key National Policies

Introduction

2.1 The starting point for defining the options to take forward in any Local Plan are the policies established by central government with regard to the preparation of such plans. These provide the framework against which local planning authorities must consider their overarching strategic approach to the long term delivery of new development. Outlined below are the key policy not only from the National Planning Policy Framework but also those set out in Planning Practice Guidance and Ministerial Statements which are also material considerations when preparing a new Local Plan.

National Planning Policy Framework

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and, taken as a whole, the policies in the NPPF constitute the Government's view of what this means in practice.

Sustainable Development

2.3 As set out in paragraph 7 of the NPPF, the three dimensions to sustainable development are: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

- an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
- a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
- an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

2.4 Government policy makes clear that these roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent. Economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards, and well-designed buildings and places can improve the lives of people and communities. Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

Sustainable Development & Local Plans

2.5 In terms of plan-making the NPPF states that Local Plans are the key to delivering sustainable development that reflects the vision and aspirations of local communities and that, they must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. For plan-making this means:

- Local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area;
- Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless:
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
 - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

National Planning Policy Framework, Paragraph 14

Meeting Objectively Assessed Need

2.6 The NPPF puts great emphasis on meeting objectively assessed development needs. In terms of housing delivery, paragraph 47 of the NPPF states that local authorities should seek to significantly boost the supply of housing and that they should use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as consistent with other policies set out in the Framework.

2.7 This point is re-emphasised in paragraphs 151 and 152 of the NPPF that state:

“Local Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. To this end, they should be consistent with the principles and policies set out in this Framework, including the presumption in favour of sustainable development” (NPPF, paragraph 151).

“Local planning authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three. Significant adverse impacts on any of these dimensions should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued...” (NPPF, paragraph 152).

Previously Developed Land & Housing Densities

2.8 Within the planning system there has always been strong encouragement for the use of previously developed land; with the NPPF supporting local councils to set locally appropriate targets. One of the Government’s core planning principles as set out in the NPPF is to:

“encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value”.

2.9 The Government’s consultation on proposed changes to the NPPF⁴ re-emphasises the priority for ensuring as much use as possible of brownfield land in driving up housing supply. Government proposes that to ensure that all possible opportunities for brownfield development are pursued, to make clear in national policy that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of using brownfield land for housing (in effect, a form of ‘presumption’ in favour of brownfield land).

2.10 In seeking to meet development needs, the NPPF also encourages local authorities to set out their own approach to housing density to reflect local circumstances. This point is re-emphasised in the Government’s proposed changes to the NPPF. The consultation document states that there are significant benefits to encouraging development around new and existing commuter hubs – reducing travel distances by private transport, making effective use of private and public sector land in sustainable locations, and helping to secure the wider regeneration and growth of the local area. In this context, the Government is keen to support higher density housing development around commuter hubs to help meet a range of housing needs.

2.11 Changes to national policy would expect local planning authorities, in both plan-making and in taking planning decisions, to require higher density development around commuter hubs wherever feasible.

Green Belt

2.12 When seeking to meet development needs as far as is consistent with other policies set out in the Framework, this includes the consideration of Green Belt. As set out in Section 9 of the NPPF, the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. National policy sets out the five purpose of Green Belt as:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

⁴ DCLG – Consultation on proposed changes to national planning policy (December 2015) - https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488276/151207_Con_sultation_document.pdf

- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2.13 Nevertheless, in seeking to meet our development needs the Government requires local authorities to consider all potential options. This includes the consideration of Green Belt. This approach is in accordance with the NPPF which specifically states that local planning authorities with Green Belts in their areas should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for both Green Belt and settlement policy. Paragraph 83 of the NPPF continues:

“...Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period”.

2.14 It is the Council’s understanding that although Green Belt has a significant degree of permanence, local planning authorities should conduct a review of Green Belt land as part of its Local Plan preparation and consider redefining boundaries which add or take away Green Belt land in order to meet local planning requirements. For example, in cases where land currently designated as Green Belt no longer serves the purposes as set out in the NPPF. However, to make any amendments, “exceptional circumstances” must be demonstrated.

