

An Update on Planning Processes

National – Regional – Local

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The changing face of the planning system.....

- An evolving National Planning System:
 - New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - December 24
 - New National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) - February 25.
 - New Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
 - National Development Management Policies.
- Return of 'regional level plans' – the West Midlands Mayoral SDS.
- New approach to Local Plan making and Duty to Cooperate.
- Neighbourhood Plans to remain.

How is Grey Belt assessed?

Purposes of Including Land in the Green Belt:

- a) Check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. But not villages
- b) Prevent neighbouring towns merging. But not villages
- ~~c) Assist in safeguarding countryside from encroachment.~~
- d) Preserve setting and special character of historic towns. But not villages
- ~~e) Assist urban regeneration by encouraging the restyling of derelict and other urban land.~~

Parcels must perform “strongly” against the respective purposes.

Grey Belt - Inappropriate or Appropriate Development?

Not regarded as 'inappropriate' if:

- Does not fundamentally undermine purposes of remaining Green Belt across area of the plan.
- Meets a demonstrable unmet need.
- Located in a sustainable location.
- Meets the Golden Rules.
 - 50% affordable housing.
 - Necessary improvements to infrastructure.
 - New or improved green space.

Amended Settlement Hierarchy

- Responded to changes in national policy and definitions around Green Belt purposes.
- Built on evidence in the Local Plan Review.
- Considered evidence around population and infrastructure.
- Importance of the hierarchy for planning purposes.
- Will be kept under review as part of new Local Plan.

Determining Applications

- Applications to build in the Green Belt locally and borough wide as well as in neighbouring areas.
- All applications must be determined on their own merits in accordance with the adopted local and neighbourhood Plan.
- The Council has a legal duty to determine applications it receives.
- Must also have regard to the NPPF and “presumption in favour of sustainable development”.
- The ‘need’ for housing is a significant material consideration established nationally.
- Importance of infrastructure and sustainable development.
- Applications likely to be determined at Planning Committee.
- Risk of planning by appeal.

Mayoral Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)

- Statutory plan produced by the West Midlands Mayor / West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) - covering the 7 constituent authorities.
- Will include scale and distribution of housing across the West Midlands.
- Will consider strategic infrastructure to support growth.
- Local Plan will need to be in 'general conformity' with the SDS.
- Still not clear how the Duty to Cooperate will function with neighbouring areas.
- Initiation of the SDS approved by WMCA Board in July with 8 guiding principles:
 - Co-development [with the 7 Mets] and Equality of participation.
 - Timing and momentum.
 - Infrastructure First.
 - Brownfield First.
 - Enhancing the functions of green spaces.
 - Additionality to local plans.
 - Evidence led.
 - Integration.
- First informal consultation has launched this week – first draft due spring/summer 2026.

A New Local Plan

- An evolution of the 2020 Plan.
- Has regard to changing national and regional requirements.
- An increased 'housing requirement' – 63% increase on previous 'housing need'.
- Important to maximise brownfield sites and increase densities where appropriate – but will require Green Belt release to meet the requirement.
- Call for sites process and updating the evidence base.
- Important to align with West Midlands Mayoral SDS.
- Consultation on the first stage due soon.

Questions?

