

5 Policies Relating to Objective W2

Objective W2: To ensure Warrington's revised Green Belt boundaries maintain the permanence of the Green Belt in the long term.

5.1 Warrington's Green Belt

- 5.1.1 Warrington's Green Belt fulfils an important role in ensuring the separation of Warrington from neighbouring towns and cities and preventing urban sprawl extending into the countryside.
- 5.1.2 The general extent of the Borough's Green Belt will be maintained but as set out in Chapter 3, it is not possible for Warrington to meet its development needs without releasing some Green Belt land for development. The land proposed for release equates to around 3.4% of Warrington's total area of Green Belt.
- 5.1.3 Policy GB1 confirms the areas of land to be removed from the Green Belt and defines the revised Green Belt boundaries. It confirms the settlements which are 'inset' from the Green Belt, those settlements which are 'washed over' within the Green Belt and sets out how development proposals within the Green Belt will be assessed.

Policy GB1 - Green Belt

General Principles

- 1. The Council will maintain the general extent of the Borough's Green Belt, as defined on the Local Plan Policies Map, throughout the Plan Period and to at least 2050.
- 2. The Council will plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt as part of Warrington's Green Infrastructure Network.

Land removed from the Green Belt

- 3. The following land has been removed from the Green Belt and the amended Green Belt boundaries are shown in Figure 6:
 - a. South East Warrington Urban Extension
 - b. Land to the east of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station
 - c. Thelwall Heys
 - d. Land at Warrington Waterfront
 - e. Land at Croft
 - f. Land at Culcheth
 - g. Land at Hollins Green
 - h. Land at Lymm
 - i. Land at Winwick

Inset Settlements

4. The following settlements are Inset (that is excluded) from the Green Belt:

- a. Appleton Thorn
- b. Burtonwood
- c. Croft
- d. Culcheth
- e. Glazebury
- f. Hollins Green
- g. Lymm
- h. Oughtrington
- i. Winwick

5. Within these settlements new build development, conversions and redevelopment proposals will be allowed providing they comply with national planning policy, other relevant Local Plan policies and any relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

6. The boundaries of the Inset Settlements are shown on the Policies Map.

Green Belt Settlements

7. The following are Green Belt settlements (that is washed over) within the Green Belt:

- a. Broomedge
- b. Collins Green
- c. Cuerdley Cross
- d. Glazebrook
- e. Grappenhall Village
- f. Hatton
- g. Heatley/Heatley Heath
- h. Higher Walton
- i. Mee Brow/Fowley Common
- j. New Lane End
- k. Stretton
- l. Weaste Lane

8. Within these settlements development proposals will be subject to Green Belt policies set out in national planning policy. New build development may be appropriate where it can be demonstrated that the proposal constitutes limited infill development of an appropriate scale, design and character, unless the infill break contributes to the character of the settlement.