Exceptional Circumstances

2.15 The Government has not defined what constitutes “exceptional circumstances” nevertheless, the importance of demonstrating exceptional circumstances has been emphasised by an increasing amount of case law as local planning authorities attempt to alter the boundaries of the Green Belt, and their justifications for doing so, have become under increasing scrutiny. One of the most established cases is *Gallagher Homes Limited v Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council* [2014]⁵. The following points were made clear by this decision:

- A local planning authority must find that exceptional circumstances exist before they make any alteration in a Green Belt boundary, whether it is considering extending or diminishing the Green Belt; and
- Whilst each case is fact-sensitive and the question of whether circumstances are exceptional for these purposes requires an exercise of planning judgement, what is capable of amounting to exceptional circumstances is a matter of law, and a plan-maker may err in law if they fail to adopt a lawful approach to exceptional circumstances. Once Green Belt has been established and approved, it requires more than general planning concepts to justify alterations.

2.16 In addition, when considering whether to amend the boundary of the Green Belt, the starting point for every local authority is that this decision should only arise after all

⁵ England and Wales Court of Appeal Decision - <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2014/1610.html>

reasonable and acceptable efforts have been taken to maximise the amount of development within the urban area. Optimising densities and ensuring that all land is appropriately used must be the first response to growth. This would include a review of employment land and other areas or uses that are protected by planning policies, commensurate with ensuring the proper balance between residential, employment and other uses.

2.17 Case law also established that general planning merits cannot be exceptional circumstances: for example, it is not sufficient that the local authority consider that the relevant land would, or would not be, a sustainable location for development, or that they would have drawn the boundary line in a different place had they been starting from scratch. In other words, something must have occurred subsequent to the definition of the Green Belt boundary that justifies a change.

Exceptional Circumstances – The Council’s Position

2.18 The Council has prepared an evidence base document setting out what it considers to be the ‘exceptional circumstances’ to amending the Green Belt in Elmbridge Borough⁶. This includes:

- Affordability – the Borough is the 4th most difficult place to get onto the property ladder across the UK and 1st across the UK excluding London.
- Smaller Units – the housing market is driven towards the provision of larger, detached properties (4+ bedrooms) however, the need is for smaller units (1-3 bedrooms). Nevertheless, developable land within the Borough is characterised by smaller sites providing between 1 and 4 net units which tends to limit high density developments / the provision of smaller units. Within Elmbridge Borough, developers tend to also lean towards building larger residential properties with higher profit margins.

Duty to Cooperate

2.19 As part of a local authority’s plan preparation the Government requires constructive and active engagement with relevant bodies, as part of an on-going process, to maximise effective working on the preparation of Local Plans in relation to strategic matters. As strategic matters are driven by larger than local issues and the actions of people, businesses and services extend beyond administrative boundaries, the Government’s ‘duty to cooperate’ is considered to be the mechanism by which strategic issues are planned for at a local level following the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies e.g. the South East Plan.

2.20 For the purpose of the Government’s duty to cooperate, ‘strategic matters’ relate to sustainable development or the use of land that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, including (in particular) sustainable development or use of land for or in connection with infrastructure that is strategic and has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas. Strategic matters also include sustainable development or use of land in a two-tier area if the development or use is a county matter

⁶ Elmbridge Borough Council – Exceptional Circumstances 2016 - <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/sdps/evidence-and-supporting-docs/>

e.g. minerals, waste, education, or has or would have a significant impact on a county matter.

2.21 As set out in paragraph 179 of the NPPF, joint working should enable local planning authorities to work together to meet development requirements which cannot wholly be met within their own areas – for instance, because of a lack of physical capacity or because to do so would cause significant harm to the principles and policies of the Framework.

Developing Options

2.22 When developing our options the key questions that need to be asked therefore, were whether housing and economic needs override constraints such as Green Belt and, whether Local Planning Authorities must meet need regardless of other policies in the NPPF?

2.23 Whilst the Government has challenged local authorities to meet their development needs and policies within the NPPF provide the framework for reviewing Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 14 of the NPPF makes clear that needs should not be met if:

- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.

2.24 Specific policies in the Framework that indicate development should be restricted are set out in footnote 9, appended to paragraph 14. These are those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; **land designated as Green Belt (officers' emphasis)**, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast or within a National Park (or the Broads Authority); designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion.

2.25 This point is re-enforced in the Governments' Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) which answers questions as to whether local planning authorities have to meet housing needs in full and if economic and housing needs override constraints on the use of land, such as Green Belt.

