



Examination into the Soundness of Newcastle-under-Lyme's Local Plan.

Matter 3 – Green Belt

Matter Statement by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

May 2025

1. Introduction

This statement sets out the Council's response to the Inspector's Matters regarding the approach to Green Belt in the Local Plan

All documents referenced in this statement are listed in Appendix 1.

Issue 3 Whether the approach to the alteration of the Green Belt and development within it is justified and consistent with national policy.

Qu 3.1 What proportion of new housing allocated in the Plan would be on land currently designated as Green Belt?

- 3.1.1 The new housing allocations equate to circa 2.3% of the currently designated Green Belt land within the administrative area of Newcastle under Lyme. This reflects:
- The total area of Green Belt within the borough equates to 9,424 hectares ("ha") (derived from the Council's GIS data).
 - The percentage figure quoted above is based on the aggregate hectareage of all those sites identified in Policy PSD5 [CD01, pg. 19-21], excluding site AB2, which is exclusively an employment site.
 - The area of site KL15 is factored in for the purposes of this calculation, owing to it incorporating an element of residential development.
 - For the avoidance of doubt, this figure does not include the site area of the proposed expansion of Madeley High School (Policy IN1 and MOD020).
- 3.1.2 If all the proposed allocations highlighted in Policy PSD5 [CD01, pg. 19-21] (including AB2 – J16, M6, and the modification to include the Madeley High School expansion) come forward in what is now the Green Belt, this figure would rise to circa 3.2 % of the total hectareage.
- 3.1.3 Based purely on the aggregate numbers of sites proposed to be allocated (irrespective of size, use or geographic location), those currently located in what is now the Green Belt account for circa 33% of the total.
- 3.1.4 It is also important to recognise that:
- These calculations (2.3%/3.2%) are based on gross site areas, so the actual built area will be smaller than this to take account of infrastructure such as roads and open spaces to be accommodated in developments. In the case of site SP11 [CD01 pg. 134-137], this will also encompass the Country Park being established.
 - Policy PSD5 [CD01, pg. 19-21] also points to compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land in compliance with national policy.
 - As stated above, aside from AB2, KL15 (one of the Keele University sites) incorporates proposals for both residential (student accommodation) and employment type uses on land currently forming part of the Green Belt.
 - The figures highlighted have not factored in the proposed "in-setting" of Keele village from the Green Belt considered more fully as part of the Green Belt Village Study [ED009].

- The impact of rounding on site areas may result in slight variances (fractions of a percent) in the overall calculation reached.

Qu 3.2 Paragraph 141 of the NPPF identifies that before exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries a strategic policy making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for housing. Taking into account the answers to question 1.2 have all opportunities to maximise the capacity on non-Green Belt land been taken? How has this been assessed and is this robust?

In particular:

- How has the Council sought to make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land?

