



**Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan  
Green Belt Preferred Options**

**Joint Response**

from

**Little Chalfont Parish Council**

and

**Little Chalfont Community Association**

**9 December 2016**

## Joint Response

### Little Chalfont Parish Council & Little Chalfont Community Association

#### INCONSISTENT PROCEDURE

1. Updating of the HELAA is still under way. Inevitably the extent to which it is necessary to identify land for removal from the Green Belt depends largely on the outcome of the HELAA exercise. It also depends on negotiations with Aylesbury Vale District Council about the extent to which it is able to help the councils meet their unmet needs. It should not therefore be accepted at this stage that a fixed quantum of Green Belt land needs to be released to meet the housing needs of Chiltern and South Bucks.
2. The two councils appear not to be doing what they undertook to do in the fourth paragraph of their Foreword to the Consultation Document, that is, to take account of what can be '*met in areas outside of Chiltern and South Bucks*' when exploring options for meeting development needs in the Green Belt. The quantum available from Duty to Cooperate negotiation is not yet known. However, by putting forward quantified Green Belt preferred options now, the councils are indicating that they will seek under Duty to Cooperate only what they cannot accommodate using built up areas, previously developed land, and the Green Belt. This is unfair (in planning terms) and inconsistent with the wording of the Foreword. The councils' approach is therefore flawed.

#### PREFERRED OPTION 6

3. Preferred Option 6 (PO6), 'South East of Little Chalfont', is a very large piece of Green Belt, so needs to be considered with great care. We oppose releasing any of this site from the Green Belt for the following reasons.

## **GREEN BELT ISSUES**

### **Openness**

4. The site is by a considerable margin the least developed of the three large POs (Beaconsfield, Chesham and Little Chalfont), and contains by far the highest proportion of open land - more than 95%. The site is open countryside mainly free from development. In their documentation the councils accept that built form is less than 5%.
5. Paragraph 79 of the NPPF defines openness and permanence as the essential characteristics of Green Belt. This site provides both. Openness means freedom from built development. It does not mean the absence of woodland, which is an asset in the Green Belt. Permanence is well established by the existing boundaries.
6. In 2013 the openness of the site was recognised by an inspector who, when refusing an appeal to extend a property within the site (Appeal Ref: APP/X0415/D/13/2204461), said 'it would substantially encroach and project into an undeveloped and open part of the Green Belt. It would therefore reduce the openness of the area. The Framework notes that one of the essential characteristics of Green Belts is their openness.'
7. Openness is not affected by visibility. The Bucks Green Belt Assessment Part 1, Annex Report 1C – General Area Assessment Pro-formas, is wrong to suggest that this site is less open because the land is partly enclosed by external development and by the very small amount of built form it contains. Visibility in or out of a site is a material consideration for development control matters, not a matter which influences whether a site is fulfilling a Green Belt function.

### **Value against encroachment**

8. It is wrong to put forward as preferred options such large Green Belt areas, with such high percentages of open land, when their value against encroachment (NPPF Green Belt Purpose 3) is so great. Inevitably the larger the size of the proposed release, the greater the encroachment.

9. The score of 3 awarded to this site for NPPF Green Belt Purpose 3 is too low, and conflicts with the councils' own methodology. See our detailed explanation of this point in the Annex to this response. The site should score at least 4, which would have exempted it from further consideration for release from the Green Belt (Sections 4.4.4., 4.4.25 Green Belt Assessment Part One, and sections 3.8, 3.9 of the draft Part Two).

### **Value against coalescence**

10. The green land north of Long Walk was the subject of planning application CH/1979/0103/FA - Refused: *"inappropriate development in the green belt and would extend and intensify the existing ribbon development along Long Walk, which is an open and rural zone important in preventing the merging of the settlements of Little Chalfont and Chorleywood"*.
11. In the draft Green Belt Assessment Part Two, Parcel Ref. 4.349 a triangle of land immediately south of Long Walk, was scored 3 for Purpose 2 with the comment *"The option is considered to make a significant contribution to both the real and perceived gap between the settlements of Little Chalfont and Chorleywood."* PO6, immediately to the north of Long Walk and Parcel 4.349, is only a little further from Chorleywood and must perform the same role, if to a slightly lesser extent.
12. This history should justify a score of at least 2 (not 1, as in the documentation,) for Green Belt Purpose 2.

### **Defensible boundaries**

13. The method by which these were approached was faulty. The councils began by looking at a number of smaller parcels which had been nominated within this site but, as they could not find one with defensible boundaries, continued to push the envelope outwards, ignoring the encroachment and coalescence issues, until they found one. They were driven by the need to find a boundary, not by observance of the NPPF Green Belt purposes.