2.26 In balancing these considerations and formulating options, the NPPF makes clear that local planning authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three. Significant adverse impacts on any of these dimensions should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be considered. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures may be appropriate.

2.27 The Framework also makes it clear that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. The Framework does not define these circumstances leaving it for each Local Authorities to decide the circumstances that are unique to that area that would allow for the Green Belt to be amended. Nevertheless, the Government has clarified that the demand for housing alone will not change Green Belt boundaries.

“The Government has put in place the strongest protections for the Green Belt. The Framework makes it clear that inappropriate development may be allowed only where very special circumstances exist, and that Green Belt boundaries should be adjusted only in exceptional circumstances, through the Local Plan process and with the support of local people. We have been repeatedly clear that demand for housing alone with not change Green Belt boundaries”.

Brandon Lewis MP, Letter to all English MP for English Consistencies dated 07/06/2016 re: development on brownfield and Green Belt land

2.28 With regard to the second question the Framework is clear that local authorities should prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to assess their full housing needs. However, assessing need is just the first stage in developing a Local Plan. Once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 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.

2.29 Therefore in developing the options to be consulted on the Council has not only established the development needs for the Borough but also reviewed all the existing constraints that currently restrict development to establish the degree to which these constraints may be amended to deliver development and the degree to which these amendments could meet these needs.

3 Formulating the Options

3.1 Based on the evidence on development needs and land supply, three options were developed that were considered to be in conformity with national policy. However, each of these options had both positive and negatives when considered against the Sustainability Appraisal criteria used by the Council when developing its policies. The broad options considered to be appropriate where:

- Option 1: Increase densities in urban areas to meet needs in full and maintain existing Green Belt boundaries;
- Option 2: Meet as much need as possible through a combination of amending Green Belt boundaries to remove land that is performing only weakly against the criteria of that designation and through increasing densities in the urban area where appropriate;
- Option 3: Meet needs in full by amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the degree to which land was meeting the purposes of Green Belt.

3.2 Before considering these for consultation the benefits and disadvantages of each was identified through the sustainability assessment. This information is summarised below.

Option 1: Increase densities in urban areas to meet needs in full and maintain existing Green Belt boundaries

3.3 This option would seek to deliver all of our development need of 9,480 new homes within the urban area on identified sites. Set within the context of the NPPF, this option seeks to significantly boost housing supply by maximising the use of previously developed land and by increasing densities in all locations. It also seeks opportunities for identifying open spaces within the urban area for redevelopment and relocating these uses within the existing Green Belt. Such uses are appropriate within the Green Belt, makes the Green Belt more accessible and work harder, and also protects the Green Belt from inappropriate development such as new homes. The option also seeks to utilise the duty to cooperate if development needs cannot be met.

3.4 This option therefore places a higher degree of weight on meeting development needs and protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Benefits:

- Seeks to meet needs in full
- Protects Green Belt by preserving current settlement boundaries
- Makes Green Belt work harder
- High density development would deliver smaller, potentially cheaper, market housing

Disadvantages:

- Limited number of appropriate sites in the urban area creates a significant risk as to the deliverability of housing need

- Changing character due to increased urbanisation of residential areas as a result of high density development
- Loss of open space in the urban area
- Reduces accessibility of open space to most urban parts of the Borough
- Could affect development viability and the delivery of affordable housing due to the increasing costs associated with high density development
- Difficulties in delivering infrastructure alongside development
- Places pressure on those areas that have historically taken most development
- Will not deliver the desired mix of houses and flats

Option 2: Meet as much need as possible through a combination of maending Green Belt boundaries to remove land that is performing only weakly against the criteria of that designation and through increasing densities in the urban area where appropriate;

3.5 Option 2 seeks to balance the needs for housing whilst recognising there are constraints on development within the Borough. This option seeks to boost housing supply by continuing to focus development on previously developed land in the urban areas and by increasing densities in sustainable locations. Option 2 also looks to maintain the green spaces within our urban areas.

3.6 However, this option recognises that there are parcels of land currently designated as Green Belt that are no longer meeting the purposes and that there are the exceptional circumstances present to justify potential releases. As such there is the opportunity for these parcels to enable the Council to meet more of its housing needs whilst maintaining the character of its towns and villages. The option also seeks to utilise the duty to cooperate if development needs cannot be met.

