

CHAPTER 7: COUNTRYSIDE

INTRODUCTION

Objections to First Deposit

1132/371 – Mr T J Grant; 1275/159 – CPRE; 1305/238 – Berkswell Society; 1378/521 – Hockley Heath Parish Council.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does this chapter give sufficient priority to Green Belt policies compared with other countryside issues, or should Green Belt policies be the subject of a separate chapter, as in the adopted UDP;*
- *Does the Introduction recognise that current policy has not been successful in protecting the Green Belt, failing to provide a clear steer on farm diversification and recognising the nature of Solihull's rural settlements;*
- *7.0.1: Does the reference to the "Meriden Gap" imply a more restrictive or two-tier approach to the protection of the Green Belt in Solihull;*
- *7.0.1: Does the Plan recognise that over 90% of the Green Belt in the area between A45, M42, A452, Coleshill Heath Road/Bickenhill Lane has been removed from the Green Belt over the last 30 years.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.1 The introduction to this chapter sets the context to the Green Belt and countryside within Solihull. SMBC explains that the adopted UDP [CD111] sets out Green Belt policies in a separate chapter, primarily because it contains no separate policies for the countryside. However, this UDP included a commitment to prepare a Countryside Strategy [CD95], which recognises the pressures for change in the countryside from development pressures, a surplus of farmland and the importance of farm-based diversification. This strategy also recognised that, although Green Belt policies provide protection from inappropriate development, it cannot ensure that the countryside is managed in the longer term, and recommended including additional countryside policies in the UDP Review.
- 7.2 The Plan should also be considered as a whole, and in this context, it includes a firm commitment to protecting and maintaining the Green Belt as part of its fundamental principles and principal objectives in Chapter 2. The introduction to Chapter 7 sets out the Green Belt context first, which in my view gives sufficient priority to this important element of policy. The importance of Green Belt policy is indisputable, as confirmed in PPG2. Other national guidance, such as PPS7 (¶ 26), confirms that countryside and other planning policies do not override or overturn Green Belt policy. National Green Belt policy confirms the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is carried forward into Policy C2 of the SUDPR. Although the SUDPR was prepared in the context of the *Rural White Paper* and draft PPS7, the latest version [CD175] generally reflects the latest guidance in PPS7. It also reflects the limited guidance on the Green Belt in new RPG11 (¶ 3.14) [CD51G], subject to a minor amendment to paragraph 7.0.6 [CD175].
- 7.3 The Green Belt has particular significance in Solihull, where it helps to prevent the growth of the main urban area, keep urban areas and rural settlements separate and retain the rural character of the countryside. However, even here it is important to maintain an appropriate balance between Green Belt policy and economic, leisure and other policies. As SMBC says, it is necessary to take account of the full range of policy issues, including guidance in PPG2 & PPS7. Policies C1, C2 & C3 provide an appropriate framework for considering proposals for development in the Green Belt, whilst other countryside policies, such as Policies C6, C7 & C10, confirm that particular developments should avoid harm or be consistent with Green Belt policy.

- 7.4 Consequently, I share SMBC's view that Green Belt policy is given sufficient priority in this chapter and is appropriately included within the Countryside chapter. The inclusion of Green Belt policies in a chapter covering most aspects of the countryside represents a positive approach to the countryside, whilst ensuring that Green Belt policies are applied properly and consistently. Since all of Solihull's countryside is in the Green Belt, it does not need to be included in a specific Green Belt chapter. The suggestion that the whole chapter should be entitled *Green Belt* is misplaced, since it covers a wider range of issues than solely Green Belt. Consequently, no amendments are needed to the introductory text to address these concerns of CPRE & the Berkswell Society.
- 7.5 CPRE raises several detailed concerns about these introductory paragraphs. SMBC acknowledges that the housing and employment proposals in the adopted UDP have had an impact on the Green Belt. But in general, unplanned development in the Green Belt has been successfully resisted during the past decade, and the proposals in this Review will have much less impact on the remaining Green Belt. There may be other unplanned proposals, such as the MSA at Catherine-de-Barnes, that might have an impact on the Green Belt, but these are subject to other statutory procedures and decisions. I realise that other past developments may have led to some erosion of the Green Belt, but these would have been considered in the context of the established Green Belt policies. I also recognise the importance of the *Arden* landscape, the nature of the rural settlements in Solihull and the other points raised by CPRE, but these are largely covered in other parts of this chapter and the SUDPR. These introductory paragraphs set the context for the policies that follow, with further guidance being given on such developments as farm-based diversification and the character of existing rural settlements in the Green Belt. I cannot see that the text is inappropriate or incorrect, and see little justification for the amendments sought by CPRE.
- 7.6 Although its precise boundaries have never been defined, the *Meriden Gap* is generally accepted as the rural area between the eastern edge of the West Midlands conurbation and the western edge of Coventry. The importance of retaining separation between these two urban areas was recognised from 1948 [CD149]. Since then, the *Meriden Gap* has featured in previous RPG, Structure Plans and decisions of the Secretary of State [UDP159/2]. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that the reference to the *Meriden Gap* is not intended to introduce a two-tier Green Belt; a single set of policies relate to all areas of Green Belt within Solihull. However, the function of the Green Belt between Birmingham and Coventry is of particular importance and of wider regional significance than other parts of the Green Belt, although it does not imply any difference in the outcome of the application of Green Belt policy.
- 7.7 In view of the historical and strategic significance of the *Meriden Gap*, I am satisfied that it is appropriate to refer to this area in the introductory text. It does not necessarily imply a stronger policy of development restraint in this area than in other parts of the Green Belt. Nor does it imply that the Green Belt around Hockley Heath or other Green Belt settlements would be treated any differently or have any lesser significance. The basic purposes of including land in the Green Belt remain the same, as set out in PPG2 (¶ 1.5), and there is no firm evidence of a two-tier approach to the Green Belt. Much of HHPC's objection may stem from the historic designation of land in that area as *Interim* Green Belt, where several development opportunities were realised in the last adopted UDP. However, the remaining land now has full confirmed Green Belt status and would be subject to exactly the same tests as Green Belt in the *Meriden Gap*. Since para 7.0.1 sets the historical context for the Green Belt policies that follow, I cannot see that the references to the *Meriden Gap* are misleading, counter-productive or undermine the Plan's credibility or implementation. In my view, they are wholly appropriate in reflecting the

strategic importance of this part of the Green Belt, particularly in the past.

- 7.8 Mr Grant is particularly concerned about the past loss of Green Belt land to developments such as BBP, Birmingham Industrial Park, Elmdon Trading Estate, hotels and other developments. He thinks a two-tier policy operates, permitting development on corporate-owned land whilst operating a very strict Green Belt policy for land owned by local residents. However, most of this land was removed from the Green Belt on the basis of some very special circumstances that had to be demonstrated at the time, either to the LPA at the time or, as in many cases, to the Secretary of State. Para 7.0.1 merely reflects the historic situation, confirming that over 60% of the Borough remains in the Green Belt, summarising some of the reasons for the past release of Green Belt land and confirming the past success of Green Belt policies in resisting numerous speculative developments. In my view, the text is correct, soundly based and properly reflects the past situation in terms of the Green Belt context.

Recommendation

7.9 *I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by amending paragraph 7.0.6 to update the reference to the latest Regional Planning Guidance [CD175].*

POLICY C1: DESIGNATION OF A GREEN BELT

Objections to First Deposit

1126/305 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1250/1201 – Mind the Gap; 1275/161 – CPRE; 1371/347 – Gallagher Estates; 1373/1005 – Granby Farms Ltd; 1378/522 – Hockley Heath Parish Council; See also Hockley Heath Schedule (Annex D).

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does Policy C1 take account of the need to provide high quality employment sites over the Plan period, especially in terms of realising the growth potential of the Coventry-Solihull-Warwickshire High-Technology Corridor;*
- *Should the Plan ensure that there are no further encroachments into the Green Belt in the area of the “Meriden Gap”;*
- *Should Hampton-in-Arden be washed over by the Green Belt rather than being an inset settlement;*
- *Should the Green Belt boundary be amended to include certain long-term housing sites and employment site E1/4 in the Green Belt;*
- *Should the second sentence of the Policy be deleted, since none of the new housing sites are on Green Belt land and employment site 4/1 is not referred to in the Policy;*
- *Has sufficient safeguarded land been allocated to justify the permanence of Green Belt boundaries;*
- *(7.1.2): Does the reference to the “Meriden Gap” imply a more restrictive or two-tier approach to the protection of the Green Belt in Solihull;*
- *(7.1.3): Should the Plan review the inner Green Belt boundaries around small inset villages to prevent the increasing development of rear garden land adjoining the Green Belt, particularly around Hockley Heath;*
- *(7.1.4): Should the text be amended to reflect changes made since the First Deposit version of the Plan.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

- 7.10 Policy C1 reaffirms the designation of the Green Belt in the Borough, whose boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map. Apart from some very minor changes to rectify obvious anomalies, these boundaries remain unaltered from

those in the adopted UDP. I note that minor amendments are proposed to the text of paras 7.1.3-7.1.4 to update the reference to RPG11 and confirm the status of Housing Sites 7 & 19 as major developed sites in Green Belt [CD175].