- 3.2.1 A positive approach to the development of brownfield and underutilised land is a key component of the approach to identifying and allocating land for development in the Local Plan.
- 3.2.2 The SHELAA [ED006 and ED006a] details the approach taken in the assessment of sites and the sources of sites, including the Council's Brownfield Register. It serves also to illustrate the capacity of brownfield (and greenfield) sites for housing [ED006a para's 5.8-5.11]. As para 5.11 points out, of the 82 sites making up the total deliverable and developable sites in the SHELAA, 53 are brownfield sites, 26 are greenfield, and 3 are mixed. As can be seen from paras 5.9 and 5.10 [ED006a] a total capacity of 1,938 units (1,162+776) will be brought forward from deliverable and developable brownfield sites.
- 3.2.3 The Site Selection Report [ED029] sought to identify as many potential sites as possible in the urban area [ED029, para 5.1] based on sources such as the Brownfield Call for Sites exercise undertaken October to November 2022, and to maximise density on non-Green Belt sites as appropriate. The detailed methodology is explained in Chapter 2 of the Site Selection Report [ED029], with site assessments categorised by settlement in Chapters 6-12. Chapter 6 deals with the Strategic Centre (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Chapter 7 with the Urban Centre (Kingsgrove) and Chapters 8-12 address the Rural Centres. The Site Selection process has sought to meet needs within settlements and non-Green Belt sites. If development needs have not been met, then Green Belt sites have been considered for allocation if exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated on a strategic and site-specific basis.
- 3.2.4 The Sustainability Appraisal [CD03] acknowledges the value of making use of brownfield sites in presenting opportunities to enhance local character within built up areas [CD03, para 12.1.9, pg. 100], safeguarding greenfield land [CD03, para E.5.2.3, pg. E12] and helping limit the permanent and irreversible loss of agriculturally and ecologically valuable soils [CD03 para G.3.2.6, pg. G12]. Accordingly, this has been a consideration in determining the growth direction option and site allocations pursued in the Local Plan. Growth direction Option 6 (the preferred option) incorporates as a starting point Option Zero and therefore seeks to maximise brownfield land opportunities first before looking at site options outside of existing development boundaries [CD03, Table D.4.3, pg. D26-27].
- 3.2.5 The Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kingsgrove Urban Capacity and Town Centre Regeneration Study [ED021] presents an analysis of the potential for urban capacity in

the town centres of Newcastle under Lyme and Kidsgrove. Whilst additional opportunities beyond existing regeneration and investment schemes are limited, it serves to demonstrate the prospective yield that could be attained and signifies the Council's endeavour in realising further sources of previously developed land. Following the completion of the study, the Council has continued to consider sites in the respective town centres through a site selection report [ED029] and a number of sites, in town centre locations, in Newcastle-under-Lyme are proposed for allocation in the Final Draft Local Plan (for example, TC7 and TC71).

3.2.6 The correlation between the framework for managing Green Belt and the prioritisation of land that has been built on previously is highlighted in the Supporting Information to Policy PSD5 [CD01, para 5.31, pg. 20]. Explicit reference to the brownfield status of individual site allocations is, as appropriate, referred to in the Supporting Information [CD01, pg. 102 onwards]. This extends to the provisions of Policy HOU6 [CD01, HOU6(1), pg. 37] with a stated preference being given to proposals located on suitable brownfield sites.

3.2.7 Small (less than the allocation threshold of 0.25ha/<5 dwellings) and windfall sites will also prospectively contribute to the reuse of land, allied to the record of commitments and completions from pre and post the start of the Plan period (2020) being on brownfield sites [ED006a].

3.2.8 Policy PSD1 Criterion 4 [CD01, pg13] also provides a policy context for the efficient use of land through windfall development / re-use of previously developed land and buildings.

- **How has the Council sought to optimise the density of development?**

3.2.9 Consideration of Housing Mix and Density is addressed within CD01 [Policy HOU2, CD01, pg. 30] with the proposed approach seeking to make the most effective and efficient use of land. The policy approach to housing densities reflects the local context and densities that have been achieved to date in the Borough. It is argued that appropriate housing densities will help enhance the character and quality of the local area, whilst also being deliverable.

3.2.10 Policy HOU2 (Housing Mix and Density) [CD01, pg. 30] sets out densities to be achieved that, whilst not prescriptive, reflect the role, function and character of settlements and their respective positions in the settlement hierarchy. Site density is to be measured in terms of the number of dwellings per hectare, based on the net developable area. Collectively this approach serves to maximise land use in the most sustainable locations.

3.2.11 Density as a determinant of the suitability of development proposals is stated within Policies HOU10 and HOU11, the policy wording aims to ensure an appropriate balance between achieving higher density housing and preserving adequate space, privacy, and daylight for both existing and new residents, as well as recognising the potential for well-designed tandem or backland development. In doing so, this will optimise land use and increase housing density in appropriate locations.

