

Matter 6: Green Belt

Council Introduction

As set out in Chapter 5 of the Submission Plan, the distinctive character of South Staffordshire is directly influenced by the fact that approximately 80% of the district is Green Belt. This contributes to the district's rural character and helps distinguish the district from neighbouring urban areas such as the Black Country. Protecting the Green Belt is therefore a key objective (Strategic Objective 1) of the Local Plan.

National Policy confirms that there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed when Local Plans are being prepared and that it is within authorities' discretion to choose to review Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan where they feel that exceptional circumstances for doing so exist and these can be fully evidenced and justified. The Local Plan review does confirm limited Green Belt boundary amendments and therefore a policy detailing where the council's development strategy requires such Green Belt amendments is necessary, as well as ensuring a strong policy framework for resisting planning applications that would result in inappropriate development in the Green Belt. As set out in the council's hearing statement on Matter 6, 38.7ha is proposed to be removed from the Green Belt through the allocation of 6 site for housing.

The justification for this Green Belt release is set out in the council's Green Belt Exceptional Circumstances Topic Paper (EB16). The council's strategy has been to maximise all suitable non-Green Belt sites options. No other authorities within the HMA have suggested that they could provide additional housing supply for South Staffordshire that would reduce the district's housing target and avoid Green Belt release.

In addition, wherever possible the council has looked to allocate suitable brownfield sites first and foremost, to reduce pressure on the district's Green Belt, however these are very limited due to the largely rural nature of the district.

Green Belt release has been limited to Tier 1 settlements due to their sustainability credentials including access to a railway station. The council does not consider there to be exceptional circumstances to justify release of Green Belt to accommodate development at the district's Tier, 2,3, and 4 settlements.

The council also considers that it would be inappropriate to release additional land from the Green Belt for safeguarded land through this Local Plan, given the need for any such release to be justified by exceptional circumstances.

The council believes that the approach to retaining Gypsy Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites in the Green Belt to be sound, as expanded on in section 2 of the Exceptional Circumstances for release of Gypsy & Traveller sites from the Green Belt Topic Paper 2024 [EB32]. However as explained in the topic paper, the council is aware of other council's removing traveller sites from the Green Belt, and should the inspectors consider this to be appropriate, then the council believes there are exceptional circumstances for established sites with permanent pitches to be removed from the Green Belt, as detailed in the topic paper.

In summary, the council's approach to Green Belt is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.