- 7.11 In response to Gallagher, Chapter 4 of the Review addresses the employment aspects relating to the CSW-HTC, and I have dealt with this issue under Policy E1. RPG11 (Policy PA7) acknowledges the need to make provision of Regional Investment Sites within the CSW-HTC, and refers to BBP & BVP, including BVP2. It also confirms that the Green Belt should be retained, allowing an adjustment of boundaries only where this is necessary to support urban regeneration (¶ 3.14). The SUDPR reflects this guidance by retaining nearly all of the remaining Green Belt in Solihull, apart from those sites referred to in para 7.1.4. Any further potential employment sites in the Green Belt within CSW-HTC would have to demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt land, based on urban regeneration and employment considerations. Since the SUDPR concludes that there is no need to allocate further employment land in the Green Belt, over and above current proposals, it would be inappropriate to make specific reference to the possibility of further employment sites in the CSW-HTC in this general policy.
- 7.12 *Mind the Gap* is an umbrella pressure group concerned about protecting the Green Belt in the *Meriden Gap*, referring to several recent developments. SMBC shares this concern for the protection of this part of the Green Belt and the SUDPR proposes no changes to the Green Belt in this area. The potential developments mentioned, such as widening of the M42, MSA at Catherine-de-Barnes, possible extension of BIA's main runway and the National Stadium, along with inappropriate housing, are not proposals of the SUDPR and would be subject to separate procedures and decisions.
- 7.13 In response to HHPC, I have dealt with references to the *Meriden Gap* in a similar objection to para 7.0.1 (see above). I come to the same conclusions on para 7.1.2, that it is appropriate to make the reference under Policy C1 due to the wider strategic importance of this part of the Green Belt. However, I consider it would be helpful if the specific purposes of the Green Belt in Solihull were spelt out, as in the adopted UDP, so that there is no doubt about which of the Green Belt purposes set out in PPG2 (¶ 1.5) are relevant to Solihull, along with any particular local issues, such as the *Meriden Gap*.
- 7.14 I deal with the possibility of amending the status of Hampton-in-Arden as an inset settlement rather than being washed over by the Green Belt under Policy C3. I have already dealt with the issue of housing site 6 and the long-term housing sites under Policies H1, H1/1 & H2 in Chapter 3 of my report, and with BVP2 (employment site E1/4) under Policies E1, E1/3 & E1/4 in Chapter 4. The question of designating sufficient safeguarded land, raised by Granby Farms, is dealt with under Policy H2, in Chapter 3 of my report.
- 7.15 The second sentence of Policy C1 confirms that when the Green Belt boundaries were defined in the adopted UDP, account was taken of the need for housing proposals to relate to a longer timescale than that of the Plan. This reflects the definition of Green Belt boundaries in the adopted UDP, in accordance with PPG2 (¶ 2.12). PPG2 (¶ 2.6) also confirms that, once defined in an adopted development plan, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, in order to maintain the degree of permanence the Green Belt should have. Apart from a few minor amendments to correct anomalies and release BVP2, no other changes have been made to the Green Belt boundaries defined in the adopted UDP. As in the adopted plan, Policy C1 does not refer to specific sites or deletions from the Green Belt. However, specific sites are referred to in para 7.1.4, with further amendments proposed clarifying the status of specific sites and deleting the reference to safeguarded land for new housing [CD156]. Para 7.1.3 is also to be amended to confirm

that one of the objectives of RPG11 [CD51G] is the retention of the Green Belt, except where this is necessary to support urban regeneration [CD175]. In my view, these amendments would appropriately clarify and update the situation, and meet these elements of CPRE's & HIAS' objections.

- 7.16 Residents in Hockley Heath are particularly concerned about the increasing development of land adjoining the Green Belt, particularly the rear gardens of properties along Stratford Road and Aylesbury Road that adjoin the Green Belt of the neighbouring local authority. In this locality, the Green Belt follows the boundary between Solihull MBC and Warwick DC. To the east of the properties in Stratford Road and on the northern side of Aylesbury Road, it follows the rear boundaries of the gardens, whilst on the southern side of Aylesbury Road, the boundary includes most of the rear gardens of these properties in the Green Belt, thus preventing any inappropriate development. I cannot identify any exceptional circumstances that would justify reviewing or tightening these boundaries in terms of PPG2 (¶ 2.6) and, having seen the land involved, I am satisfied that the boundary shown on the Proposals Map, unaltered from the adopted UDP, is appropriate.

Recommendation

- 7.17 I RECOMMEND** that the Plan is **modified** by:
- (i) *amending paragraph 7.1.3 to update the reference to the strategic objective on the Green Belt in the latest RPG11 [CD175];*
 - (ii) *amending paragraph 7.1.4 to clarify and correct the situation on housing sites and employment sites in terms of the Green Belt status [CD175];*
 - (iii) *amending the text accompanying Policy C1 to confirm the specific purposes of the Green Belt in Solihull, including any local factors such as the Meriden Gap.*

POLICY C1 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

- 7.18 Several objections have been submitted seeking the removal of particular sites from the Green Belt. In considering these site-specific objections, the starting point in every case is national policy on Green Belts. PPG2 (¶ 2.1/2.6) confirms that the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and that once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved, it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances; detailed boundaries defined in adopted development plans should be altered only exceptionally. In this case, detailed Green Belt boundaries were defined either in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Local Plan, or in the adopted UDP [CD111]. This latter plan took account of the need to relate housing proposals to a longer timescale than that of the Plan, in accordance with PPG2 (¶ 2.8/2.12). PPG2 (¶ 2.7) confirms that where existing development plans are being revised and updated, Green Belt boundaries should not be changed unless exceptional circumstances exist which necessitate such revision.
- 7.19 New RPG11 [CD51G; ¶ 3.14] contains no specific policy on Green Belts, but one of its spatial strategy objectives is to retain the Green Belt, except where adjustments are necessary to support urban regeneration. It also seeks to resist peripheral expansion for housing (¶ 3.8) and the extension of the boundaries of the major urban areas (Policy CF3), generally restricting housing in rural areas to local needs and to support local services (Policy CF2), as well as protecting and maintaining local character (Policy RR1).
- 7.20 SMBC confirms that in the SUDPR the approved Green Belt boundaries in the adopted UDP have been retained [CD142]. The only exceptions are where land is proposed for new development (such as BVP2) or where there are obvious anomalies or errors. In considering requests to amend Green Belt boundaries

in the SUDPR, the clearly established test is whether there are any exceptional circumstances that would justify the amendment, having regard to national policy and the regional strategy established in the latest RPG11.

Land at Widney Manor Road, Bentley Heath**Objections to First Deposit** 1006/568 – Mr D Acton**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Knowle/Dorridge to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.21 This 6.67ha site lies on the western side of Widney Manor Road, opposite Smiths Lane, with the Birmingham-Leamington railway line at the rear and a cemetery to the south. Mr Acton suggests a range of uses, if the land is removed from the Green Belt, including cemetery, housing, sports facility, business park and/or education, possibly involving the dedication of some land to SMBC. Nevertheless, there can be no dispute that the site currently lies in the approved Green Belt, defined in the adopted UDP. The present Green Belt boundary is clearly marked by Four Ashes Road/Browns Lane, and land to the west lies in the relatively narrow area of Green Belt separating Knowle/Dorridge from the main urban area of Solihull. In its present designation, it helps to prevent the outward sprawl of Bentley Heath & Knowle/Dorridge and safeguard the adjoining countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions.

7.22 The deletion of this site from the Green Belt would effectively create an isolated island of land within the Green Belt, which would not accord with national and local planning policy on Green Belts. It would also give the potential for further development, as the objector suggests, which could erode the rural character of this western fringe of Bentley Heath. Some of the possible uses suggested, such as a cemetery or outdoor sports and recreation, may not be inappropriate in the Green Belt. However, in the absence of any very special circumstances, the other suggested uses would clearly be inappropriate in the Green Belt. I am not fully aware of all the circumstances applying to the other developments referred to in the representations, but none provide sufficient justification to exclude this site from the Green Belt. I have dealt with general housing provision in Chapter 3 of my report, where I conclude that there is no overriding case to release additional land for housing, particularly on greenfield sites within the approved Green Belt. Consequently, I can see no exceptional circumstances that would justify the deletion of this site from the approved Green Belt at this time.

Recommendation

7.23 I RECOMMEND <u>NO MODIFICATIONS</u> to the Plan to address this objection.
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Bickenhill Lane and Blackfirs Lane, Solihull**Objections to First Deposit** 1132/372 – Mr T J Grant.**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.24 Mr Grant argues that properties in Blackfirs Lane & Bickenhill Lane should be removed from the Green Belt, giving it the same status as BBP and other developments on land released from the Green Belt, on the grounds that this area no longer functions as Green Belt. The land in question lies in the approved Green Belt, defined in the adopted UDP, which forms an integral part of the remaining narrow gap between BBP/NEC and Marston Green/Chelmsley Wood. Although the land is occupied by long-standing houses along the road frontages, it does contribute to the character of the area and prevent the spread of the built-up area, safeguarding the remaining open land from further encroachment. In my view, none of the reasons put forward, including Human Rights issues, the alleged two-tier approach to Green Belt, references to RPG11, previous removal of land from the Green Belt and other points, provide the type of exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the removal of this land from the Green Belt at this time.

Recommendation

7.25 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

68 Kelsey Lane, Balsall Common**Objections to First Deposit** 1184/284 – Mr P Lynch**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Balsall Common to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.26 This land comprises part of the rear gardens of properties on the southern side of Kelsey Lane, centred on No.68, extending to about 1.83ha. The current Green Belt boundary, originally defined in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP, follows a somewhat arbitrary and largely undefined line across these rear gardens. I understand that the land was considered for possible long-term housing at the 1995 UDP inquiry, [CD128; p.89-90], but was rejected on Green Belt grounds and unsuitability for housing. Since then, there has been no change in physical circumstances.

7.27 I recognise that Green Belt boundaries should be defensible and capable of being maintained as a permanent feature. In this case, the current boundary is not ideal, but there are reference points on the ground nearby and it can be identified on a map. The existence of a more defensible and clearly marked boundary within the Green Belt does not necessarily justify moving the Green Belt boundary outwards. With its current Green Belt status, the land helps to prevent the outward spread of Balsall Common and safeguard the adjoining countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions. The fact that

the land forms part of rear gardens with stables and other outbuildings does not diminish that role, since these are relatively large open plots which extend well into the Green Belt and have a visual relationship with the adjoining countryside.