- 3.2.12 Policy SA1 General Requirements [CD01, pg. 102] in setting out the general requirements for site allocations includes explicit reference to density as a strategic consideration, and forms part of the overall development strategy [CD01, PSD1 'Overall Development Strategy', criteria 4, pg14] in encouraging the efficient use of land. The role of innovative design solutions in attaining appropriate densities is explained in the Supporting Information to Policy PSD7 'Design' [CD01, 23].
- 3.2.13 Further context and background to the density assumptions is provided in the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment [ED006 para's 3.5 – 3.10], and the Site Selection Report and associated technical assessments for individual sites [ED029] proposed for allocation in the Local Plan. The Site Selection Report has sought to maximise density on sites whilst acknowledging site specific constraints and considerations.
- 3.2.14 Of particular significance in the context of para 146(b) of the NPPF, and its emphasis on promoting an uplift in density standards in town centres and other locations well served by public transport, is the approach set out in ED006 (para 3.9) that in Newcastle-under-Lyme, the Town Ward has been split apart from the rest of the central area to ensure the higher density nature of this ward is appropriately considered. This largely reflects completions of apartments (modular development) within or surrounding the town centre. This has manifested in allocations, such as TC71, having densities that equate to 180 dwellings per hectare. Optimising development densities in the context of alternatives to Green Belt release are highlighted as well within the Plan Strategy Housing Topic Paper [ED031, para 5.47, pg. 35].
- 3.2.15 The site selection report [ED029, paras 6.5-6.7 as an example] details how, in the site selection process, the Council has looked at site options for previously developed sites and / sites well served by public transport in the first instance.
- 3.2.16 Policy PSD1 [CD01, pg. 13] in criterion 4 supports the efficient use of land through windfall development.

Qu 3.3 Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in the Borough in principle? If so what are they? If not, how do you consider housing and employment needs could be met?

- 3.3.1 Yes, the Council consider that there are exceptional circumstances to alter the Borough's Green Belt.
- 3.3.2 The Housing Spatial Strategy Topic Paper [ED031] presents a detailed review of this issue to justify the Council's stance (para's 5.46 – 5.47 with the supporting text, pgs. 35-38). Para 5.47 of the Topic Paper [ED031] sets out the detail of the elements of the exceptional circumstances case by reference to Strategic Factors, consideration of Alternative Options to Green Belt Release, and Site Level Exceptional Circumstances. This approach is also echoed in the Employment Spatial Strategy Topic Paper [ED032 paras 5.12-5.13, pgs. 23-26].
- 3.3.3 There are a number of factors, including case law (detailed in [ED008a] at 4.2.3, pgs. 26-27), that the Council has had regard to in determining whether there are exceptional circumstances for amending Green Belt boundaries. These include:
- 3.3.4 *The Housing and Employment Requirement:* delivery of objectively assessed need necessitates Green Belt amendments, owing to there being insufficient sites within existing development boundaries to meet overall identified requirements through the Local Plan [CD01 (para 5.17) and examined throughout ED029]
- 3.3.5 *Green Belt constraint on Growth:* Green Belt is constraining growth in the Borough, particularly around the urbanised areas of Newcastle and Kidsgrove where there is limited available land for development within existing town centre boundaries [ED021 (para 5.11, pg. 31)]. The housing and employment land requirement cannot therefore be provided without Green Belt release.
- 3.3.6 The potential negative consequences of failing to amend Green Belt boundaries could extend to demand for new housing outstripping supply; an increasingly ageing population as young people leave the borough and an absolute reduction in the number of people of working age; increases in traffic and congestion as people unable to live close to their place of work are forced to travel longer distances for employment; and, a decline in the vibrancy and vitality of town centres as some local services and facilities becoming unviable.
- 3.3.7 The importance of allocating land to go some way to meeting the identified development needs (on greenfield land which is otherwise in highly sustainable or appropriate locations), combined with the consequences for sustainable development of not doing so, constitutes the exceptional circumstances required to justify alteration of the existing detailed Green Belt boundaries. The Local Plan seeks to do this, whilst maintaining the overall general extent of the Green Belt.
- 3.3.8 *Alternative Options to Green Belt Release:* There are significant facets to this and taking each in turn:

- 3.3.9 Issues of brownfield land availability and optimising development densities have been considered previously (see response to Qu 3.2 above) which indicate the absence of sufficient capacity from this source to obviate the need for Green Belt release and the wider character and context considerations that inform location appropriate densities.
- 3.3.10 Notwithstanding allocations such as KS3 and BL18 which have, or have had, sports provision on site, open space evaluated within [ED022 (para 6.35, pg. 80)] presents limited opportunities for development, in light of the need to have regard to the health, recreation and amenity benefits accrued from their retention, the mitigation required to compensate any loss, and consideration of alternative types of open space provision that may be deficient.
- 3.3.11 Alternative sites in the rural area would not provide a sustainable pattern of growth, with these locations having limited key facilities (including community facilities, health services, public transport, shops, and employment) and infrastructure to support extensive growth [ED005 Table 3 and Appendix 1, pgs. 13 and 16-26].
- 3.3.12 Investigations as to whether any more villages (which are currently washed over) could be inset from the green belt, and if so, sites allocated within them. Of the two villages (Keele and Whitmore) where this is an option, owing to other villages already having been inset as part of the 2009 Joint Core Spatial Strategy, only Keele is proposed to be inset (Green Belt Village Study [ED009], section 6, pg. 23). However, there are no allocations proposed within the Keele village boundary.
- 3.3.13 Neighbouring authorities accommodating identified need - bilateral discussions and statements of common ground show this is not an option [Duty-to Co-operate Statement of Compliance, CD11, pgs. 8-17].
- 3.3.14 Site level exceptional circumstances have also been considered. For housing, a list of potential allocation sites has been assessed [ED008 (Section 1.2 and Section 4, pgs. 28-40)] which alongside other technical evidence has informed identification of the proposed local plan allocation sites. In relation to Green Belt sites have been assessed against the following:
- Performance of the site against Green Belt purposes.
 - Impact of removing the site on the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt.
 - Presence/creation of a recognisable and permanent boundary
 - Proposed compensatory improvements to the remaining Green Belt.
- 3.3.15 This is also evidenced through the site assessments undertaken as part of evidence base documents, including the Sustainability Appraisal [CD03, Appendix H] and the Site Selection Report [ED029, Appendix 2, pgs. 94-409] which set out the appraisal and rationale for sites included in the preferred spatial strategy.
- 3.3.16 In terms of employment, Keele University is an asset for the Borough and the strategic objectives in the draft Local Plan seek to enable the growth of the establishment. Green Belt release in the University Growth Corridor (Site KL15) will also support the growth of key knowledge-based sectors (of importance to economic growth in the borough and

wider sub-region) directly associated with the University, in a balanced way which recognises its location in the Green Belt and in a rural location.

- 3.3.17 The strategic employment site at Junction 16 of the M6 (Site AB2) provides a sub-regional logistics focused employment park to accommodate employment development to meet a sub-regionally identified logistics need and provide for alternative HGV parking. There are no alternative available sites in the borough that could accommodate this development in a feasible and deliverable manner for the end user.
- 3.3.18 Further evidence of the exceptional circumstances case for the two strategic employment sites is set out in the Strategic Employment Sites Assessment [ED002, para 3.34, pg. 18 and Chapter 12, pgs. 56-59], allied to analysis as part of the Sustainability Appraisal [CD03 (AB2 and KL15 are referenced at numerous points and their appraisal summarised at Appendix H)], Green Belt Assessment [ED008 (page D-0 to D-1 and page D-27 to D-28)], Site Selection Report [ED029 (para 8.15, Table and Appendix 2)] and Plan Strategy Employment Topic Paper [ED032 (para's 5.12-5.13)]. Regard should also be had to the Council's responses to Matter 9, question 9.6 for AB2 and KL15.
- 3.3.19 Finally, it should be noted that two decades have passed since changes were last made to the Borough's Green Belt (ED008c, para 2.1), so the emerging Local Plan presents a timely and much needed opportunity for this designation to be reassessed in the context of attaining the most sustainable form of development up to 2040.