Benefits:

- Protects the character of the urban area
- Protects 97% of the Green Belt ensuring boundaries can endure beyond the plan period
- Maintains existing settlement pattern
- Delivers an increase in housing provision over previous Core Strategy
- Larger sites enable infrastructure to be delivered alongside new development
- Increase in the delivery of affordable housing and smaller units compared to previous Core Strategy
- Potential opportunity to identify land for self / custom-housebuilding

Disadvantages:

- Will not meet housing needs in full
- Some loss of Green Belt
- Development may be in less sustainable locations on the edge of urban areas
- Increased pressure on highways
- Reliance on other Local Planning Authorities to meet residual needs

Option 3: Meet needs in full by amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the degree to which land was meeting the purposes of Green Belt.

3.7 The final option considered was to meet needs in full by amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the strength with which it was delivering against the purposes of Green Belt. Whilst such an approach would meet needs and deliver a significant amount of affordable housing it would fundamentally alter the character of our towns and villages through coalescence, urban sprawl and encroachment of new development into the countryside.

Benefits:

- Protects the character of the urban area
- Meets housing needs in full
- Seeks to meet the needs of the wider Housing Market Area
- Larger sites enable infrastructure to be delivered alongside new development
- Increase in the delivery of affordable housing compared to previous Core Strategy
- Potential opportunity to identify land for self / custom-housebuilding

Disadvantages:

- The loss of a significant amount of Green Belt
- Significantly increases the risk of settlement coalescence, encroachment into countryside and excessive sprawl
- Fundamental changes to the nature of the Borough and its settlement patterns
- Massive pressure on infrastructure in particular highways

3.8 Following these considerations, the Council developed these options into more detailed proposals for consultation. These detailed options are set out in Appendix 1.

4 Identifying the Preferred Approach & Key Strategic Areas

The Preferred Approach

4.1 When examining options the Council has considered the Government's continuing position which places significant importance on Green Belt as a planning designation. The Secretary of State has upheld a number of decisions by Councils across the country preventing inappropriate development on Green Belt. However, the Government has also set out that Councils must also seek to meet housing need and, as part of the plan making process, consider whether land currently designated as Green Belt still meets those purposes.

4.2 Within this in mind and having considered its evidence base⁷ and the sustainability of the options, the Council considered that Option 2 is to be preferred. This option balances the Government's directive to increase the levels of development, and in particular, housing development in the Borough whilst recognising that there are constraints on the amount of developable land which will prevent us from meeting our development needs in full.

Option 2:

As far as possible meet development needs whilst maintaining development at appropriate densities in the urban area by:

- Increasing densities on sites in the urban area only where it is considered appropriate and does not impact significantly on character;
- Amending Green Belt boundaries where:
 - the designation is at its weakest;
 - the areas are in sustainable locations; and
 - the areas are not, or are only partially, affected by absolute constraints.

Within these areas opportunities for accommodating our development needs will be explored taking into account site constraints, land ownership, the need to support sustainable development, and compliance with other planning policies; and

- Using the Duty to Co-operate to enquire as to whether other authorities have the potential to meet some of our need.

⁷ Elmbridge Borough Council – Local Plan Evidence Base - <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/sdps/evidence-and-supporting-docs/>

Appraising Sustainability

4.3 Assessing the sustainability of a Local Plan and its policies and proposals is intrinsic to the plan-making process given that sustainability and sustainable development sits at the heart of the planning system. A sustainability appraisal is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of a Local Plan. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.

4.4 As set out in PPG, the sustainability assessment process is an opportunity to consider ways by which the plan can contribute to improvements in environmental, social and economic conditions, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the plan might otherwise have.

Key Strategic Areas

4.5 Option 2 states that Green Belt boundaries will be amended where the designation is at its weakest; the areas are in sustainable locations; and the areas are not, or are only partially, affected by absolute constraints. Within these areas opportunities for accommodating our development needs will be explored taking into account site constraints, land ownership, the need to support sustainable development, and compliance with other planning policies. Following these principles the Council considers there to be three Key Strategic Areas within the Green Belt where the designation could be removed.

