



<b><u>AGENDA ITEM:</u></b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Planning Committee:</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> March 2011</b>
<b>Cabinet:</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup> March 2011</b>
<b>Executive &amp; Scrutiny:</b>	<b>Overview 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011</b>

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**Report of:** Acting Executive Manager Planning

**Relevant Portfolio Holder:** Councillor M. Forshaw

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**SUBJECT: LDF CORE STRATEGY EVIDENCE BASE – DRAFT GREEN BELT STUDY**

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Wards affected: Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Planning Committee, Cabinet and Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Draft Green Belt Study, which forms a key plank of evidence within the West Lancashire Local Development Framework (LDF) Evidence Base, and to determine whether this document should proceed to a six week public consultation period.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO PLANNING COMMITTEE**

- 2.1 That the Draft Green Belt Study be considered and that agreed comments be referred to Cabinet.

## **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET**

- 3.1 That the comments of the LDF Cabinet Working Group provided at Section 8.0 of this report and any comments received from the Planning Committee be considered.
- 3.2 That the Green Belt Study be approved for a six week public consultation exercise commencing after the Local Elections in May.
- 3.3 That the Acting Executive Manager Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation, be authorised to finalise and make amendments, prior to public consultation, to the Green Belt Study following consideration of any agreed comments from the Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.4 That call-in is not appropriate for this item as the report is being considered at the next meeting of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31 March 2011.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

- 4.1 That the Committee provide any agreed comments on the Draft Green Belt Study for consideration by the Acting Executive Manager Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, prior to the document being issued for public consultation.
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#### **5.0 BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 Through the preparation of the Core Strategy Preferred Options Paper, targets have been identified to meet the Borough's growth needs to 2027, including 87 hectares of new employment land and a total of 4500 new dwellings over the 15 year plan period.
- 5.2 It has become evident through this process that due to the significant amount of land designated as Green Belt within the Borough (91%) and the limited amount of land available for development within existing settlements, achievement of the above targets will not be possible unless development is permitted within the Green Belt or the Green Belt boundaries are amended.
- 5.3 Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts, stresses that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances exist. Before any change can be approved, local authorities must satisfy the Secretary of State that they have considered all reasonable opportunities for development in the urban areas, and that they have considered the possibility of neighbouring authorities meeting any outstanding development needs.
- 5.4 In order to evidence this final point, the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Housing and Spatial Planning Co-ordinating Group agreed in June 2009 that, once all the Merseyside authorities and West Lancashire have completed their evidence base studies and established their growth targets, an 'Overview Study' should be carried out to understand the capacity of each authority to meet its own needs, and to assess whether any authority has the ability to meet any of the needs of the adjoining authorities. This work commenced in spring 2010, and at this point in time, it is not anticipated that the Overview Study will identify any capacity elsewhere in the LCR to meet West Lancashire's needs.
- 5.5 As a result of the pressure which will be mounting on Green Belt boundaries and land, a study was also commissioned to review Green Belt land around the edge of existing built-up areas within the Borough that is likely to come under development pressure and to identify whether or not this land still meets the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as set out within National Planning Policy (PPG2).
- 5.6 The study does not identify or allocate land which would be suitable for development as this is done through the LDF process and, ultimately, through the Site Allocations document within the LDF at a later stage within the process.

- 5.7 The study was carried out alongside similar studies being undertaken by Sefton and Knowsley Borough Council's who neighbour West Lancashire to the east and south respectively. A shared methodology was used as the starting point for the studies and discussion of analysis and outcomes has taken place. However, Sefton and Knowsley have engaged independent consultants to validate each stage of the methodology, whilst West Lancashire has used Lancashire County Council in order to provide independent validation.
- 5.8 The validation process has resulted in the methodology used by West Lancashire diverging slightly from that used by the neighbouring authorities in order to take total account of the differing local geographies and circumstances.
- 5.9 The study is now complete in draft and it is hoped that public consultation will assist in ensuring the findings are accurate and take account of the communities understanding of West Lancashire's Green Belt land.

## **6.0 CURRENT POSITION**

### Overview of the Green Belt Study

- 6.1 The purpose of the Green Belt Study is to review land around the edge of existing built-up areas and to identify whether or not this land still meets the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as set out within National Planning Policy (PPG2). The study does not identify land suitable for development or allocate any land to be released at a later stage. This process will form part of the LDF through the Core Strategy Site Allocations Development Plan Documents (DPD).
- 6.2 The study is split into 3 stages:
- Stage 1 – Sub-division of the West Lancashire Green Belt into Parcels;
  - Stage 2 – Assessment of all parcels against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt; and
  - Stage 3 – Assessment of the remaining parcels against sustainability criteria.

### Stage 1

- 6.3 The parcels were devised using existing strong physical boundaries as a guide to identify logical parcels, which could then be assessed. Given the size and extent of the Green Belt within West Lancashire, the study focused only on parcels on the periphery of existing built-up areas, as these were likely to come under pressure from future development needs. However, Sefton and Knowsley assessed the entire Green Belt as the designation covers a significantly smaller amount of land within their Borough's.
- 6.4 At the end of this stage, a total of 258 parcels were identified for assessment around the settlements of Appley Bridge, Ormskirk / Aughton, Burscough, Halsall, Haskayne, Parbold / Hilddale, Wrightington, Mere Brow, Newburgh, Rufford, Scarisbrick, Skelmersdale / Up Holland, Westhead and along the Sefton and Knowsley boundaries.