Qu 3.4 The Council has produced a Green Belt Assessment (ED8, 8a, 8b, 8c). Is the Council's approach to assessing Green Belt appropriate? What are your reasons for this view?

- 3.4.1 The Green Belt Assessment consists of a number of assessment stages (Part 1, 2, 3 and 4), as described in the Housing Topic Paper [ED031, para 4.10 – 4.39]. There is no single correct approach for undertaking Green Belt Assessments.
- 3.4.2 The approach adopted provides a full strategic assessment of the Green Belt within Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- 3.4.3 The Part 1 assessment [ED008c] covered the entire Green Belt by dividing it into general areas and then parcels and assessing these against the five Green Belt purposes. The Part 2 assessment [ED008b, 8a (Section 5) and 8] covered shortlisted sites and assessed these against the five Green Belt purposes. The weak and moderate performing sites were then assessed for their suitability, availability and achievability and their Green Belt impact (i.e. whether removal of the site from the Green Belt would harm Green Belt function and purposes).
- 3.4.4 The Part 2 approach [ED008c] combines both Green Belt considerations and site selection criteria to filter and identify those sites which are most suitable, available, and achievable and where their release is likely to be less harmful to the Green Belt. This approach was then also considered through the implementation of the Council's site selection methodology [ED029, para 1.4].
- 3.4.5 The approach and methodology are clearly defined at each stage and takes account of the NPPF, PPG, case law, Planning Advisory Service guidance, and good practice approaches adopted by other authorities which have been found sound at Examination.
- 3.4.6 The assessments used a combination of desktop assessment and site visits. All parcels and sites were individually visited at the time of preparing the staged report. As the Green Belt Assessments spanned a number of years, at each stage the methodology was reviewed against the latest national policy, guidance, case law, and good practice to ensure it continued to be robust and relevant.
- 3.4.7 The methodology provides an interpretation of the five purposes in the context of Newcastle-under-Lyme ensuring that the terminology and criteria is clearly defined. The methodology is deliberately set out in significant detail to enable a consistent and objective assessment of the Green Belt.
- 3.4.8 The neighbouring authorities had the opportunity to influence the approach to the Green Belt Assessment. The methodology for ED008c and ED008b was shared with the neighbouring authorities [ED008, section 3.4]. Comments received were reviewed and where appropriate amendments were made. It is agreed with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, through a Statement of Common Ground that the Council utilise the methodology set out in the Arup Green Belt Assessment [CD011, Appendix 2, para 4.22-4.26].

- 3.4.9 Overall, the approach to assessing the Green Belt is robust, justified, and consistent with national policy, guidance, case law and good practice.

Qu 3.5 Has the Green Belt Assessment adequately assessed the suitability of individual sites and their contribution towards the purposes of including land in the Green Belt? Are there any omissions in the policy?