## **Location at the urban edge**

14. The councils' argument under 'Exceptional Circumstances Conclusion' in the pro-forma at Appendix 5 to the draft Green Belt Assessment Part Two suggests that the site is somehow less valuable Green Belt because it is at the urban edge. This is the opposite of the truth. It is at the urban edge that the Green Belt most needs protection. With more than 95% openness the site cannot, as claimed, have an 'urban fringe' character.

## **Absence of 'Exceptional Circumstances'**

15. The case for exceptional circumstances has not been made.
16. *'The approach to exceptional circumstances adopted in the Green Belt Assessment Part Two for Chiltern and South Bucks Districts is designed to reflect the duty to achieve sustainable development'* (GBA2 3.11). According to the Preferred Options Appraisal document, PO6 would have an adverse impact on Local Plan Sustainability Objectives 2 and 3, a moderate positive impact only on 9 (Housing) and 10 (Transport) and a neutral or uncertain impact on the rest.
17. We strongly reject the claim that there could be any positive impact on Transport, given the impermeable nature of the site to vehicle access (see below under Infrastructure) and the existing problems of congestion and parking in Little Chalfont. With up to 1000 dwellings and probably 1500 or more cars associated with its inhabitants, of whom a very small minority may find employment within the village, there will be many more and longer car journeys.
18. We do not agree that there is a 'good fit' with Emerging Spatial Strategy Option C (*Built area extension(s) to the principal settlements of Chesham, Amersham, Little Chalfont, Beaconsfield, Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross and Burnham*), as claimed under Exceptional Circumstances Assessment in the pro forma at Appendix 5 to the draft Green Belt Assessment Part Two. The Green Belt characteristics of the site, as described above, should protect it against becoming a 'built area extension'.

## **Inconsistent handling of General Areas 29 and 35.**

19. These two General Areas were reviewed as a single landscape. The councils decided that it would be wrong to release one half of the parcel (GA29) from the Green Belt, but did not follow the logic that it would also be wrong to release GA 35.

## **THE AONB**

20. Development of the site would damage the view from within the adjacent AONB, thus reducing the quality of the AONB itself. The south east corner of the site is one of the highest points in Chiltern District and would be visible from large areas of the AONB.

## **BIODIVERSITY ISSUES**

### **Ancient Woodland**

21. It is proposed to incorporate two areas into any development, with 'buffer zones' of 15m. To surround important woodland with a housing estate is to lose entirely the context and setting of the woodland and therefore its value. It would inevitably be further degraded under urban fringe pressure from surrounding housing.
22. The Woodland Trust research refers to buffer zones of a minimum 50m. (source: Woodland Trust, Impact of nearby development on ancient woodland, Dec 2012.)

### **Other biodiversity constraints**

23. A large area of **priority habitat inventory** deciduous woodland runs east to west with minor gaps of open grassland, part of which has a blanket TPO covering the area around Pucks Paigles (TPO 10/86(126).
24. The site contains a high spatial priority **Woodland Priority Habitat Network** (Wildlife Corridor) and is part of an east/west section ensuring migration and gene exchange (source: Forestry Commission England, Strategic Development Team).
25. The site includes high **spatial woodland improvement** areas.
26. There are **hedgerows** within the site that are more than 60 years old as represented on Dec.1945 area photographs. (Source: Google Earth timeline).

27. The fields abutting Long Walk are rich in *wildflower hay meadows*.
28. The above provides a strong case for the site to be left undisturbed.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

29. The infrastructure Capacity Study produced in 2015 is too short of information to be of use in assessing the infrastructure implications; much necessary information is still lacking. We are told only that a Development Infrastructure Schedule will be drawn up to accompany the draft local plan next year. It is unsatisfactory to be asked to comment on preferred options in these conditions.
30. We are extremely concerned about almost every aspect of infrastructure, but will reserve our position on all infrastructure matters, until a full assessment of the implications for PO6 is available.
31. In the meantime, we note the following general points.
  - Large Green Belt releases like the one proposed at PO6 should be around large settlements, which have more capacity to absorb the impact on their communities, having a broader range of physical and social infrastructure.
  - The size of the proposed release relative to the size of the community of Little Chalfont is also important. A release of this site would involve an increase of over 30% in the population of Little Chalfont, which will inevitably place stress not only on infrastructure, but also on social integration.
  - Unlike the other (Core Strategy) main settlements for development - Amersham, Chesham, and Chalfont St Peter - Little Chalfont has no bypass (precluded by the AONB) to protect its centre from the main road (A404). The conflict between through traffic and local traffic – which would be greatly increased by any development of PO6 – is a fundamental constraint on further acceptable development.
  - PO6 would be exceptionally impermeable to vehicle access because three of the surrounding roads are private. Of the remaining two, Burtons Lane is narrow and inconvenient in places. Lodge Lane is also narrow, especially under the railway bridge, and has long steep hills,

which can ice up in winter, on either side of its present (the former golf club) access to the site.

