

## **Item 6 - Green Belt Assessment**

The attached report was considered by the Planning Advisory Committee, relevant Minute extract below:

### Planning Advisory Committee on 17 January 2017 (Minute 35)

The Chairman acknowledged the large number of public in attendance. She advised all present that the report before the Committee for consideration and recommendation to Cabinet was on the whole of the District and completed without the consultants knowing about the 'call for sites'. It could be seen from the report that the vast majority of Green Belt was performing well and that all parcels met the tests to varying degrees and non had failed. She asked the Committee to have a good transparent and generic discussion and not to focus on particular areas. There were some sub parcels which needed further investigation and Officers would be doing this in order that the Council could prove to the Planning Inspectorate that it had been rigorous and had a robust evidence base. The Council needed to be able to prove why land should not be removed from the Green Belt. The Green Belt sites submitted through the 'call for sites' process were not likely to be taken forward unless there were 'exceptional circumstances' for them to be released.

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the report which provided an overview of the findings of The Green Belt Assessment (undertaken by Arup on behalf of the Council) which would help inform the production of the new Local Plan for the period 2015-35.

The Green Belt Assessment was a key evidence base document, which, together with other strands of evidence, would help the Council to protect the Green Belt. It provided a comprehensive review of the performance of the District's green belt against the five green belt 'purposes', as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Most of the Green Belt within the District was performing strongly and the Assessment report provided a robust evidence base for its continued protection. A very small number of weakly performing parcels had been identified, including sites like Sevenoaks/Greatness Quarry and the priority was to review those, and other brownfield sites within the Green Belt.

Separately, an analysis of statutory natural and historic environmental constraints and a landscape sensitivity assessment had been undertaken. The results of those separate assessments were overlaid with the NPPF assessment, which had led to the identification of parcels of land / sub-areas which were recommended by Arup for further consideration. At a future stage, further investigation and consultation would therefore be undertaken to determine which sites were to be taken forward into the

Local Plan. In the meantime, those sites would not go out to public consultation.

The Chairman asked whether Members had received an email from Wates Developments and whether there was a representative of them present. All Members apart from Cllr Halford had received the email, which would be forwarded to him. The Chairman advised that it would be submitted to the Planning policy team as a consultation response.

The Chairman used her discretion and allowed two members of the public to address the Committee and voice their concerns on the protection of the Green Belt, along with a local ward Councillor. Mr. Dobson called for a visionary Local Plan to include all brownfield options and maximise development on existing sites; Councillor Purves voiced concern about RA-16 and a proposal to develop the land owned by Knole Estates; Mr. Perkins was also concerned by the same proposal and how the loss of Green Belt would impact on the appeal of the town. He wanted Green Belt protected and Members to reject consideration of any Green Belt sites.

The Chairman pointed out that the suggestion to develop RA-16 had come forward from the landowner under the 'call for sites' and was not under discussion. What the Committee was considering was whether the Green Belt Assessment report was correct and robust.

The Vice Chairman added that the methodology used by the consultants had been proven as had recently been examined. Members were being asked to accept whether it was good evidence or not. In response to the public's concerns she did not disagree with regards to needing to protect the Green Belt and it was part of the Council's vision. She requested the Chief Planning Officer explain what exceptional circumstances might mean.

In response the Chief Planning Officer advised that the NPPF set a high bar with clear Green Belt boundaries which could only be changed through Local Plan review with a thorough methodology and only in exceptional circumstances. There was no actual definition of what those exceptional circumstances might be but there were emerging examples from around the country.

Members discussed the report. With regards to comments made referring to a report to be considered the following week the Chairman reminded Members that was a debate for the following week. Members thanked Officers for their work. Some concern was expressed with regards to the 'if necessary' wording in the second recommendation. The Chairman advised and pointed out that other issues such as open spaces and leisure had yet to come to Committee. The Chief Planning Officer explained that the assessment provided a robust piece of evidence and would be overlaid with other pieces of evidence. There was a clear objective to use brownfield sites over Green Belt. He reminded Members that the Issue and Options report would be coming to Committee in June 2017.

## Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the findings of the Green Belt Assessment, be noted; and
- b) the further consideration of 'brownfield' sites in the Green Belt and then, if necessary, the limited number of land parcels/sub-areas identified in the Arup report, be supported.