- 3.5.1 From a Green Belt Assessment perspective, individual sites were assessed in the Part 2 assessment (ED008b, 8a (Section 5) and 8). This considered shortlisted sites being considered for release by firstly providing an assessment of these sites against the five Green Belt purposes. The weak and moderate performing sites were then assessed for their suitability, availability and achievability. Based on this, sites which were recommended to be taken forward were then assessed for their Green Belt impact. Based on the Green Belt impact, a recommendation was made as to whether to 'take site forward for further consideration' or 'exclude site from process.'
- 3.5.2 The Part 2 approach combines both Green Belt considerations and site selection criteria to filter and identify those sites which are most suitable, available, and achievable and where their release is likely to be less harmful to the Green Belt.
- 3.5.3 The assessment of the site's contribution to Green Belt purposes applies the same methodology as the Part 1 assessment (ED008c) ensuring consistency in approach. Each site was visited as part of the assessment.
- 3.5.4 The red/amber/green assessment of the site's suitability was undertaken using GIS in the first instance followed by a sense check and professional judgement. Site visits were used to identify key features. An element of professional judgement was applied in determining the suitability of the site.
- 3.5.5 Section 5.2 of ED008b confirms that the suitability criteria applied draws on the sustainability appraisal and the SHLAA and ELR (now the SHELAA) as well as guidance contained in the NPPF and PPG. Appendix D of ED008b provides justification for the criteria identified and the red/amber/green scoring categorisation.
- 3.5.6 The assessment of Green Belt impact considers whether removal of the site will harm Green Belt function and purposes. This involves an assessment of how development of the site would impact upon Green Belt purposes, whether there are any cumulative impacts due to release of adjacent sites, and what the resultant Green Belt boundary would be.
- 3.5.7 Overall, the suitability of individual sites has been robustly and consistently assessed as part of the Green Belt Assessment both from a Green Belt perspective and in terms of suitability constraints to development.
- 3.5.8 The site selection report prepared by the Council [ED029, para 5.5, pg. 10] considered the outcomes of the Green Belt Assessment in undertaking the site selection work. This is confirmed in the site selection report [ED029, para 1.4]. There are instances where, the Council's judgement, the implementation of the site selection process has led to the Council identifying sites that make a 'strong' contribution to Green Belt purposes. A separate Green Belt Assessment for the individual site was undertaken through the site

selection report, examples include TK10 [ED029, Table 17, pg. 28], AB12 [ED029, Table 27, pg. 37].

- 3.5.9 In respect of the omissions to Policy PSD5 (Green Belt), MOD020 is proposed to correct an omission from the list of sites included and ensure consistency with Policy IN1 and add reference to Madeley High School Extension Land to the list.

Qu 3.6 How has the Green Belt Assessment informed and been informed by the spatial strategy? How is it affected by other constraints?

- 3.6.1 In responding to this question, it is important to set the context for Green Belt in the Plan area. The Green Belt boundary in Newcastle-under-Lyme forms part of the wider North Staffordshire Green Belt. It covers most of the northern half of the Authority's area and is contiguous with the Green Belt within Stoke-on-Trent to the east, Cheshire East to the north and Stafford Borough to the south.
- 3.6.2 The Newcastle-under-Lyme Green Belt is drawn tightly around the urban areas of Newcastle and Kidsgrove, marking a swathe of predominantly rural land interspersed with various smaller scale settlements. The Green Belt encompasses a sizeable proportion of the Borough's overall land area. The Green Belt designation is therefore a significant policy consideration when looking at growth in the Borough, and particularly the scope for expansion around the strategic and urban centres.
- 3.6.3 The Housing Spatial Strategy Topic Paper [ED031, Para 4.11, pgs. 20-21] sets out how the Green Belt assessment evidence base has informed the Local Plan's spatial strategy and includes the following considerations and actions:
- Assessments of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Green Belt against the five Green Belt Purposes set out in the NPPF (para 144) for both discrete land parcels [ED008c] and individual site boundaries [ED008 – ED008b].
 - For sites identified as making a 'weak' or 'moderate' overall contribution to Green Belt purposes, site assessments (reflecting Arup's own independent interpretation of available evidence), looking at factors including suitability, availability, and achievability, and advised on Green Belt implications and resultant boundaries [ED008 – ED008b].
 - Advising on safeguarded land [ED008d], compensatory improvements and exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release [ED008b].
 - Production of a Green Belt village study [ED009]
 - Alongside other evidence (see ED029 para 2.20 and Section 5), informing the identification of sites for potential allocation in the Local Plan [CD01].
- 3.6.4 In establishing the spatial strategy, (and in accordance with national policy) the Council has examined all reasonable alternative options to Green Belt release to accommodate the growth levels advocated. These include (with reference to [ED31 pg. 36-37]):
- The assessment of known alternative brownfield and underutilised land within settlement boundaries
 - Optimising the development densities to ensure efficient use of land
 - Assessing the potential of surplus open space to accommodate housing
 - Reviews of alternative sites in the rural area
 - Reviews of potential options to inset villages currently washed over with Green Belt and allocate sites.
 - Duty to Co-operate – collaborating with neighbouring authorities to assess the option of meeting unmet housing needs outside the Borough.
- 3.6.5 These alternative options have been assessed through the collective evidence base and via ongoing engagement with key stakeholders and neighbouring authorities. The