- 7.28 Moreover, the release of this land would noticeably extend the built-up area of the settlement into the relatively narrow area of Green Belt between Balsall Common and Coventry. It would also open up opportunities for a significant amount of new development, as shown on the illustrative plan for more than 40 new houses on this land. I am aware that planning permission was granted in the past for 4 dwellings, but this was entirely on that part of the site within the development limits of the settlement. I have dealt with the issue of housing provision in Chapter 3 of my report and, having withdrawn previous objections, the objector does not now press a case based on housing need. Consequently, I can see no exceptional circumstances that might justify amending the approved Green Belt boundary in this locality at this time.

Recommendation

7.29 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

The Lodge, Dorridge Road, Dorridge

Objections to First Deposit 1188/96 – Mr R Marshall

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Dorridge to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.30 This 0.2ha site comprises *The Lodge*, a single-storey dwelling with garden and detached garage lying on the southern side of Dorridge Road on the eastern fringe of Dorridge. It lies in the approved Green Belt, here clearly defined by property boundaries to the west, originally established in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that this would represent a minor adjustment to the Green Belt boundary, without having any strategic implications.
- 7.31 Formerly the lodge to *The Ards*, a large house to the south-east since demolished, the dwelling lies close to the road, but is separated from the row of detached dwellings to the west by the front garden and a former track. I realise that this is the only house fronting this side of the road in the Green Belt, lying opposite houses within the development limits of Dorridge. However, there is an appreciable gap between the houses in the main built-up area of Dorridge and *The Lodge*. Furthermore, the property is set in a relatively large plot adjoining the former grounds of *The Ards*, a large area of open land to the east and south. Although the site is fenced off from this adjoining land, I consider the forward siting and different orientation of the dwelling gives it a closer relationship with this adjoining open land than with the more built-up suburban area of Dorridge. This accords with the view of an appeal inspector who was considering a proposal to extend *The Lodge* in 2002.
- 7.32 In its present Green Belt designation, the land helps to prevent the outward spread of the built-up area of Dorridge and safeguard the adjoining open land from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions. Its release from the Green Belt would not only extend the development limits of Knowle further

eastwards along the southern side of Dorridge Road, but also open up possibilities for further intensification of development along the road frontage and to the rear, eroding the character of this attractive rural fringe of Dorridge. It could also lead to pressures for the development of the adjoining open land, which is subject to other objections which I deal with in Chapter 3A of my report. Since the designation of the Green Belt in this locality, there have been no changes in physical circumstances, and so I can identify no exceptional circumstances that might justify amending the Green Belt boundary in respect of this site.

Recommendation

7.33 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Myrtle Cottage Farm, Coventry Road, Bickenhill

Objections to First Deposit 1358/899 – Bollerton Properties/Dellington Enterprises

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.34 This site lies on the northern side of the main A45, adjacent to the M42 (J6), and is surrounded by roads, including the NEC spur road and other link roads. I understand that the site has been used for commercial purposes for some time and was previously part of a possible site for the National Stadium, now abandoned. In this locality, the Green Belt boundary is firmly defined by the M42, with all land to the east, both north and south of the A45, included in the approved Green Belt defined in the adopted UDP. Its present designation helps to safeguard the countryside from encroachment and protect a vulnerable part of the *Meriden Gap*, both valid Green Belt functions.

7.35 The exclusion of this site from the Green Belt would breach established Green Belt boundaries and effectively create an isolated island within the Green Belt. This would be inappropriate, both in terms of national and local planning policy and its potential consequences for further development, eroding what is left of the open and rural character of this locality. I recognise that, in its present condition, the site does not enhance the appearance of this visually sensitive area, which a high quality new development might do. However, given its location within the approved Green Belt, I do not consider this is sufficient reason to exclude it from the Green Belt, particularly bearing in mind national guidance in PPG2 (¶ 2.6). I realise the site lies in a strategic location, alongside the M42 & A45, close to public transport facilities, including BIA, but the same could be said of many Green Belt sites in this particular locality. I can therefore see no exceptional circumstances that might justify excluding this site from the Green Belt at this time.

Recommendation

7.36 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Land at Fordbridge and Marston Green**Objections to First Deposit** 1361/1032 – Bulpitt Trust**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.37 Bulpitt Trust argues that all the land south of the A452 and west of BBP at Marston Green should be excluded from the Green Belt and shown as urban greenspace or other land uses, since it does not function as Green Belt. The objection is associated with a specific proposal for housing and open space on land at Bickenhill Lane, which I deal with in Chapter 3A of my report.

7.38 The land in question lies in the approved Green Belt, defined in the adopted UDP, which forms an integral part of the remaining narrow green wedge between BBP/BIA/NEC and Marston Green/Chelmsley Wood. Contrary to the objector's view, I consider the land does perform valid Green Belt functions, in helping to prevent the outward spread of the urban area, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preventing the coalescence of Marston Green/Chelmsley Wood with the BBP/BIA/NEC complex. In fact, it is a relatively narrow and particularly vulnerable area of Green Belt within which further erosion should, in my view, be resisted. Apart from the provision of additional housing and open space, no exceptional circumstances are put forward to justify the removal of this land from the Green Belt, and I can see no inconsistencies in its present designation. Consequently, I conclude that no amendments to the Green Belt boundary are necessary in this instance.

Recommendation

7.39 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Hampton Manor Homes, Hampton-in-Arden**Objections to First Deposit** 1374/560 – Hampton Manor Homes**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the inset boundary of Hampton-in-Arden to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.40 Hampton Manor Homes lies on the western fringe of Hampton-in-Arden behind the properties in High Street/Solihull Road. The objector seeks to exclude the walled garden and outbuildings to allow for a development designed to meet the care facilities of this special needs group. SMBC confirms that the inset boundary defining the settlement limits of Hampton-in-Arden was carefully considered both before and during the 1995 UDP inquiry [CD128; p.135-137]. The current Green Belt boundary is tightly drawn around the main built-up area, and the present designation of this land helps to prevent the outward spread of Hampton-in-Arden and safeguard the surrounding countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions.

- 7.41 The exclusion of this land would noticeably extend the settlement limits, which with the possibility of further development, could erode the rural setting of the village, particularly important given the special character and Conservation Area status of the village. In my view, any further development related to the special needs of Hampton Manor Homes should be justified in terms of normal Green Belt policies, and consequently, I can see no exceptional circumstances that might justify the exclusion of this land from the Green Belt.

Recommendation

7.42 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Manor Hotel, Birmingham Road, Meriden

Objections to First Deposit 1385/982 – Manor Hotel; 1415/94 - Manor House Hotel.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the inset boundary of Meriden to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.43 This 0.57ha site forms part of the car park at the rear of the Manor Hotel on the northern side of Birmingham Road. In the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and the adopted UDP, the Green Belt boundary follows a line along the rear wall of the front part of the hotel building, but cutting through the rear wing. As part of this Review, SMBC reviewed this boundary and proposes a new line around the rear and side edge of the main hotel buildings, retaining the rear car park in the Green Belt. The objectors ask for the whole site, including the buildings and rear car park to be excluded from the Green Belt, on the grounds that the proposed boundary is an anomaly. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that this would represent a minor amendment to the Green Belt boundary, rather than having any strategic implications.
- 7.44 In this locality, the Green Belt boundary is generally tightly drawn around the main built-up part of the village, except for an area of "safeguarded" land immediately to the north-west of this site. SMBC's proposed boundary would be clearly defined along the rear and side walls of the hotel buildings, reflecting the present extent of built development and having regard to a 1997 appeal decision which dismissed proposals to extend the hotel and car park. At that time, the inspector concluded that the northern part of the site gave an appearance of continuity with the countryside and formed part of the open surroundings of the buildings, serving the important function of defining the edge of the built-up area. I can see no reason to disagree with these views. Although the suggested Green Belt boundary is clearly marked by a hedgerow and trees, there are gaps through which the adjoining fields can be seen. In any event, the existence of an alternative defensible outer boundary is no reason to justify amending the proposed boundary which, in my view, would be equally clear and defensible. Despite the hard surfaces, the open car park clearly has a different character to that of the existing hotel buildings and has a relationship with the adjoining countryside.
- 7.45 With its present Green Belt status, the site helps to prevent the outward spread of Meriden and safeguards the adjoining countryside from further encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions, particularly in this sensitive area of the *Meriden Gap*. The release of this land from the Green Belt would not only physically extend the development limits of Meriden, but also open up

the possibilities for further built development on this land, eroding the rural character of this eastern fringe of the settlement and encroaching into its rural surroundings. I note that there are no current plans to develop this land, but any future extensions to the hotel should be assessed in the light of Green Belt policies and the circumstances at the time. Consequently, I can see no exceptional circumstances that would justify a further amendment to the Green Belt boundary to exclude this part of the site.

Recommendation

7.46 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Land at The Clock Inn, Coventry Road, Bickenhill

Objections to First Deposit 1400/667 – Punch Travel Inns.

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.47 This land comprises *The Clock Inn* with its car park and associated buildings lying on the southern side of the main A45 opposite the BIA/NEC complex. The approved Green Belt boundary currently runs along the A45, including the area to the south in the Green Belt. I recognise that this is a long-established commercial site, with a close physical and functional relationship with the airport and NEC, and sited along the important A45 road corridor. However, although most of the eastern part of the site is developed, the western part remains open and makes some contribution to the character of the adjoining mainly rural area. Its present designation helps to prevent the spread of built development and safeguard the countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions, as well as protecting the remaining area of Green Belt.

7.48 To exclude this site from the Green Belt would not only breach a long-established Green Belt boundary, but also allow possibilities for further development, which could erode the character of the area and lead to pressures for the development of adjoining land. I recognise that parts of the site are undeveloped, but PPG2 (¶ 2.6) confirms that Green Belt boundaries should not be altered merely because land has become derelict. Nothing in the latest RPG11 suggests that land should be released from the Green Belt to meet business or tourism objectives, unless needed to support urban regeneration, which is not the case here. In my view, any proposals for further development or redevelopment of this site, including business and tourist accommodation, should be considered in terms of Green Belt policy, particularly given the vulnerable nature of this part of the *Meriden Gap*. Consequently, I do not consider that the type of exceptional circumstances that might justify the exclusion of this site from the Green Belt have been demonstrated in this case.