9. The boundaries of the Green Belt settlements are shown on the Policies Map.

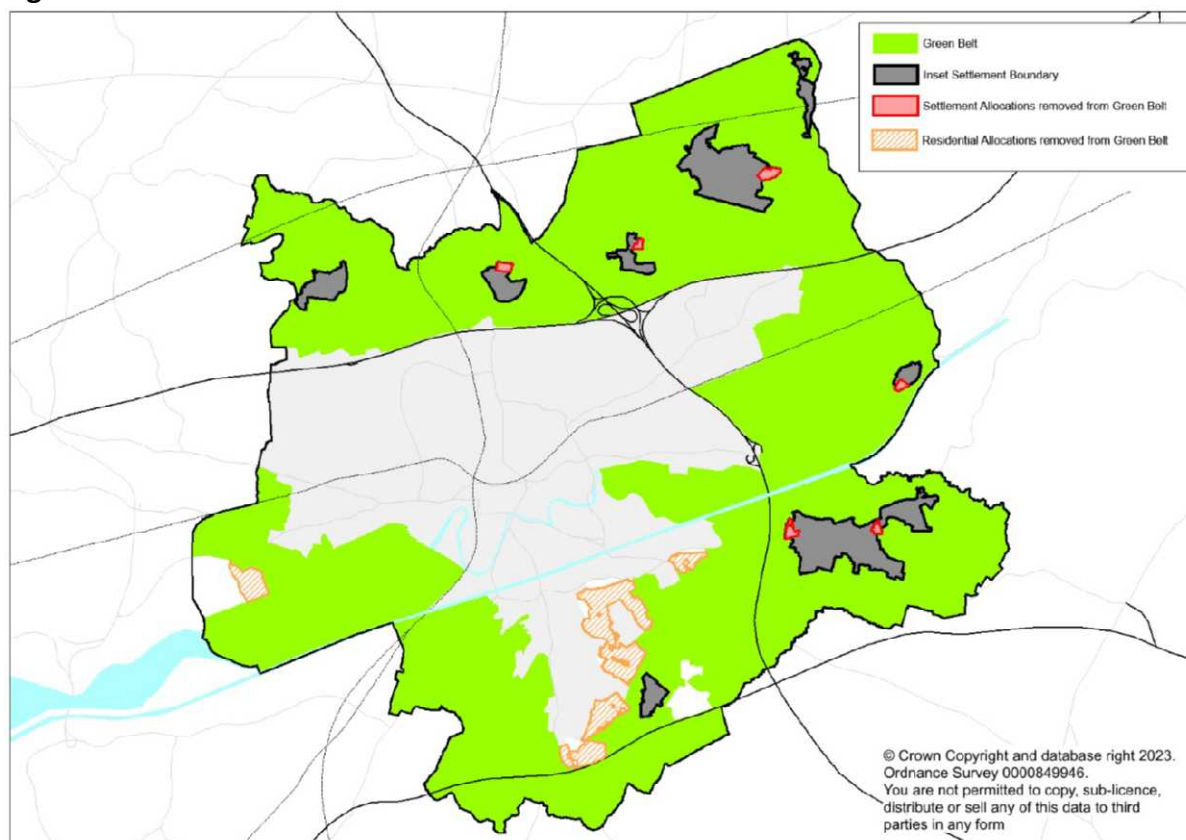
Development Proposals in the Green Belt

10. In accordance with national planning policy, within the Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, except in 'very special circumstances'.

11. A scheme of compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of land remaining in the Green Belt will be required to be provided. Financial contributions will be considered where this would help to ensure that the benefits of compensatory improvements can be maximised by providing them in the most appropriate location.

12. Other forms of development defined in national planning policy to be an exception to inappropriate development within the Green Belt, will be supported, subject to meeting other relevant Local Plan policies and any relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

Figure 6 – Amended Green Belt Boundaries



Why we have taken this approach

Removal of Land from the Green Belt

- 5.1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states that ‘once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of Plans’. However, once strategic policies have established the need for changes to Green Belt boundaries, further detailed amendments may be made through non-strategic local policies, including Neighbourhood Plans.
- 5.1.5 As set out in Chapter 3, there are significant identified needs for market and affordable housing, that cannot be met in full within the existing urban areas of the Borough.

- 5.1.6 In line with national planning policy, additional work has been undertaken by the Council to understand the development capacity of underutilised land and brownfield sites, to ensure only the required amount of Green Belt land will be released for development. The Council is also proposing minimum density requirements for the Town Centre, together with minimum requirements for all site allocations to minimise the amount of Green Belt release required.
- 5.1.7 Through the Council's Duty to Co-operate discussions and as evidenced in the Council's Statement of Common Ground, it is also clear that neighbouring Local Planning Authorities are in similar situations, and there is no capacity within adjoining authorities to absorb any of Warrington's identified development needs. The one exception is the employment allocation in St Helens, which provides an extension to the existing Omega development in Warrington. Both Councils have agreed that this will contribute towards meeting Warrington's development needs.
- 5.1.8 It is therefore concluded that in line with paragraph 141 of the NPPF (2021) that the Council has demonstrated that it has considered all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development through:
- making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;
 - optimising the densities used in developments to reflect the location of development; and
 - engaging constructively with neighbouring authorities to discuss options for neighbouring authorities to accommodate some of Warrington's identified future development needs.
- 5.1.9 As set out in Chapter 3, the starting point for Warrington's 'Exceptional Circumstances' is the requirement to ensure that sufficient land is provided to meet the Council's housing needs.
- 5.1.10 'Exceptional Circumstances' are further justified through the Spatial Strategy of the Plan. The Plan will enable the creation of new sustainable communities but in a manner, which will support the delivery of strategic infrastructure required to address existing issues of congestion and unlock major development sites with significant brownfield capacity. This will ensure that the release of Green Belt land will work in parallel with brownfield development and infrastructure delivery to provide a comprehensive Plan for Warrington as a whole.
- 5.1.11 'Exceptional Circumstances' can also be demonstrated for each area of Green Belt release as set out in Chapter 3 and in each of the site allocation policies.
- 5.1.12 Demonstrating Exceptional Circumstances to release Green Belt land for development has also resulted in some minor additional consequential changes to the existing Green Belt boundaries to ensure that the remaining Green Belt land fulfils the purposes and function of Green Belt land, and the revised boundaries are durable beyond the Plan period.