Council has concluded that following assessment of these options there remains a need to amend the Green Belt to accommodate the housing requirement in full (including delivery of employment land and associated economic growth). Further consideration of this is also expressed in the Council's response to Qu 3.3.

- 3.6.6 The Green Belt Assessment has been informed by the spatial strategy as part of the process for identifying the Green Belt sites to be assessed. Section 3.1 of [ED008, pg. 12] confirms that the process involved an initial sift of sites using the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) criteria to reject sites based on hard constraints and/or lack of availability. The emerging Local Plan strategic objectives and spatial strategy were then applied to this longlist of sites, to assess them for their strategic fit, to act as a second sieve.
- 3.6.7 Beyond that, the spatial strategy was not a direct consideration or criterion as part of the individual site review process within the Green Belt Assessment. Section 3.3.5 of [ED008, pg. 25] confirms that conformity with the spatial strategy was not applied as a consideration as this forms part of the Council's further deliberations in preparing the Local Plan.
- 3.6.8 Other constraints which have been considered in the Green Belt Assessment include those listed under the 'suitability' assessment as shown in the example proforma at Appendix A of [ED008, pgs. A-0 – A02].

Qu 3.7 Has the Green Belt Assessment adequately addressed the cumulative effects of Green Belt release?

- 3.7.1 Table 16 of the Green Belt Assessment [ED008, pg. 26] sets out the methodology for assessing the Green Belt impact taking into account the implications of releasing the site from the Green Belt (in terms of any harm to the function and integrity of the Green Belt), and the resultant Green Belt boundary.
- 3.7.2 The methodology firstly asks: 'What is the impact on Green Belt function and purposes of removing the site from the Green Belt?' Based on this, the methodology then asks: 'Are there any cumulative impacts (due to release of adjacent sites)?'
- 3.7.3 There is no recognised or prescribed approach as to how this should be assessed, and the methodology is based on a review of good practice from other local authorities. The assessment has been undertaken on a qualitative and desktop basis.
- 3.7.4 The assessment of cumulative impacts in the assessment proformas firstly considers whether there are any other sites which have been recommended for further consideration either in close proximity to the assessment site or around the same settlement. The assessment then considers whether the release of all or some of these sites could exacerbate any of the impacts on Green Belt purposes.
- 3.7.5 The assessment proformas demonstrate that in most cases, the cumulative impact of further release is increased incursion into undeveloped countryside. Where there is a risk that the cumulative impact of releasing several sites would impact upon Purpose 2 by eroding the gap between defined neighbouring towns and resulting in the potential or perceived merging, this has been identified in the proformas as part of the cumulative assessment.
- 3.7.6 The assessment provides a robust and proportionate assessment of the potential cumulative effects of Green Belt release.

Qu 3.8 Is the Council's decision to not include safeguarded land soundly based?