Recommendation

7.49 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Land at Grove Road, Knowle**Objections to First Deposit** 1428/985 – Mr A Smith**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Knowle to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.50 This site comprises 4 detached houses and gardens on the northern side of Grove Road on the eastern fringe of Knowle. Currently lying in the approved Green Belt defined in the adopted UDP, the eastern boundary of the development limits of Knowle are firmly defined by a footpath adjoining the new housing off Middlefield Avenue. Most of the properties to the east have relatively long rear gardens which adjoin open fields and contribute to the rural character of the surroundings, in contrast to the more intensively developed part of the main built-up area to the west.

7.51 The present Green Belt designation helps to prevent the outward spread of Knowle and safeguard the surrounding countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt functions. However, the exclusion of this land from the Green Belt would result in a noticeable eastward extension of the development limits of Knowle, with the potential for further development, eroding the rural character of this locality. No exceptional circumstances are put forward to justify this amendment, and I can therefore see no basis on which to support the exclusion of this land from the Green Belt.

Recommendation

7.52 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Land between 114-200 Kenilworth Road, Knowle**Objections to First Deposit** 1434/870 – Mrs Byrnes**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft**Key issue**

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Knowle to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.53 This site comprises several detached houses with grounds fronting the southern side of Kenilworth Road on the eastern fringe of Knowle. It currently lies beyond the development limits defined in the adopted UDP in the approved Green Belt. The spacious nature of the dwellings and well-vegetated grounds contribute to the rural quality of the area, surrounded by countryside on all but the western side, in marked contrast to the more intensely developed part of the main built-up area of Knowle to the west. In physical and visual terms, it relates more to the surrounding countryside than the suburban area of Knowle, and its current designation helps to check the sprawl of Knowle/Dorrige and safeguard the countryside from encroachment, both valid Green Belt purposes.

- 7.54 The exclusion of this area of land from the Green Belt would result in a significant eastward extension of the development limits of Knowle into the surrounding countryside, with the potential for considerable further infill development, harming the present rural character of the area and failing to reflect the present pattern of development. There is no longer any question of blight from potential road schemes and I can identify no significant changes or exceptional circumstances since this land was designated as Green Belt in earlier plans. Consequently, there are no grounds to justify an amendment to the Green Belt boundary in this case.

Recommendation

7.55 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

Rear of 129 – 185 Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common

Objections to First Deposit 1436/621 – Mr M E Pyper

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Balsall Common to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.56 This site comprises part of the rear gardens of houses fronting the eastern side of Kenilworth Road, including the car park of Rose Court. It extends to about 1ha and adjoins public open space associated with new housing off Grosvenor Crescent. The current Green Belt boundary, originally defined in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP, follows the largely undefined line of a former public footpath (M146A – originally marking a parish boundary) across the rear gardens of these properties.
- 7.57 I recognise that there have been some important changes in the character of this locality, including the building of new houses and provision of a new area of public open space adjoining this objection site. I also realise that the rear gardens of these properties have been extended to the boundary of the public open space and the public footpath has been moved twice. However, these changed circumstances do not represent the type of exceptional circumstances necessary to justify amending the approved Green Belt boundary. With its present Green Belt status, the land helps to prevent the outward spread of Balsall Common and safeguard the open character of the adjoining open space and wider countryside, both valid Green Belt functions.
- 7.58 I realise that, for much of its length, the current Green Belt boundary cuts across rear gardens and is not marked by any features on the ground. However, from taking existing boundary features at various reference points along its route, the line of the boundary is readily identifiable on a plan. In any event, the existence of an alternative more defensible boundary beyond the currently defined line does not necessarily justify the amendment of the Green Belt boundary. Similarly, the change of use of the adjoining land from farmland to public open space and subsequent diversion of the public footpath do not provide sufficient reasons to alter the Green Belt boundary.
- 7.59 Furthermore, the release of this significant swathe of rear garden land from the Green Belt would open up the opportunity for further development, eroding the character of this north-eastern fringe of the settlement and extending its built-up area. It might also set a precedent for a similar

amendment to the Green Belt boundary along the extended rear gardens of the properties to the north of Lavender Hall Lane, which would further erode the rural character and setting of this part of Balsall Common. Consequently, I conclude that the factors advanced do not represent the type of exceptional circumstances that would justify the amendment of the Green Belt boundary in this locality at this time.

Recommendation

7.60 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

29 Blythe Way, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit

1454/533 – Mr B McElholm(Ketley)

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the Green Belt boundary around Solihull to exclude this land from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.61 This 0.7ha site is occupied by a detached house and garden lying at the southern end of Blythe Way, adjoining Brueton Park, south-east of Solihull town centre. The current Green Belt boundary, originally defined in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP, excludes this site from the urban area of Solihull.
- 7.62 The particular circumstances advanced in support of this amendment largely relate to the historic nature, relevance and inadequacy of the current Green Belt boundary, the restrictive nature of Green Belt policy and the logic of the proposed Green Belt boundary. Since the land was first included in the Green Belt, this former park keeper's house has been divorced from the adjoining park and has a new access from Blythe Way. The Green Belt boundary has also been amended to exclude the rear garden of the adjoining house in Blythe Way. At the inquiry, SMBC explained that this Green Belt boundary had been reconsidered when both the adopted UDP and this Review were being prepared, and also confirmed that a minor amendment could be made to the Green Belt without having any strategic implications.
- 7.63 Apart from a very short distance across the driveway, the current Green Belt boundary is clearly defined by the boundaries of the adjoining properties in Blythe Way. Although the suggested boundary would follow firmly defined fence lines, the existence of an equally defensible boundary beyond the current Green Belt boundary is not necessarily sufficient reason to justify an amendment. I also note that RPG11 (Policy CF3) does not support extensions to the boundaries of the main urban areas, like Solihull. Similarly, questions of land ownership are not relevant to Green Belt designation.
- 7.64 Its present Green Belt designation helps to prevent the unrestricted sprawl of Solihull, safeguarding the openness of the adjoining parkland and preventing further encroachment. The site also lies in the relatively narrow area of Green Belt between Solihull and Knowle/Dorridge, and therefore performs valid Green Belt functions. Furthermore, the house lies in a relatively large plot, set back from the houses in Blythe Way and protruding into the park. Even though the access has been changed and there are clear boundary fences, I consider the site retains some relationship with the adjoining parkland, as well as with the adjoining residential area, providing a "soft" edge to the urban area.

- 7.65 In my view, the present boundary is not an anomaly and the site still performs a Green Belt function. Its release from the Green Belt could lead to pressures for further development on the site, eroding the character of the area. I recognise that current Green Belt policies restrict the development potential of this site, including extensions to the existing house. However, in view of its visually sensitive location on the edge of the park, I consider it is wholly appropriate for any such proposals to be assessed in the light of Green Belt policies, including Policy C2(iv) and associated SPG [CD163]. Consequently, I conclude that none of the factors mentioned represent the type of exceptional circumstances that would justify the exclusion of this site from the Green Belt.

Recommendation

7.66 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

702 Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common

Objections to First Deposit

1459/73 – Mr & Mrs J C Kissack

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the inset boundary of Balsall Common to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.67 This site forms part of the garden at the rear of this detached house on the south-western side of Balsall Common. It extends behind adjoining properties and backs on to fields. The Green Belt boundary in this locality was originally defined in the 1977 Solihull Green Belt Plan and carried forward into the adopted UDP, apart from new housing developments. For the most part, the Green Belt boundary is tightly drawn around this edge of the settlement, following fences and property boundaries. Only for a very short distance, across the narrowest part of this rear garden, is it not defined by any feature marked on the ground, but even here, the boundary can be clearly identified by reference to adjoining property boundaries. Since this objection site extends behind the rear gardens of the frontage properties, and is separated from them, it has some physical and visual relationship with the adjoining countryside. In its present designation, the land helps to perform a valid Green Belt function by preventing the sprawl of Balsall Common and safeguarding the adjoining countryside from encroachment.
- 7.68 Although the area of land is reasonably small and has well defined boundaries, its exclusion from the Green Belt would result in a perceptible extension of the settlement limits into the surrounding countryside, with the potential for further development. Contrary to the objector's view, the current boundary is not an anomaly, and the existence of a better defined boundary is not, in itself, sufficient to justify an amendment. I therefore conclude that the land is appropriately included in the Green Belt and none of the factors put forward represent the type of exceptional circumstances that would justify an amendment to the Green Belt boundary in this case.

