REP-1615-1145

Matter 4: Green Belt Boundaries and Exceptional Circumstances (paragraphs 5.8-5.13) [Note: This considers whether, at a high level, there are exceptional circumstances to redefine Green Belt boundaries through the Plan. At a detailed level, the justification for the proposed site allocations in the Green Belt, as well as other changes to its boundaries, will be considered in the Stage 2 hearings]

4.1 Having regard to the Green Belt’s purposes and subject to consideration of the implications of the Plan’s specific proposals, do exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries in the Borough? In particular:

a) Does the Plan’s strategy make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land, including estates regeneration and surplus public land where appropriate?

No. The site at Trumps Farm has apparently been rejected on the basis of reasoning, which conflicts with that used to justify Longcross Village site

b) Does the strategy seek to optimise the density of development in line with national planning policy to make the most effective use of land?

No.

c) Is it clear that the Plan has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development?

No

4.2 Having regard to the proposed releases of land from the Green Belt, does the Plan promote sustainable patterns of development?

No. In the latest version of the draft Local Plan dated December 2017 and Infrastructure delivery Plan (IDP) the Council makes the following responses and admissions (references are to the local plan except where stated):

Character of development

Appendix B p.7 Any development which comes forward over the period of the Local Plan would be expected to be designed to respect local character. Policy EE1 sets out that development proposals should reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development by: Creating attractive and resilient places which make a positive contribution to the Borough’s townscape and/or landscape quality by respecting and enhancing the local, natural & historic character of the environment; paying particular regard to scale, layout, building lines, materials, massing, bulk, density, height and topography; and, contributing to and enhancing the quality of the public realm and/or landscape character through high quality hard and soft landscaping schemes.

Comment
There is no recognition in the plan anywhere that Virginia Water is a village with village roads, infrastructure and amenities, which are already under stress. The thrust of the plan is to create new environments of a particular character such as the Garden Village at Longcross but with no regard whatsoever for irretrievable further degradation of the existing village character of Virginia Water and its
village roads or the unsustainability of such development from the perspective of traffic congestion, air quality, safety and infrastructure. In effect the Plan proposes to create a new settlement (Longcross Village), which is admitted to be unsustainable in its own right and tack it onto (the distance between the two settlements is 200 metres) an existing settlement (Virginia Water village), which is at the limits of its own sustainability. The Council’s unsupported view is that the distinction between Longcross and Virginia Water settlements can be retained. The proposals in the Local Plan affect both Virginia Water and other linked environments in Windlesham, Chobham, Englefield Green, Thorpe and abutting Old Windsor in similar ways. In these respects, the Local Plan is completely unsustainable and should be rejected outright.

In relation to Hurst Lane, which has been suggested by a number of residents, this site has been discounted apparently on the basis that it could not form a logical extension to any of the boroughs urban areas and the site is not large enough in its own right to form its own new sustainable settlement. As such, the release of the site would not accord with the Council’s own overarching spatial strategy, which only considers the release of Green Belt sites further if they could initially meet one of these criteria to ensure sustainable patterns of development. The other sites were apparently also rejected as they were either too distant from existing settlements, currently performed well against the purposes of the Green Belt, have poor accessibility to services or were too greatly constrained by unresolvable practical or environmental constraints.

4.3 Are there adequate reasons in this case for not identifying safeguarded land as part of the Green Belt review? Are the consequences for the permanence of the Green Belt boundaries acceptable?

No comment

4.4 Does the proposed release of land from the Green Belt take adequate account of the effects on broader purposes that it may serve e.g. provision for outdoor sports and recreation, access to the countryside, protection and enhancement of landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity?

No comment