4.6 The three Key Strategic Areas are:

- Land north of Blundel Lane including Knowle Hill Park and Fairmile Park, Cobham (Local Area 14);
- Land south of the A3 including Chippings Farm and The Fairmile, Cobham (Local Area 20); and
- Land north of the A309 and east & west of Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton (Local Area 58).

4.7 The process of identifying these three Key Strategic Areas is summarised in Figure 1 and explained in detail below.

Identifying the three Key Strategic Areas

4.8 As set out in the Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR)⁸, any potential alteration to the Green Belt must be based on a new permanent and defensible boundary. Thus, permanent man-made e.g. roads and railways, and natural features e.g. rivers, were used in the Review as the basis to divide land designated as Green Belt into Local Areas (parcels). In total 80 Local Areas were identified, including two areas of greenfield land currently allocated as reserve housing sites (see Appendix 2).

⁸ Elmbridge Borough Council – Green Belt Boundary Review (GBBR) (2016) - <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/sdps/evidence-and-supporting-docs/>

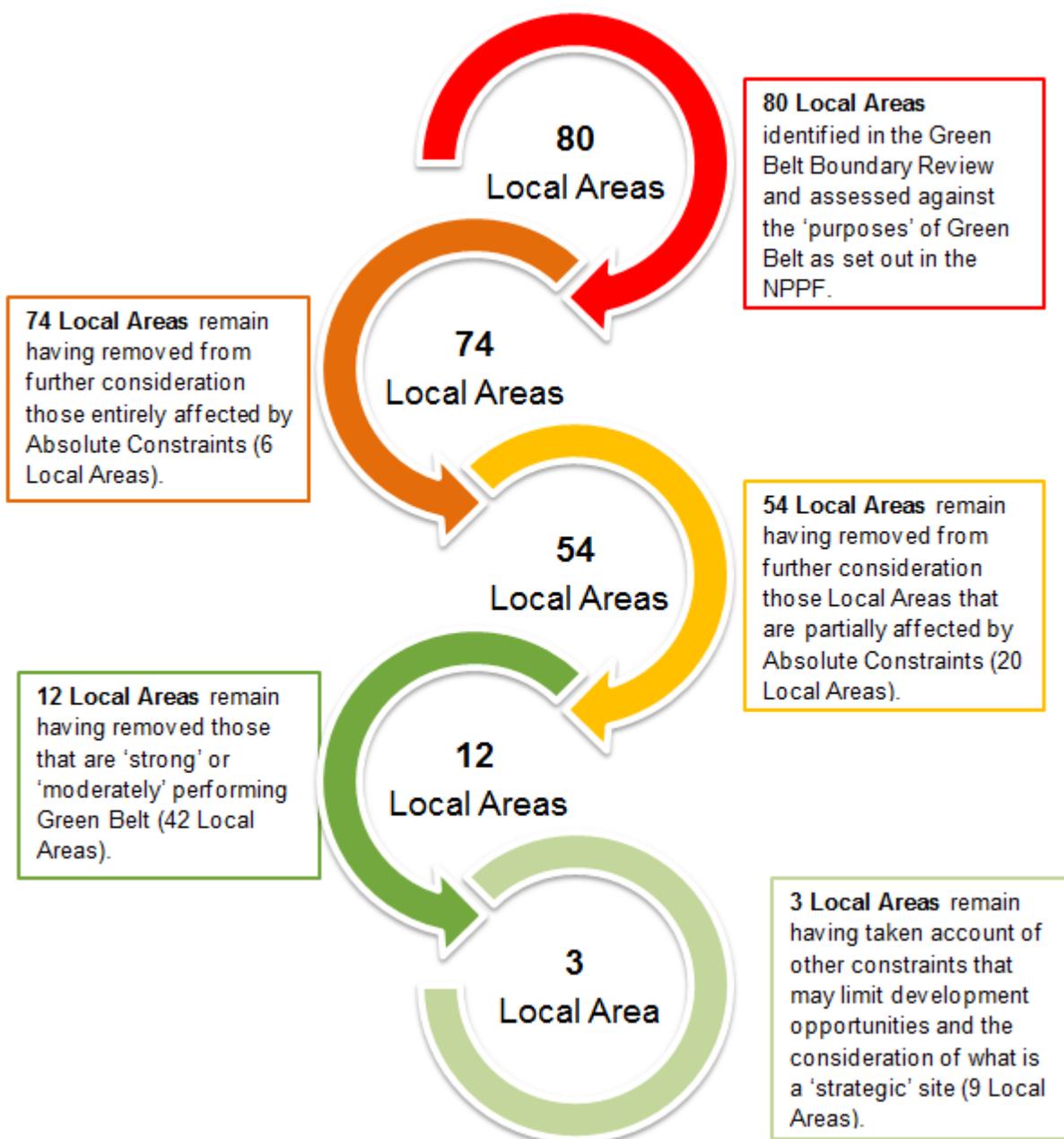


Figure 1: The Process of identifying the three Key Strategic Areas

4.9 In accordance with the NPPF, policy designations that would prevent development from taking place and where it would not be possible to mitigate impacts were identified across the Borough. Identified as 'absolute' constraints to development, these were considered to be:

- Flood Zone 3b (1 in 20 year flood outline – undeveloped land).
- Within a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Within a Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar Site
- Within a Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANG)
- Registered Park and Garden

- Ancient Woodland
- Registered Commons and Village Greens

4.10 As part of the Review of Absolute Constraints⁹, six Local Areas were identified to be covered entirely by those designations that would prevent development from taking place (see Table 1 for those Local Areas entirely affected by Absolute Constraints). Thus, reducing the number of Local Areas to consider further to 74.

4.11 In addition to the six Local Areas covered entirely by Absolute Constraints, a further 20 Local Areas were then removed as they were partially affected by Absolute Constraints but to such an extent as to have limited opportunities for redevelopment. The criteria used to identify these areas were:

- The land remaining was a ‘dry island’ i.e. surrounded by land within the 1 in 20 Flood Outline (Flood Zone 3b), or
- There was 1.0 hectares (ha) or less of land remaining not covered by an absolute constraint.