Recommendation

7.69 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

- 7.70 The following objections to Policy C1 are related to housing “omission” sites, and Green Belt issues are dealt with in Chapter 3A – Housing Omission Sites:

Ref	Site	Objection
DH58	Land at Rumbush Lane/Cleobury Lane, Dickens Heath	1005/571 – Redrow Homes; 1364/540 – Catesby Property Group 1445/1120 – Mr P Barnard
KD29	NE of Site H, Grove Road, Dorridge	1129/625 – William Davis Ltd
HA14	Old Station Road, Hampton-in-Arden	1140/581 - William Davis Ltd
SE2	Hampton Lane, Solihull	1355/531 – Azemco Ltd
DH57	Land at Dickens Heath Road	1356/915 - Baroda Consortium
SE3	Marsh Lane/Light Hall Farm, Solihull	1359/737 – Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd
KD31	Norton Green Lane, Knowle	
ME22	Hampton Lane, Meriden	1362/766 - Cala Homes Ltd
ME18	Birmingham Road, Meriden	1372/932 – Mr J Kimberley
KD40	Browns Lane/Smiths Lane/Widney Manor Road	1373/1005 – Granby Farms Ltd
SE1	Pinfold Nursery, Solihull	1375/869 – Harper Estates
CG55	Land at Vicarage Road, Hockley Heath	1376/920 – Hedgerow Farms
MO53	Stratford Road, Shirley	1386/816 – Marcicity Devts
HH49	Ashtons Nursery, School Road, Hockley Heath	1391/925 – Miller Homes
KD30 N9	Land adj Sites 9F & (h), Grove Rd, Knowle Chelmsley Lane/Coleshill Road, Marston Green	1409/883-884 – Secretary of State for Health
MO52	Land off Stratford Road, Shirley	1416/887 – Trustees of A L Lowe
ME19	R/o 53-65 Fillongley Road, Meriden	1418/640 – Archdiocese of B'ham
MO51	Lodge Farm, Stratford Road, Shirley	1420/678 – TRW Ltd
ME20A	Land off Fillongley Road, Meriden	1426/892 – William Davis Ltd
DH61	Tythebarn Lane, Dickens Heath	1430/1088 – Mr D F L Harrison
KD34	Earlwood Road, Dorridge	1435/191-192 – Mr & Mrs Gatling
HA15	Hampton Storage Depot, Hampton-in-Arden	1438/537 – Mr J Taylor
BC25	152, Kenilworth Road, Balsall Common	1439/902 – Mrs I Thompson
KD32A	The Ards/Nevin, Dorridge Road, Dorridge	1450/78 – Mr R Clinton
KD38	The Firs etc, Four Ashes Road, Dorridge	1451/638 – Mr M Leek
KD39	Land at Four Ashes Road	1458/909 – Mr Kimberley/Bradley
KD27	Jacobean Lane, Copt Heath	1452/524-525 - Mrs S Middleburgh
ME20B	Manor Fields, r/o Manor Hotel, Meriden	1492/1110 - CPS Ltd

- 7.71 The following objections to Policy C1 are related to employment “omission” sites, and Green Belt issues are dealt with in Chapter 4 under Policies E1-E4:

Site	Objection
Provident Park, Stratford Road, Solihull	1363/1102 – Castlemore Securities
Light Hall Farm, Stratford Road, Shirley	1386/816 – Marcicity Developments
Land off Coventry Road, Solihull	1411/680 – Silkplan
Brickfield Farm, Chester Road, Solihull	1412/889 – Slough Properties
Land south of Coventry Road, Bickenhill	1440/1007 – Mr M Wheeldon

POLICY C2: CONTROL OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREEN BELT

Objections to First Deposit

1126/304 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1153/948 – Birmingham International Airport; 1246/366 – A J Richardson & Associates; 1271/898 – Tyler-Parkes Partnership; 1275/160 – CPRE; 1306/1155 – Dorridge & District Residents Association; 1360/1126 – BT Group; 1365/859 – Chase Midland plc; 1371/348 – Gallagher Estates; 1374/561 – Hampton Manor Homes; 1389/1138 – Meriden Parish Council; 1402/968-969 – Redland Properties; 1423/999 West Midlands RSL Planning Consortium; see also Hockley Heath Schedule (Annex D).

Objections to Revised Deposit

1126/509/R – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/132/R – CPRE; 1364/88/R – Catesby Property Group; 1378/79/R, 82/R – Hockley Heath Parish Council; 1450/34/R – Mr R Clinton; 1459/33/R – Mr & Mrs J C Kissack; 1485/108/R – Slough Estates plc; 1492/47/R, 429/R – Countryside Planning Services; 1504/176/R – Tidbury Green Residents Association.

Key issues

- Does Policy C2 reflect national guidance in PPG2 or conflict with other policies in the Plan;
- Should clause (ii) of the Policy indicate that only small-scale development essential for outdoor sport and recreation is appropriate in the Green Belt;
- Are the settlements listed in clause (iii), including Chadwick End, Cheswick Green & Tidbury Green, appropriate for limited infilling and should they be confirmed as settlements washed over by the Green Belt, with defined boundaries for infilling; and should the status of other settlements, including Hampton-in-Arden and Catherine-de-Barnes, be reviewed;
- Is clause (iii) too prescriptive and should it be amended to enable individual applications to be considered on their merits when considering limited infill sites within a significant residential grouping in the Green Belt;
- Clause (iv): Should the Plan include a policy setting out the criteria against which extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt will be assessed;
- Should clauses (vi) & (vii) be deleted, since they conflict with Policy ENV20 & PPG2, or be combined into a single clause covering waste and mineral extraction, restoration and aftercare;
- Should the Policy expressly acknowledge that the principles in PPG2 (¶ 3.15) will be rigorously enforced;
- Does the Plan ensure a consistent application of Green Belt policy, particularly in the Meriden Gap;
- Should the Policy include an additional criterion relating to strategic park and ride for remote parking, in accordance with PPG2 & PPG13;
- Should the Policy address the impact of a possible national stadium in the Green Belt;
- Does Policy C2 take account of the need to provide high quality employment sites over the Plan period, especially in terms of realising the growth potential of the Coventry-Solihull-Warwickshire High-Technology Corridor;
- Does Policy C2 unduly restrict development that might benefit the community;
- Should Policy C2 refer to development proposals involving major developed sites and include a policy covering the limited infilling or redevelopment of such sites, including Arden Brickworks;
- Should the Policy make provision for affordable housing where need is established as an exception to Green Belt policy;
- Rev 7/3: Should Hockley Heath be reinstated in criterion (iii);
- Rev 7/3: Should the final paragraph of Policy C2 be deleted, or should further explanation be given about relevant criteria on assessing the impact on the visual amenities of the Green Belt;
- Should the purposes of the Green Belt be set out in the Plan.

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.72 Policy C2 confirms that development in the Green Belt will not be permitted, except in very special circumstances, and sets out the specific exceptions that may be permitted, reflecting national policy in PPG2. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that the inclusion of *Cheswick Green, Tidbury Green & Chadwick End* in Policy C2(iii) corrected an error at First Deposit stage (Rev 7/3). No change in status is intended, since these settlements were similarly designated in the adopted UDP, and this approach reflects PPG2 (¶ 2.11), PPG3 (¶ 69-71) & PPS7. This correction fully meets Chase Midland & BT's objection.
- 7.73 Having reviewed the detailed criteria in Policy C2, it seems to me that these broadly reflect national policy on Green Belts in PPG2, in most cases directly repeating national guidance, without deviating significantly. Subject to questions of scale and compatibility with Green Belt policy, I am satisfied that Policy C2 generally accords with national policy in PPG2 and does not conflict with other policies (such as Policies C10, R8 & ENV20) in the SUDPR. Bearing in mind that the Plan has to be read as a whole, I see no need for any further cross-referencing of policies in this section of the SUDPR.

- 7.74 The wording in clause (ii) directly reflects national guidance in PPG2 (¶ 3.4), referring to *essential* facilities for outdoor sport and recreation. Rev 7/3 confirms that proposals for outdoor sport and recreation have to maintain openness and not conflict with Green Belt purposes. Although PPG2 (¶ 3.5) refers to *small changing rooms* and *small stables* as possible examples, this does not preclude larger facilities where these are essential to outdoor sport and recreation uses, provided they maintain the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with Green Belt purposes. The term *essential facilities* is not qualified by *small scale*, and PPG2 does not specify that all *essential* facilities should be *small scale*. PPG17 (¶ 30) confirms that development related to outdoor sport and recreation facilities should be the minimum necessary, but does not restrict them to *small scale*. This would largely be a matter of judgement, and any new facilities would also have to meet the terms of Policies C10 & R1.
- 7.75 I recognise that there may have been proposals for sport and recreation developments in the Green Belt in the past. However, much would depend on the specific circumstances of each case, and any proposals would have to meet the tests in national and local planning policy. Similar points apply to proposals for new playing fields and floodlighting. National policy in PPG2 & PPG17 confirms that urban fringe Green Belt land may be appropriate for outdoor sport and recreation facilities. Questions about associated buildings would therefore largely depend on whether they are essential to the use and whether they maintain the openness of the Green Belt. I am therefore satisfied that clause (ii), as amended in the Revised Deposit draft, reflects national policy in PPG2 and there is no need to specify that any buildings or facilities should be small scale.
- 7.76 Turning to the settlements listed in clause (iii), SMBC confirms that *Chadwick End* is suitable for limited infilling. The 1988 *Chadwick End Village Study* [CD164; ¶ 4.6] recognised the potential for limited infilling within the village and this status was reflected in the adopted UDP (Policy GB2(c)). Although on the periphery of the Borough, the village is served by a regular bus service and has a village shop/post office. I recognise that most of the limited opportunities for infilling have now been taken up, but I see no exceptional circumstances that might justify changing its Green Belt status in terms of a *washed-over* settlement where limited infilling would be permitted. Other policies in the Plan would ensure that its rural character is retained. I also understand that Baddesley Clinton, the adjoining settlement in Warwickshire, has a similar status as a *washed-over* Green Belt settlement in the First Deposit version of the Warwick District Local Plan Review [UDP.165/1].
- 7.77 *Cheswick Green* is a compact community of over 2,260 people and almost 900 houses, with a tightly-knit suburban character and a range of facilities. Although the settlement lies outside the main urban area, it is less than 1km away, with a regular bus route. It is not as unsustainable as some objectors make out, and I am satisfied that it is appropriately designated as a “washed over” settlement in the Green Belt with limited opportunities for infilling. I recognise that the opportunities for affordable housing in this category of settlement may be limited and that these needs are likely to be met in the main urban area. No expansion is proposed at Cheswick Green, but there is an area of safeguarded land adjoining the settlement (Site (c)). I note that the new RPG11 strategy now focuses new development in the main urban area, but it has not been demonstrated that limited infilling in this category of settlement would necessarily undermine the fundamental strategy of RPG11. I also understand that the status of Cheswick Green as a washed over Green Belt settlement was found to be appropriate at the previous UDP inquiry [CD128; p.47]. Consequently, I can see no exceptional changes in circumstances that would justify reviewing the designation of Cheswick Green in this Review.