5.1.13 In order to assist amending detailed Green Belt boundaries a comprehensive Green Belt Assessment has been undertaken. The assessment considered the contribution that larger General Areas, individual parcels of Green Belt land adjacent to the main urban area and inset settlement boundaries and development sites promoted through the 'call for sites' process make to the 5 purposes of the Green Belt.

5.1.14 The Green Belt Assessment has been one of the key factors that has informed the Plan's Spatial Strategy and individual site allocations.

Ensuring Green Belt Boundaries Endure Beyond the Plan Period

5.1.15 The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) requires that, when defining Green Belt boundaries, Plans should be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the Plan period to ensure they will endure over the long term.

5.1.16 The Plan makes provision for development potential beyond the Plan period for housing land. The Council has included flexibility of supply in its allocations for housing land. The land that has been removed from the Green Belt to facilitate the South East Warrington Urban Extension will provide a supply of new homes that will extend a number of years beyond the Plan period, together with the Waterfront subject to the timing of the delivery of the Western Link.

5.1.17 The Council considers that there will still be a realistic supply of brownfield land beyond the Plan Period although it is acknowledged that the availability of brownfield development will decrease over time. Further supply may arise from Neighbourhood Plans making minor amendments to Green Belt boundaries.

5.1.18 When this potential land supply is compared against future development needs, the Council is able to demonstrate that the revised Green Belt boundaries will endure well beyond the end of the Plan Period without having to identify any 'safeguarded' areas of land. Further detail on the approach to land supply following the end of the Plan Period is set out under Policy DEV1.

5.1.19 The Council recognises that there are uncertainties over Warrington's longer term employment land supply, beyond the end of the Plan Period. As such, the Council is committed to undertaking a review into Warrington's employment land needs before the end of the Plan period to ensure the long term supply of employment land. At this stage, it is likely that key infrastructure improvements, including motorway junction improvements, will have been delivered and the impacts of any further required employment allocations can be fully appraised.

Defining 'Inset' and 'Washed Over' Settlements

5.1.20 Within the Borough there are a number of settlements varying in size and in the nature of services on offer. The larger settlements and those which provide a greater number of services are 'inset' from the Green Belt recognising the potential

for their sustainable growth. Smaller settlements are ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt with greater restrictions on development.

- 5.1.21 With the exception of the removal of Grappenhall Heys as an inset settlement, and half of the ‘washed over’ settlement of Stretton to the west of the A49, due to the allocation of the South East Warrington Urban Extension, it is considered that since the adoption of the Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) that there have not been any material changes in circumstances that would warrant amendments to the allocation and definition of Inset and Washed Over Green Belt Settlements.
- 5.1.23 The only amendments to boundaries of the settlements are those required to facilitate the allocated development sites in the Inset Settlements, including consequential changes necessary to ensure a robust Green Belt boundary.

Development Proposals in the Green Belt

- 5.1.24 National Policy defines limited forms of development which are appropriate in the Green Belt and confirms that Very Special Circumstances are required for ‘inappropriate development’. The Council will apply national policy in assessing proposals in Warrington’s Green Belt.
- 5.1.25 The Council’s Design and Construction SPD provides guidance on the conversion and re-use of buildings in rural areas. Additional guidance on the assessment of rural workers dwellings, equestrian related development/uses and other forms of development not regarded as inappropriate development by paragraph 149 of the NPPF will be provided in an updated version of this SPD or a new standalone SPD.

Key Evidence

- National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- Local Housing Needs Assessment (2021)
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2020)
- Brownfield Register (2019)
- Economic Development Needs Assessment (2021)
- Warrington Green Belt Assessment (2016) and Addendums
- Habitat Regulation Assessment: Proposed Submission Version Local Plan (2021)
- Sustainability Appraisal Report: Proposed Submission Version Local Plan (2021)

Other Planning Documents

- WBC Design & Construction SPD (2010)

Council Wide Strategies

- Warrington Means Business (2020)

Delivery Partners

- Natural England
- Private Sector Stakeholders
- Public Sector Stakeholders
- Warrington and Co