

Draft Local Plan to be ‘ reassessed’ in light of new government planning guidance

Guildford Borough Council have issued the following press release on the Draft Local Plan which appears to commit the Council to reassessment of several key aspects of the Draft Local Plan.

“With about 15,000 of the 20,000 Draft Local Plan consultation responses now processed, the views of the many local people who took the time to comment are very clear. There is widespread opposition to building on the green belt and the Council will respond by carrying out a comprehensive reassessment of all site constraints using recent clarification to the government's planning practice guidance.

Since the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first published by the government in 2012, advice from barristers and all other planning policy advisors was that the Council had no option but to look at revising green belt boundaries to comply with the obligations of both national policy and guidance. This was also the position faced when we successfully challenged the South East Plan's proposal to allocate green belt land for 2,000 houses north-east of Guildford. However, the government has now placed greater emphasis on sensitive constrained green belt locations, such as Guildford, where the objectively assessed housing need can now be weighed against a set of compelling constraints.

Based on the high number of consultation responses and the clear guidance from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the current Draft Local Plan will be reassessed. All proposed development sites will now be re-evaluated against the constraints highlighted in the revised Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) planning practice guidance. We will then publish a new version of the Draft Local Plan for consultation next year.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Stephen Mansbridge says: "I can state categorically that no site will come forward for development within the green belt, any Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or area of flood risk unless it has been fully reassessed against the tests set out in the planning practice guidance as amended in October this year."

DCLG's revised guidance restates that objectively assessed housing need must be met unless any adverse impacts of doing so would clearly outweigh the benefits. Harm to the green belt is identified as one of the tests. Locally there is an additional and significant constraint in the form of the congested road network.

As a result of the new DCLG guidance, the emerging Local Plan will be reassessed.

- The housing number set out in the revised Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) will be reassessed against the local constraints and the test of harm.
- Every potential development site will now be reassessed against the new national planning practice guidance test "to take account of 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."

In explaining the fundamental change in approach that will now be used to amend the Draft Local Plan, Cllr Mansbridge says: "We have been given a clear steer from the government in its revised guidance for making a significant change in direction on our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and Draft Local Plan, which can now be fully reassessed against constraints. The housing number, land availability and each development site will be rigorously reassessed against the test of harm set out in the revised

guidance.

"I would like to add that this has been a difficult time for all concerned and inevitably the challenges in framing a policy compliant Draft Local Plan have caused immense worry and concern to many local people. However, we now have an alternative route map to review the extent to which we can meet the housing need identified in the SHMA. We are also reviewing the SHLAA as part of revising the Draft Local Plan and this should allay those fears. We must continue the current process towards having a sound Local Plan in 2016."