- 7.78 *Tidbury Green* is a much smaller settlement, with over 700 people and 280 houses. It is more loose-knit, with ribbon development along the approach roads. It has fewer facilities, has poorer public transport links and, although not far from Dickens Heath new village, it is not as sustainable as other settlements. There are also two safeguarded sites adjoining the settlement (Sites (a) & (b)). Nevertheless, as with Cheswick Green, I can identify no exceptional changes in circumstances that would justify a change of status of this settlement. In my view, it is appropriately designated as a “washed-over” settlement in the Green Belt, with limited opportunities for infilling.
- 7.79 SMBC accepts that infill boundaries of these settlements are not defined, but clause (iii) of Policy C2 defines infilling as *the filling of a small gap within an otherwise built-up frontage with not more than two dwellings*. This definition should limit the scale of any infilling and avoid disputes about the applicability of the Policy to specific sites, providing clarity and consistency. It also avoids the need to define infill boundaries for these settlements on the Proposals Map, with no change from the adopted UDP. Moreover, I can imagine that drawing precise boundaries defining the extent of infill development would be controversial.
- 7.80 Similarly, it is reasonably clear that these settlements are *washed over* by the Green Belt, otherwise they would be included under Policy C3. However, it would be helpful if this was confirmed in the supporting text, to avoid any confusion and reflect PPG2 (¶ 2.11). I understand that the Green Belt status of these settlements was established in the current adopted UDP. Furthermore, since different policies apply to *washed-over* and *inset* settlements, it would be inappropriate to combine Policies C2 & C3 in terms of the status and policy applying to these Green Belt settlements.
- 7.81 The other settlements mentioned, such as *Barston, Berkswell, Bickenhill, Whitlocks End* and *Ilshaw Heath*, are small settlements, in some cases with Conservation Areas, lying some distance from the MUA. They have the same status as unidentified settlements washed-over by the Green Belt in the adopted UDP. As with the named settlements, I can find no exceptional changes in policy or characteristics that would justify reviewing their status.
- 7.82 *Hockley Heath* is a settlement inset from the Green Belt and is not subject to Green Belt policy, but covered by Policy C3, a situation unchanged from the adopted UDP. In policy terms, it is effectively part of the urban area and is included in the *Urban Capacity Study [CD99-101]* and *Housing Site Selection Compendium [CD154]*. Under the terms of RPG11 (Policy RR1), the main priority in rural settlements subject to strong urban influences, like Hockley Heath, is to manage the rate and nature of further development and to protect local character. Hockley Heath is an established settlement, with a good range of services and facilities, on a major route with a regular bus service, and has seen a significant amount of development proposed under the current adopted UDP. It has a population of over 1,800 with over 740 dwellings, a primary school, church, shops and garage, and is reasonably self-sufficient and sustainable. No further housing development is proposed in the SUDPR, but there is scope for infilling. Other policies in the Plan would help to protect its character and its tight Green Belt boundary would prevent expansion.
- 7.83 I understand that the status of Hockley Heath as a settlement excluded from the Green Belt was established in the Solihull Green Belt Plan in 1977. Apart from recent development, there has been little change in physical circumstances, and apart from RPG11 & PPG3, no change in planning policies since the status of this settlement was confirmed in the adopted UDP in 1997. I can therefore see no exceptional circumstances to justify its deletion from Policy C3 and inclusion in Policy C2(iii), and so no amendments are needed to address HHPC’s concerns. I deal with the Green Belt status of Hampton-in-Arden and Catherine-de-Barnes under Policy C3 (see below).

- 7.84 Mr Richardson suggests widening the scope of infill development to cover all existing significant residential groupings in the Green Belt. However, PPG2 (¶ 2.11/3.4) confirms that limited infilling should only be permitted in existing named villages or identified major developed sites. To widen the scope of infilling to any residential grouping in the Green Belt would not only conflict with national policy, but also be inappropriate in the context of the smaller settlements, hamlets and residential groupings in Solihull's Green Belt. In this context, I do not regard amended clause (iii) as being too prescriptive, since it reflects national policy and the particular circumstances of Solihull.
- 7.85 Clause (iv) of Policy C2 sets out the general principles limiting the replacement or limited extension to existing dwellings. Para 7.1.6 directly links this clause to Proposal C2/1, which confirms that SMBC will prepare and review SPG on this matter. The current SPG on House Extensions [CD163] limits extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt to 20% or a total of 140 sq m. I consider the approach of including a general principle in the UDP, with relevant details in SPG, is appropriate. The precise figures would be subject to consultation and debate when revised SPG is prepared.
- 7.86 Clauses (vi) & (vii) deal with waste management and minerals exploration and extraction. I cannot see that these clauses conflict in any way with Policy ENV20, which relates to *bad neighbour* development. Rev 7/3 confirms that waste management proposals will be permitted only where they maintain openness and do not conflict with Green Belt purposes, in line with PPG2. Modern waste management methods and current policies make it less likely that new landfill sites would be established in the Green Belt, and the SUDPR includes detailed waste management policies in Chapter 10. PPG2 (¶ 3.11) also confirms that mineral extraction may not be inappropriate in the Green Belt. Detailed policies covering the search or extraction of minerals, including the need for high environmental standards and restoration, are in Chapter 11 of the SUDPR (Policies M1-M4). It therefore seems to me that criteria (vi) & (vii) accord with national policy in PPG2, and I can see no justification for any amendment to these criteria in response to this element of HIAS' objection.
- 7.87 Residents in Hockley Heath are particularly concerned that land adjacent to the Green Belt is protected in order to resist proposed developments that would injure the amenities of the Green Belt due to their location and massing, reflecting PPG2 (¶ 3.15). Rev 7/3 added to Policy C2 confirms that development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt should not harm the visual amenities of the Green Belt due to siting, materials or design. This revision fully addresses these concerns. The assessment of the visual impact of a particular development would depend on the site-specific circumstances and other relevant considerations. It would be difficult to set out objective criteria against which to judge this impact.
- 7.88 In response to MPC, SMBC agrees that Green Belt policies should be applied correctly and consistently across the Borough. The Green Belt is a vitally important principle, which is correctly addressed by Policy C2. It allows inappropriate development only when justified by very special circumstances, reflecting national guidance in PPG2 and the new regional strategy in RPG11. I realise that recent developments near Meriden, such as the new link road, may have affected the visual character of the Green Belt, but previous proposals, such as the National Stadium, are no longer current. I have dealt with the issue of the playing fields at Meriden in the Housing section of my report (Chapter 3). The *Meriden Gap* clearly has an important part to play in terms of Solihull's Green Belt. However, I am satisfied that Policy C2 provides a firm and appropriate context, enabling a consistent approach to be taken to development proposals within this sensitive part of the Green Belt.

- 7.89 SMBC acknowledges that park-and-ride development is not necessarily inappropriate in the Green Belt provided that the criteria in PPG13 (Annex E) are met, and suggests adding a criterion confirming that *Proposals for park and ride that comply with the criteria in PPG2 (¶ 3.17)* are one of the permissible exceptions in the Green Belt. This addition would correctly acknowledge national policy on park-and-ride schemes, and I recommend accordingly. However, proposals for remote parking (rather than strictly park-and-ride schemes) for BIA/NEC in the Green Belt would not necessarily fall within this definition and would have to be justified on the grounds of very special circumstances, in accordance with PPG2 (¶ 3.1-3.3).
- 7.90 There is no proposal for a national stadium in the Green Belt in the SUDPR and I understand that previous proposals are no longer to be carried forward. If such a proposal re-emerges, it would have to be considered against national and local Green Belt and other relevant planning policies, including traffic considerations. It is therefore inappropriate and unnecessary for the SUDPR to refer to this possibility.
- 7.91 I have dealt with Gallagher's point about employment sites in CSW-HTC under Policy C1 (see above). The same conclusions apply to Policy C2, since any employment sites within this area would need to demonstrate very special circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt land. Although RPG11 acknowledges the need to make provision within CSW-HTC, it would be inappropriate and out of line with national policy to make a specific exception for this type of development in Policy C2 without these very special circumstances having been demonstrated on a site-by-site basis.
- 7.92 The criteria in Policy C2 reflect national policy on Green Belts in PPG2, which is necessarily restrictive in order to safeguard the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, the restriction of new development that might benefit the community is fully justified, contrary to the views of Hampton Manor Homes.
- 7.93 I have dealt with the issue of affordable housing in rural areas under the Housing policies in the Plan (Chapter 3; Policy H4). In Solihull, the rural areas of the Borough are relatively close to the main urban areas where a range of house types and prices are available, including affordable housing on urban sites. The strategy of the SUDPR focuses new housing development in the main urban area, in line with RPG11. Limited provision of affordable housing may come forward as a result of proposals for residential development within the smaller settlements in the Green Belt, but most affordable housing needs are intended to be met within the main urban areas. PPG3 (Annex B5) confirms that the rural exceptions policy is not intended to apply in most Green Belt areas, which are close to the main conurbations where conditions are not typical of most rural areas. Consequently, in response to WMRSL, I cannot see sufficient justification for a specific exception for affordable housing in the Green Belt to be included in Policy C2. I deal with the issue of *Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt*, such as Arden Brickworks, below.
- 7.94 The general purposes of the Green Belt are set out in PPG2 (¶ 1.5). However, from the debate during the inquiry, I understand that the purposes of the Green Belt in Solihull do not include preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. In order to provide clarity and avoid any confusion, it would be helpful if this Review included an explicit statement clarifying the specific purposes of the Green Belt in Solihull, as in the adopted UDP (¶ 10.31, suitably amended). The most appropriate place for this clarification is in the text accompanying Policy C1.

7.95 With these amendments, I conclude that Policy C2 establishes a sound basis for considering proposals for development within Solihull's Green Belt.