4.12 An area of 1.0 ha is generally considered sufficient in scale to accommodate a development of up to 10 dwellings with associated gardens, amenity space and road network within the development scheme. Whilst an area of this size would not necessarily be considered as strategic, consideration was given as to whether the remaining land not affected by Absolute Constraints could be included within a wider Local Area i.e. with those adjacent, and a new defensible boundary identified. Consideration was also be given to whether the area of the Local Area below 1.0 ha could accommodate development. For example, whether it was open land or whether the area forms essential infrastructure (road network, railway lines) that is very unlikely to be allocated for future development.

4.13 Removing from further consideration those Local Areas partially affected by Absolute Constraints that were either ‘dry-islands’ or 0.1 ha or less, left 54 Local Areas to be considered as potential Key Strategic Areas. Table 1 sets out those Local Areas partially affected by Absolute Constraints and not considered further as Key Strategic Areas on the basis of the two bullet points above.

4.14 Taking the 54 remaining Local Areas, the outcomes of the Green Belt Boundary Review were then applied. In drafting a new spatial strategy for the Borough, the Council does not want to dismiss entirely those policies that have helped to maintain the pattern of our towns and villages and the distinct characters they have. Therefore, in accordance with the NPPF and PPG, the Council has placed significant weight on the protection of the overall integrity and function of Green Belt. The Council believes that it would only be appropriate in Elmbridge Borough to consider development on those areas of Green Belt that are assessed as only weakly meeting the purposes as set out in national policy recognising that this will impact on our ability to meet our development needs in full. Also by only focusing on the weakest performing areas of Green Belt, it is expected that the remainder of the land designated as Green Belt will be strengthened.

⁹ Elmbridge Borough Council – Review of Absolute Constraints (2016) – <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/sdps/evidence-and-supporting-docs/>

4.15 By removing ‘strongly’ and ‘moderately’ performing Local Areas, 12 Local Areas remained that needed to be considered further as potential Key Strategic Areas.

4.16 As the Strategic Options consultation focuses on the strategic issues, from the remaining 12 Local Areas the Council has only identified those that have the potential to significantly increase our housing land supply and help meet our housing need. Having undertaken assessments of each area of Green Belt identified as being weakly performing and that has not been ‘ruled out’ as part of the assessment of Absolute Constraints, three Key Strategic Areas have been identified.