- 3.8.1 Reaffirming the position and clear rationale expressed within ED031, the Council consider that it is fully justified in concluding that safeguarded land should not be included (Para's 4.23 – 4.28 of [ED031], pgs. 23-24). The reasons for this include:
- 3.8.2 The Local Plan [CD01] proposes a degree of flexibility with the provision of a circa 8.3% housing supply buffer (para 5.4, pg. 14). It is considered that this flexibility in housing supply, allied to the scale and nature of employment allocations, provides a supply of land which will contribute to needs beyond the end of the plan period.
- 3.8.3 More so, in relation to identifying further potential housing land (based on documents including [ED006a]) there are insufficient available Green Belt site options to 'safeguard' to provide 5 – 10 years (i.e. akin to the timeframes applied by other authorities as researched in [ED008a] App A, pgs. A-1 – A-14) housing land supply beyond the plan period. This should also be viewed in the context of the safeguarded land options presented in CD03 (paras N97-N103).
- 3.8.4 It is also the case that there might be an early review of the Local Plan commenced as the spatial strategy (including the role of Green Belt) may need to be revisited in the light of new legislation. This is considered in more detail as part of Matter 1, Qu1.12, para 1.12.4). Allied to this, uncertainty remains as to the implementation of reforms, including national development management policies and potentially a further revised National Planning Policy Framework on Plan Making, and this uncertainty extends further to the likely local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and the differing geographies for Plan making that will arise as a consequence.

Implications of the NPPF (2024)

Although the Plan will be examined under the provisions of the NPPF December 2023 individual planning applications will be considered under the provisions of the version of the NPPF current at that time. The December 2024 NPPF introduced the concept of “Grey Belt”.

Qu 3.9 How relevant to this Examination are the provisions of the NPPF2024?

3.9.1 The Council’s response to Matter 1, Qu1.12, para 1.12.4 details the transitional arrangements and relevance to the examination of the provisions of the 2024 NPPF.

Qu 3.10 If you consider this to be the case, which sites within the Green Belt Review would be considered to be Grey Belt?

3.10.1 Please refer to the response provided to Qu 3.9. If the 2024 version of the NPPF is deemed to be relevant, the Green Belt Assessment methodology would need to be updated to reflect changes to the 2024 NPPF and PPG. This would require a reassessment of the sites based on the new methodology in order to identify grey belt. Changes to the method are likely to alter the assessment outcomes and as such, using the existing outcomes from the Green Belt assessment to determine which sites are grey belt would not be compliant with NPPF 2024.

Qu 3.11 Will the “Golden Rules” have any implications for proposed sites?

3.11.1 Important aspects of the evidence base, such as the Viability Study [ED004] have not had regard to the implications of the Golden Rules. Nor have they been considered in the context of the Statements of Common Ground with site promoters and the prospective impacts on deliverability that might ensue. Therefore, for the purposes of the examination and in recognition of the transitional arrangements, it is considered that within the examination, the Golden Rules will not have any direct implications for the proposed sites.

2. Appendix 1 – List of Reference Documents

A. The Council's evidence for Green Belt is set out below.

B. National Policy:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2023 and 2024)
- National Planning Practice Guidance

C. Government Regulations and Acts:

- Town and Country Planning Act
- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

D. Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan Submission / Examination Documents

- CD01 Local Plan
- CD02 Local Plan Policies Map
- CD03 Sustainability Appraisal
- CD11 Duty-to-Co-operate Statement of Compliance
- ED002 Strategic Employment Sites Assessment
- ED005 Rural Topic Paper
- ED006 Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment Methodology
- ED006a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment
- ED008 Green Belt Assessment (Part 4)
- ED008a Green Belt Assessment (Part 3)
- ED008b Green Belt Assessment (Part 2)
- ED008c Green Belt Assessment (Part 1)
- ED008d Safeguarded Land Assessment
- ED009 Green Belt Village Study
- ED021 Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kidsgrove Urban Capacity and Town Regeneration Study
- ED022 Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy
- ED029 Site Selection Report and Assessments
- ED031 Plan Strategy Housing Topic Paper
- ED032 Plan Strategy Employment Topic Paper