Recommendation

- 7.96 I RECOMMEND** that the Plan is **modified** by:
- (i) *amending the text accompanying Policy C2 to confirm that the settlements listed in clause (iii) are settlements washed over by the Green Belt in which limited infilling may be permitted;*
 - (ii) *adding an additional criterion to the list of exceptions in Policy C2, covering "Proposals for park and ride that comply with the criteria in PPG2 (¶ 3.17)";*
 - (iii) *including a statement summarising the purposes of including land in the Green Belt in Solihull in the text accompanying Policy C1.*

POLICY C2 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Arden Brickworks, Coventry Road, Solihull

Objections to First Deposit

1381/558 – Jones Plant Services Ltd;
1402/968-969 – Redland Properties

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- *Should this land be designated as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt, in accordance with PPG2 (Annex C).*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.97 Arden Brickworks lies on the southern side of the main A45, close to M42 (J6) and the NEC link road, extending to some 5.93ha. It comprises a group of buildings, plant and structures associated with the brickworks, adjoining plant hire depot, kennels and Civic Amenities site close to the main road, with mineral workings to the south. The site lies in the Green Belt, originally defined in the Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP. Arden Brickworks is part of a much larger site with long-standing permissions for mineral working. From 1997, the site was subject to review, with planning conditions now requiring each extraction phase to be restored to agriculture, along with the restoration of previous phases.
- 7.98 These objectors seek an additional policy, designating this site as a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*, and outlining the extent of development or redevelopment, reflecting the criteria in PPG2 (Annex C). The general principles for the re-use of existing buildings in the Green Belt are set out in Policy C2(v), which reflects PPG2 (¶ 3.7-3.10). However, this does not cover the redevelopment of buildings or further development of Green Belt sites. I deal with the other specific objections relating to housing and employment in Chapters 3A & 4 of my report.
- 7.99 Originally, SMBC did not regard this as a *major developed site* because it is subject to restoration conditions attached to a mineral extraction permission and contains temporary buildings [CD142; ¶ 6.4/SOL-C2-1]. SMBC later accepts that the brickworks on the frontage is correctly defined as *previously developed land* in para 10.3.2 of the SUDPR [SOL-C1-2]. As regards the proposed waste transfer station adjoining the existing Civic Amenities site, para 10.3.2 confirms that any development should maintain openness, or will need to be justified by very special circumstances, in accordance with PPG2 and Policy C2. However, in its responses, SMBC does not specifically address the question of whether this site should be identified as a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*.

- 7.100 PPG2 (Annex C) gives examples of *Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt*, including factories, collieries, power stations, water and sewage works and military sites, all *substantial* sites. I realise that there can be no hard and fast rule about what constitutes a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*. Size can vary, as can the footprint of buildings, and I understand that brickworks in other areas have been accepted under this definition. I also recognise that, although the site includes buildings of a permanent nature, such as kilns, drying shed and chimneys, along with storage sheds and hard surfaced areas, it would be difficult to re-use them for modern day uses. In addition, there are other less permanent structures which currently affect the open character of the area. I also realise that the present scale of development and hard surfaces contrasts with the more rural character of its surroundings and impinges on the openness of the wider Green Belt. Nevertheless, the general nature and scale of the buildings and uses on the site does not persuade me that this site meets the relevant criteria set out in PPG2 (Annex C).
- 7.101 I recognise the distinction in policy terms between designated *Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt* and other Green Belt sites. However, SMBC's acceptance that the front part of the site constitutes *previously developed land* goes some way to recognising its status and may provide some leeway in terms of opportunities for re-use and redevelopment. Nevertheless, given its location in a vulnerable part of the *Meriden Gap* Green Belt, I consider it would be inappropriate to designate the front part of this site under PPG2 (Annex C) given the limited size of the site, its prominent location in the Green Belt, the proximity of current and future mineral workings, and the physical and visual impact that any redevelopment of the existing buildings could have on the character and openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.102 Consequently, I conclude that it is unnecessary to include a specific policy to deal with this site or similar partly developed sites in the Green Belt, or designate it as such on the Proposals Map. In my view, any proposals to redevelop or improve this part of the site should be considered against normal Green Belt policies and only permitted if very special circumstances can be demonstrated. No amendments are therefore needed to Policy C2 or the Proposals Map in response to the Green Belt elements of these objections.

Recommendation

7.103 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

PROPOSAL C2/1: EXTENSIONS IN THE GREEN BELT

There were no objections to this proposal.

POLICY C3: SMALL INSET VILLAGES IN THE GREEN BELT***Objections to First Deposit***

1069/1051 – GO-WM; 1126/303 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/163 – CPRE; 1359/739- Taylor Woodrow Devts Ltd; 1362/768 – Cala Homes (Midlands) Ltd; 1365/860 – Chase Midland plc; 1398/805 – Persimmon Homes (South Midlands) Ltd; 1429/644 – Mr N Moore; see also Hockley Heath Schedule (Annex D).

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does Policy C3 provide an appropriate basis for considering future development in inset villages in the Green Belt in Solihull;*
- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify designating Hampton-in-Arden and Catherine-de-Barnes as washed-over settlements in the Green Belt, rather than inset villages in the Green Belt;*
- *Should Chadwick End be included in the list of small settlements inset in the Green Belt, to allow limited expansion and infilling;*
- *Should any further amendments be made to Policy C3 and the supporting text to reflect other changes made in the Plan;*
- *Should Policy C3 confirm that residential development is acceptable in principle within the inset areas;*
- *Should the supporting text be amended to refer to minimum densities;*
- *Should Policy C3 be strengthened to resist infill development in gardens adjoining the Green Belt, possibly by preparing SPG.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.104 Policy C3 confirms that the small settlements of Hampton-in-Arden, Hockley Heath, Meriden and Catherine-de-Barnes are inset in the Green Belt, with inset boundaries defined on the Proposals Map, and sets out the factors that will be taken into account in considering applications for development.
- 7.105 SMBC explains that Hampton-in-Arden & Catherine-de-Barnes were inset from the Green Belt in the adopted UDP [CD111] as a result of proposals in that Plan for expansion. Inspectors at previous UDP inquiries supported the definition of inset boundaries at Hampton-in-Arden [CD128:p.135-137; CD129:p.77]. New housing development at Hampton-in-Arden is now complete and there are no new housing sites proposed in the SUDPR. Other reasons put forward by CPRE & HIAS for reviewing the Green Belt status of Hampton-in-Arden include the lack of safeguarded land, its attractive nature, with a Conservation Area and vulnerable rural setting, the difficulty of resisting housing within the existing built-up area, the need to protect the remaining open land, and the fundamental commitment to protecting and maintaining the Green Belt. Catherine-de-Barnes is similarly inset within the Green Belt, but is subject to a housing proposal (Site H/1.1) in the SUDPR, carrying forward a similar proposal in the adopted UDP.
- 7.106 PPG2 (¶ 2.6) advises that Green Belt boundaries should relate to a longer timescale than the Plan period and, once approved, should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. The status and Green Belt boundaries of Hampton-in-Arden and Catherine-de-Barnes were firmly established in 1997 in the adopted UDP, after full consultation and debate at previous inquiries. At Hampton-in-Arden, there are no proposed housing sites or safeguarded land, but its size and nature are sufficient to retain its status as an inset settlement, particularly given its general sustainability and convenient location. In the case of Catherine-de-Barnes, there has been no change in circumstances, since a new housing site remains proposed, which now has outline planning permission. There are few changes in physical circumstances since the Green Belt status of these settlements was established in 1997 and, apart from the new RPG11, no changes in national and regional planning policies.

- 7.107 Policy C3 specifically recognises the importance of the rural setting of these settlements and the features that contribute to their special character, further amplified in the supporting text. I recognise the concern about pressures for development and incremental expansion, but the tightly defined inset boundaries would prevent this from happening, along with refusals of inappropriate new infill and over-intensive development. Policy C3 also confirms that Green Belt policy would strictly apply outside the defined inset boundaries. I am therefore satisfied that Policy C3, along with other relevant policies in the Plan, would safeguard the character of these settlements and enable existing open space and other features to be protected. Consequently, I can see no exceptional circumstances that might justify changing the Green Belt status of these settlements at this time.
- 7.108 Similarly, I can see no reasons for any further detailed development control guidance on each settlement, given the precise terms of the Policy and the clarification in the supporting text. Other larger settlements, such as Knowle & Dorridge and Balsall Common, do not fall within the terms of this Policy, since they are larger urban settlements. I have dealt with the particular circumstances of Hockley Heath under Policy C2 (see above).
- 7.109 Policy C3 confirms that the named settlements are not subject to Green Belt policy and sets out the matters to be taken into account when considering development applications. Para 7.1.7 confirms that these settlements are appropriate for limited expansion or limited development (more than infilling), in line with PPG2. Para 7.1.10 confirms the acceptance of limited development within these settlements, subject to the impact on the special character, scale, environment and rural setting. This provides sufficient confirmation of the extent of permissible development without needing any further confirmation that the principle of residential development is acceptable.
- 7.110 I have already concluded that *Chadwick End* is appropriately included under Policy C2(iii) as a settlement “washed over” by the Green Belt where limited infilling may be appropriate. It is a relatively small settlement, with a population of about 300 people and with few local facilities, hardly any employment and unsuited to major expansion, since it would encourage further journeys by car and would not be particularly sustainable. I recognise that Chadwick End needs to be a viable community under Policy C7, but there is a very limited range of facilities to support and its expansion would not perform well against the latest regional strategy which focuses development on the MUA. SMBC has resolved to review the *Chadwick End Village Study [CD164]*, and I note that the adjoining settlement, Baddesley Clinton, is also washed over by the Green Belt. The criteria for inseting Green Belt settlements is set out in PPG2 (¶ 2.11), and I am satisfied that Chadwick End should not fall into this category and is appropriately included under Policy C2(iii), rather than being an inset settlement under Policy C3.
- 7.111 GO-WM is concerned that Policy C3 may lead to lower densities in these settlements than recommended in PPG3 and suggests developments of less than 30dw/ha should be avoided. However, although these are established settlements, they are effectively villages surrounded by Green Belt and have some special characteristics. Although PPG3 (¶ 57-58) advises against developments that make inefficient use of land and sets a minimum density of 30dw/ha, PPG3 (¶ 70) also advises that development in villages should be *designed sympathetically and laid out in keeping with the character of the village*. Policy H5 of the SUDPR expects proposals to respect national policy on housing density, whilst having regard to the character, local distinctiveness and design quality of the locality. Rigid application of a minimum density might be incompatible with the special character of these settlements and, in the context of Green Belt policy, I am satisfied that Policy C3 and the supporting text provides sufficient guidance for new residential development, especially when read together with Policy H5.