4.17 Development in the remaining 9 Local Areas is prevented by constraints such as its location in the flood plain or its status as a Park or Garden of Historic Interest, or they are considered to be too small to any reasonable scope for new strategic development.

Process	Local Areas Removed	No. of Local Areas Removed	Total Local Areas Remaining
Local Areas identified in the Green Belt Boundary Review	N/A	N/A	80
Absolute Constraints – Entirely Affected	8, 15, 64, 73, 75b & 79	6	74
Absolute Constraints – Partially Affected	3, 6, 16, 19, 24, 26, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 60, 61, 63, 65, 68, 76 & 78	20	54
Green Belt Performance – Strongly & Moderately Performing	1-2, 4-5, 7, 9-13, 17, 21-23, 25, 27-29, 31-35, 39, 41, 45, 47-48, 52, 54, 56, 59a, 59b, 62, 66, 67, 69, 72a, 72b, 74, 75a, N1	42	12
Strategic Significance	18, 36, 37, 51, 53, 70, 71, 77, N2	9	3

Table 1: The process of identifying potential Key Strategic Areas

Summary

4.18 Each of the three Key Strategic Areas has been judged to be weakly performing against the purposes of Green Belt and is either unaffected or only partially affected by ‘absolute constraints’ which limit development opportunities. An initial appraisal of these three areas shows that their potential removal from the Green Belt to meet development needs would provide an appropriate balance of the three roles of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

5 Next Steps

Amending the Green Belt Boundary

5.1 This paper will be published alongside the first stage in the Council's preparation of a new Local Plan; the consultation on the Strategic Options (December 2016). As part of the consultation the Council will be asking whether:

- The suggested exceptional circumstances are sufficient to support the amendment of the Green Belt boundary?
- That the three key strategic areas identified are appropriate for removal from the Green Belt?
- There are sites within any of the three key strategic areas that could be considered for future development?
- Other areas of land should be removed from the Green Belt including those that are moderately or strongly performing?

5.2 Moving forwards, the responses to this consultation will help shape the Council's vision for the Borough including the Spatial Strategy that provides the overview of the type, amount and location of future development that is likely to take place within the Borough up to 2035. If appropriate, and where necessary in response to the consultation responses, the Council may need to revisit its exceptional circumstances case alongside the consideration of other development options suggested. This could include for example, other Local Areas (parcels) submitted for potential development. The Council will also need to revisit this work and the consideration of Local Areas on the basis of the GBBR which identifies:

- a number of moderately or strongly performing Local Areas (parcels) where there is clear scope for sub-division to identify weakly performing sub-areas.
- non-Green Belt areas which could be considered for inclusion in the Green Belt.
- anomalous boundaries which should be amended to ensure the Green Belt boundary is both readily recognisable and likely to be permanent, in line with national policy.

5.3 The Council will also need to decide its approach to the remaining weakly performing Local Areas e.g. whether these should remain as Green Belt or whether an alternative designation, such as Local Green Space, would be more appropriate.

5.4 In accordance with the NPPF (para. 86) the Council will also need to consider whether amendments are required to the boundaries of its villages. Paragraph 86 states that if it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.

Appendix 1 – The Three Strategic Options

Option 1 - Maintain existing Green Belt boundaries and deliver all development by concentrating development within the urban area by:

- Significantly increasing densities on all sites in the urban areas; and
- Identifying open spaces such as allotments and playing fields for redevelopment and relocating these uses within the existing Green Belt.
- Using the Duty to Co-operate to enquire as to whether other authorities have the potential to meet some of our housing need.

Option 2 - As far as possible meet development needs whilst maintaining development at appropriate densities in the urban area by:

Increasing densities on sites in the urban area only where it is considered appropriate and does not impact significantly on character;

- Amending Green Belt boundaries where:
 - the designation is at its weakest;
 - the areas are in sustainable locations; and
 - the areas are not, or are only partially, affected by absolute constraints.