## **PROGRESS TOWARDS A LOCAL PLAN**

32. The Consultation document shows that there remains much work to be done on areas of key importance. Urban capacity has yet to be identified. Previously developed land within the Green Belt suitable for release has yet to be quantified. The contribution which Aylesbury Vale District Council can make has yet to be agreed. Work on infrastructure and service capacity is yet to be undertaken.
33. In that context it is clearly inappropriate at this stage to identify land fulfilling valid Green Belt purposes for release for development.
34. By the same token it is impossible at this stage to reach a judgment that exceptional circumstances exist which would justify the removal of the proposed Green Belt sites in general, and PO 6 in particular, from the Green Belt.

## **CONCLUSION**

35. In our view, based on the evidence available so far, the emerging local plan will be unsound if it includes release from the Green Belt of Preferred Option 6, whose contribution to the Green Belt the evidence documents understate.
36. We suggest that a local plan may still be sound if it does not meet the full objectively assessed need. The two quotations from Planning Practice Guidance at Section 1.11 of the draft Green Belt Assessment Part Two, which explain constraints on the ability of LPAs to meet objectively assessed need, are most relevant here. One was quoted as follows in House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 00934 of 5 January 2016, to answer the question 'Do local authorities have to meet full housing needs identified in needs assessments?'

*Once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a strategic housing land availability assessment 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.'*

37. Finally, we note the request in the consultation response form for “views on what type of development should be sought if suitable and what type of requirements (other than infrastructure), should be secured as part of development”. We think it inappropriate to answer this question, as the current consultation is about whether certain sites should be released from the Green Belt, not about what should be done with them if they are released.

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## ANNEX

### Option 6 – Land to the south-east of Little Chalfont

1. The Chiltern and South Bucks Green Belt Assessment Part Two (referred to below as GBA2) awarded scores of 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) for each site against each of the 5 Green Belt Purposes set out in the NPPF.

### Green Belt Purpose 3

2. We challenge the score of only 3 awarded in the pro-forma at Appendix 5 to GBA2 for this site.
3. Section 4.4.25 of the Buckinghamshire Green Belt Assessment Part 1 Methodology and Assessment of General Areas (Referred to below as GBA1) explains that when the General Areas identified at Stage 1 of the assessment were reviewed, for Green Belt Purpose 3, a score of 4 was awarded where an Area contained less than 10% built form and/or possesses a strong unspoilt rural character. Sections 3.8 and 3.9 of GBA2 explain that potential sites for 'preferred options' were assessed in the same way.
4. The district councils' own analysis (Green Belt Assessment Part 1 (January 2016) - Parcel Proformas) of GB Parcel 35 (the "General Area 35") site which is now the Little Chalfont 'preferred option', confirms that the built form within the site is less than 5%. In fact, it is only about 2.4% (Source: Magic Maps). In this case, the first requirement (that the site contains less than 10% built form) is satisfied and therefore, the site should score at least 4.
5. Indeed, we could argue that the score could be 5, which the methodology awards to a site which "contains less than 5% built form and possesses a strong unspoilt rural character". However, we accept that there is some subjectivity or judgment in the assessment of "a

strong unspoilt rural character". Indeed, we acknowledge that section 4.4.25 makes specific provision for adjustment of the initial score on qualitative grounds. Therefore, we limit our claim to the Preferred Option 6 site warranting a score of at least 4 on the published scoring methodology and using the district councils' built form data.

6. According to Section 3.8 of GBA2, land "scoring strongly (4 or 5) against the criteria for one or more of the Green Belt Purposes was judged to be meeting the Purposes strongly overall" and Section 3.9 confirms that GBA2 adopted the same approach as the Part One Assessment, GBA1. In Section 4.4.4 of the GBA1, land "judged to be meeting the [NPPF] purposes strongly overall" was "deemed unsuitable for further consideration in Part 2 of the Green Belt Assessment".
7. In GBA1, an exception to the scoring methodology was allowed where a possible sub-division of sites was identified. The scoring of this Little Chalfont site was clouded because it was only part of the site taken forward as a strategic option site for consideration in the Green Belt Assessment Part 2. The site taken forward encompassed the western parts of the large General Area 29 and all of General Area 35. While it was considered that the combined site had "the potential to score differently" and "may score weakly", no score was awarded to the combined site. However, the Draft Green Belt Assessment Part 2 concluded that the initially proposed extension of General Area 35 was ruled out in the Green Belt Development Options Appraisal because of "significant harm to the AONB " and "exceptional circumstances are not demonstrated" to include the western parts of General Area 29.
8. With the exclusion of the western part of General Area 29 from the strategic option site, the Preferred Option 6 site is the same as the original General Area 35, which under the published methodology warrants a score of at least 4, and should therefore be excluded from further consideration for development.

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