## Stage 2

- 6.5 In order to assess the parcels against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, criteria were established to measure how well each parcel performs against each purpose. Paragraph 1.5 of PPG2 states that there are five purposes for including land in the Green Belt and the following criteria were applied to each purpose:
1. **To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas** – How well contained the parcel is by the urban area and is the boundary stronger or weaker than the existing Green Belt boundary.
  2. **To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another** – A measure of the width of the open gap between urban areas.
  3. **To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment** – How much of the parcel was covered by built development, the use of the buildings and land, when the development dates from and the strength of the boundary.
  4. **To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns** – Subjective commentary.
  5. **To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land** – Not measured within this study.
- 6.6 All 258 parcels of land were assessed against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Any that were deemed to wholly fulfil at least one of the purposes were ruled out from further consideration at Stage 3. A total of 15 parcels remained where were then taken through to Stage 3.

## Stage 3

- 6.7 The remaining parcels were then subject to assessment to consider how deliverable and sustainable they are. A set of constraints were devised which could be considered prohibitive, restrictive or limiting to development and included such things as flood zone designation, utilities constraints, heritage constraints and ecological designations.
- 6.8 In order to consider the sustainability of the parcel, access to services and transport links other than the car were assessed. In addition, any positive attributes for delivering the parcel such as improved access to services for the wider area or the removal of a conflicting use were identified.

## Conclusion

- 6.9 The overall findings of the study identified that the majority of the Green Belt land on the periphery of existing settlements in the Borough that had been assessed is still fulfilling one or more of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and therefore, the boundary within these location was defensible. Of those 15 parcels that were found not to fulfil a purpose of the Green Belt, only the following 7 were considered potentially deliverable and sustainable for future development:
- Ormskirk - ORM.01- Land rear of Grove Farm, High Lane
  - Ormskirk – ORM.07 - Land between Ruff Lane and St Helens Road (Edge Hill)
  - Burscough - BUR.08 - Land rear of Lordsgate Lane
  - Burscough - BUR.09 - Land rear of Liverpool Road South

- Burscough - BUR.10 - Land at Yew Tree Farm, Higgins Lane
- Burscough - BUR.11 - Land adj. to Burscough Employment Area
- Burscough - BUR.12 - Land adj. to Burscough Employment Area

- 6.10 Given the purpose of this study is to review land around the edge of existing built-up areas and to identify whether or not this land still meets the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, as set out within National Planning Policy (PPG2), the process of allocating land for development is beyond the remit of the study. This process has to be undertaken through the LDF process; in particular through the Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPD's. This process takes account of all the evidence base work, including this Study, in order to ensure development is directed to the most appropriate locations within the Borough and includes consideration of sites that do not fulfil the purposes of Green Belt as identified within this Study, as well as certain sites that do fulfil those purposes but may be desirable to allocate due to their location or other advantages.

## **7.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The six week public consultation exercise will be carried out in conformity with the Council's LDF Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The Green Belt Study will be available for comment as part of the wider Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation exercise, which will involve public events in all parts of the Borough, online consultation and more traditional written correspondence. The consultation exercise, the public events and details of how to respond will be publicised through a leaflet inserted in local papers.
- 7.2 With regards specifically to the Green Belt Study, the public will be asked to comment on any factual errors they notice in the draft study and on the methodology used in the study.

## **8.0 COMMENTS OF THE LDF CABINET WORKING GROUP**

- 8.1 No comments were raised by the LDF Cabinet Working Group

## **9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

- 9.1 Given that the Green Belt Study itself does not seek to remove land from the Green Belt or allocate land for development, it will not have any direct implications for sustainability or the community strategy. However, it will be used as a key piece of evidence in preparing planning policy for the Borough through the LDF. The documents within the LDF, and the decisions they make as to release of Green Belt land and allocation of land for development, will be subject to an independent Sustainability Appraisal and are required to be consistent with, and help implement, key aspects of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

## **10.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Budgetary provision has been made to allow for the Public Consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options and the Green Belt Study. Budgetary provision has also been made to allow for any further evidence base work that may be required following the Public Consultation.

## **11.0 RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 As a key part of the evidence behind the emerging LDF for West Lancashire, the Green Belt study is an important piece of work. As such, its methodology and conclusions will be examined by a Planning Inspector as part of an Examination in Public to ensure that it is a “sound” study that provides robust evidence for LDF documents.

## **12.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 12.1 The Green Belt Study is a substantial piece of work and public views will need to be sought on the study before it is finalised.

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### **Background Documents**

The following documents are also available from the LDF Team Leader:

- Appendix 2 of the Draft Green Belt Report – Stage 2 raw data analysis
- Appendix 3 of the Draft Green Belt Report – Stage 3 raw data analysis

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

The Green Belt Study will feed into the Core Strategy document, for which a statutory Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) will be prepared.

### **Appendices**

**Appendix 1** - The Draft Green Belt Study (February 2011)  
(Circulated under a separate cover)