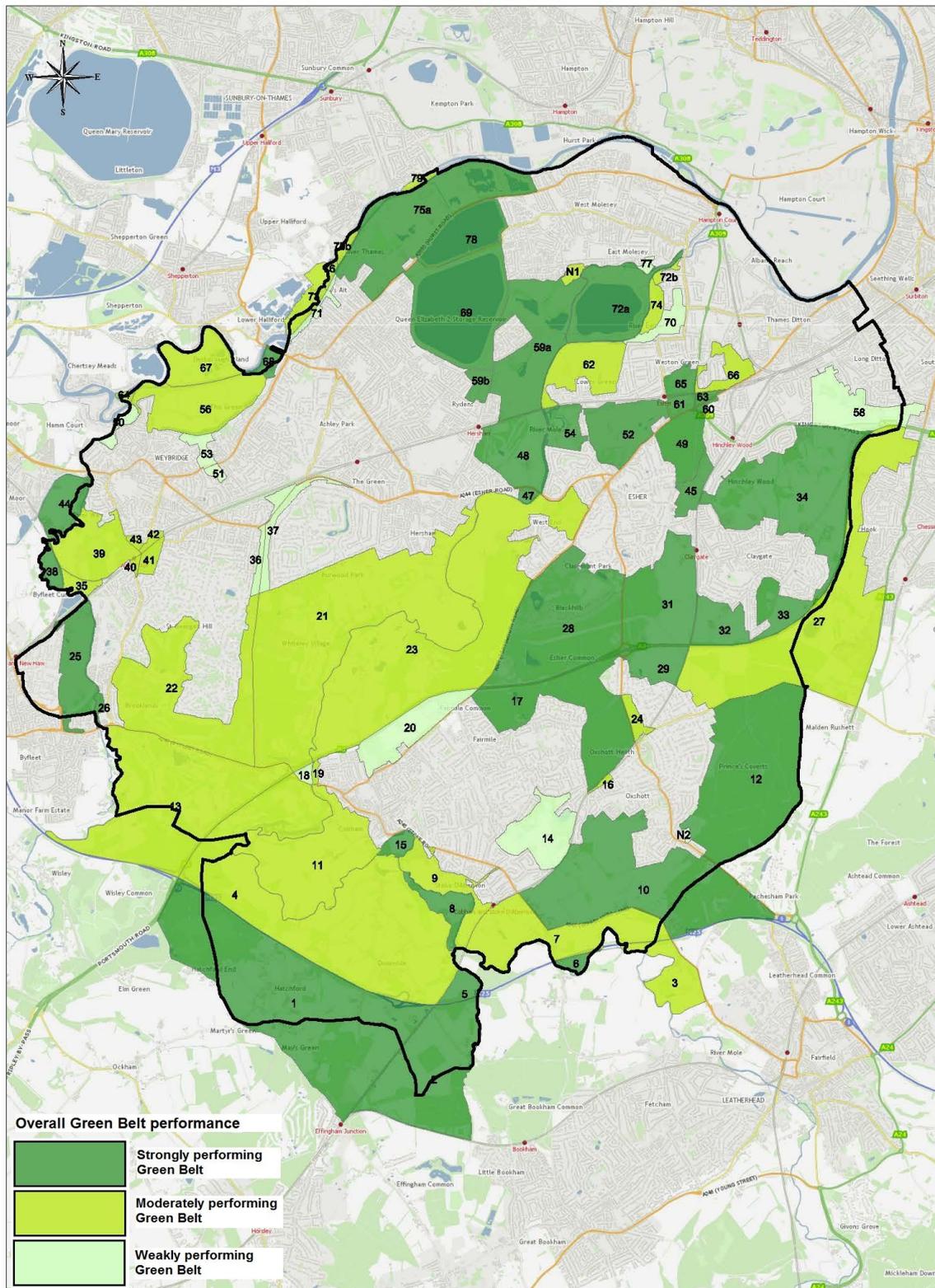
Within these areas opportunities for accommodating our development needs will be explored taking into account site constraints, land ownership, the need to support sustainable development, and compliance with other planning policies; and

- Using the Duty to Co-operate to enquire as to whether other authorities have the potential to meet some of our need.

Option 3 - Deliver development needs of the Borough in full and explore opportunities to meet needs of other Boroughs and Districts in the HMA by:

- Increasing densities only on sites in the urban area only where it is considered appropriate and does not impact on character; and
- Amending Green Belt boundaries regardless of the strength of Green Belt and allocating sites in these areas for development.

Appendix 2 – Local Areas (Parcels) Map



Operator:	
Department:	
Drawing Number:	
Date: 08/09/16	Scale:



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