7.112 Hockley Heath residents are keen to resist inappropriate development, to protect the scale, environment and rural setting of these small settlements, particularly resisting infill developments in gardens adjoining the Green Belt. However, Policy C3 confirms that the rural setting, townscape, open space, density and other attributes that contribute to their special character will be taken into account. Para 7.1.10 also confirms that proposals which would harm their special character, scale, environment and quality of their rural setting will be resisted. In addition, Proposal C7/1 supports the preparation of village design statements and recognises the role of local communities in their development. In my view, this is sufficient to address these concerns.

Recommendation

7.113 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

POLICY C3 - SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECTIONS

Land at 351 Lugtrout Lane, Catherine-de-Barnes

Objections to First Deposit 1431/550 – Mr N McLean

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- *Are there any exceptional circumstances to justify amending the inset boundary of Catherine-de-Barnes to exclude this site from the Green Belt.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

7.114 This is a 0.65ha greenfield site between Lugtrout Lane and the Grand Union Canal on the western fringe of the settlement. Various factors are advanced in support of this amendment, including meeting short and long-term housing needs, ensuring a steady local supply of housing, provision of affordable housing, support for local employment/services, location and site characteristics. I have dealt with housing matters in Chapter 3 of my report. New housing development is already taking place in the village (Housing Site H1/1.1) and there is no evidence of any pressing need for housing in this village or to support local facilities. Given the current anticipated provision of housing in Solihull generally and in Catherine-de-Barnes locally, I can see no overriding case to release this land for development on housing need grounds.

7.115 There is no dispute that the site lies in the approved Green Belt, established in the adopted UDP, outside the defined boundary for infilling. It lies in the relatively narrow and vulnerable stretch of Green Belt between Catherine-de-Barnes and the main urban area of Solihull to the west. It does not currently form part of the built-up area of the village and relates more closely to the surrounding countryside. The existing inset boundary is well-defined by existing boundaries and its release from the Green Belt would extend the built-up area of the settlement noticeably westwards beyond its present limits. The fact that the suggested boundary could provide an equally defensible boundary is no reason itself to physically extent the settlement beyond its existing limits. Although Catherine-de-Barnes may be suitable for limited expansion, Policy C3 confirms that Green Belt policies apply to areas like this, immediately beyond the inset boundary. Consequently, I can identify no exceptional circumstances that would justify releasing this land from the Green Belt and its allocation for housing in the short or long term.

Recommendation

7.116 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.

- 7.117 The following objection to Policy C3 has already been dealt with under Policy C1 (see above):

Site	Objection
<i>Hampton Manor Homes, Hampton-in-Arden</i>	1374/562 – Hampton Manor Homes

- 7.118 The following objections to Policy C3 relate to housing “omission” sites, and Green Belt issues are dealt with in Chapter 3A – Housing Omission Sites:

Site	Objection
<i>Land at Bakehouse Lane, Chadwick End</i>	1429/644 – Mr N Moore
<i>35 Ilshaw Heath Road, Ilshaw Heath</i>	1455/539 – Mr & Mrs Letby

POLICY C4: AGRICULTURAL LAND

Objections to First Deposit

1002/61 – Packington Estate Enterprises Ltd; 1003/67 – Packington Estate Trustees; 1403/1093 – RMC Aggregates (Western) Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Is Policy C4 unduly restrictive and in conflict with current national policy on protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land;*
- *Does the Policy recognise that minerals development almost inevitably involves best and most versatile farmland, but does not have to lead to its permanent loss.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

- 7.119 Policy C4 aims to safeguard the best and most versatile farmland and encourage the use of the remainder for farming. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that there is about 590ha of Grade 2 farmland and 10,635ha of Grade 3 farmland in Solihull. About 20% of all farmland was thought to fall within the *best and most versatile* category. I understand that Policy C4 was drafted in the context of PPG7 (1997) and the subsequent amendment in 2000. More recent guidance in PPS7 (¶ 28) confirms that *best and most versatile farmland* (Grades 1, 2 & 3A) should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations, and that where development is unavoidable, poorer quality farmland should be used in preference to higher grade land. PPS7 also confirms that development plans should include policies protecting areas of *best and most versatile farmland*.
- 7.120 The test of *overriding need* in Policy C4 may be more stringent than that in PPS7, but this reflects the fact that there is a small proportion of high-grade farmland in Solihull, which if lost, is in many cases irreplaceable. It also helps to protect the rural character of the countryside, reflecting the approved strategy in *Solihull’s Countryside [CD95]*. Packington Estate’s suggested amendments to the Policy would provide a much less restrictive approach, and would not properly reflect current national policy. I also note the concerns about golf courses and diversification proposals, but I am satisfied that Policy C4 would allow such developments to be considered, along with the re-use of land and buildings, subject to the tests set out Policies C2, C4 & C6.
- 7.121 Having considered the points raised, it seems to me that the thrust of Policy C4 and the supporting text is not necessarily out of line with current national guidance, and reflects Solihull’s particular local circumstances. However, I consider it would be helpful if SMBC reviewed the details and application of the

Policy, along with the accompanying text, in the light of the latest national guidance in PPS7 (¶ 28).

- 7.122 Policy C4 does not prevent minerals extraction which involves the use of *best and most versatile farmland*, provided that it can be justified in the terms of the tests set out in the policy. Minerals development is specifically subject to Policy M4(viii), which includes the protection of *best and most versatile farmland* from permanent loss. Rev 11/13 (¶ 11.3.1) confirms that proposals leading to a permanent loss of such land would need to demonstrate that alternatives have been considered, in line with Policy C4. Consequently, I consider that Policy C4, read together with Policy M4, provides an appropriate basis to consider mineral developments involving the use of *best and most versatile farmland*.
- 7.123 I therefore conclude that, apart from reviewing Policy C4 and para 7.2.1 in the light of the latest national policy in PPS7 (¶ 28), no further amendments are needed in response to these objections.

Recommendation

7.124 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by reviewing the wording of Policy C4 in the light of the latest national policy on agricultural land set out in PPS7, and updating the reference and details of national policy in paragraph 7.2.1.

POLICY C5: FARM WORKERS ACCOMMODATION

Objections to First Deposit

1275/162 – CPRE.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- Does Policy C5 provide an appropriate basis for considering proposals for farm workers accommodation, in accordance with national policy.

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.125 Policy C5 sets out the criteria for permitting new agricultural dwellings in the Green Belt. Farm workers accommodation is one of the exceptions permitted in the Green Belt under PPG2 & Policy C2. CPRE argues that the policy should be worded more strongly to prevent abuses of the system and retain properties for farm workers, including removal of permitted development rights for extensions. However, the suggested revisions would add nothing that is not already covered in national guidance, now in PPS7 (Annex A), which specifically refers to the functional and financial tests. Standard agricultural occupancy conditions would ensure that new farm-workers accommodation remains available for occupation by farm workers.
- 7.126 I recognise the concern about subsequent extensions to farm workers dwellings, but these would have to meet the tests in PPG2 (¶ 3.6) and Policy C2(iv). Further clarification on the size and scale of extensions is given in SPG [CD163]. Circular 11/95 (¶ 87-89) confirms that permitted development rights should only be withdrawn in exceptional circumstances. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that the withdrawal of such rights would be looked at on a case-by-case basis and that a blanket approach would be inappropriate. Consequently, I can find no justification for withdrawing permitted development rights in all cases, and so the policy and supporting text need no further amendments to address CPRE's concerns. However, at the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that the reference to national policy in para 7.2.3 should now refer to PPS7 (Annex A).

Recommendation

7.127 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by amending the text of paragraph 7.2.3 to refer to **Annex A of PPS7**, rather than Annex 4 of PPG7.

POLICY C6: FARM-BASED DIVERSIFICATION

Objections to First Deposit

1002/62 – Packington Estate Enterprises Ltd; 1003/68 – Packington Estate Trustees; 1126/301 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/164 – CPRE.

Objections to Revised Deposit

1002/341/R, 443/R – Packington Estate Enterprises Ltd; 1492/44/R Countryside Planning Services Ltd; 1126/507/R, 508/R – Hampton-in-Arden Society.

Key issues

- *Does Policy C6 adequately set out the criteria for the conversion of rural buildings, and accord with national policy;*
- *Does Policy C6 provide an appropriate basis for considering proposals for farm-based diversification, in accordance with national guidance, particularly given that Solihull's countryside lies in the Green Belt;*
- *Rev 7/7: Should Policy C6 promote agriculture and equine-related development, particularly where it enhances well-established units needing to expand and survive economically;*
- *Rev 7/8 (7.2.4): should the text confirm that Policy C6 does not override Green Belt policy;*
- *Rev 7/9 (7.2.5): should the reference to farm shops be deleted;*
- *Rev 7/9 (7.2.5): should offices and workshops be included in the list of examples of suitable forms of diversification.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.128 Policy C6 supports farming by encouraging farm-based diversification, and sets out the necessary criteria, generally reflecting national guidance in PPS7 (¶ 30-31). Further clarification is given in the supporting text. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that Policy C6 reflects the latest RPG11 (Policies RR1(c) & PA15), but pointed out that para 7.2.4 needs to be updated to refer to the latest regional guidance [CD175] and national guidance in PPS7 rather than PPG7. An earlier PIC [CD156] confirms that the reference in para 7.2.4 to the *Rural White Paper* is the 2000 edition.
- 7.129 Packington Estate's main concerns relate to issues of scale and location, and seeks further guidance on the criteria for the conversion of rural buildings. SMBC explains that guidance on such buildings is included in Policies C2(v) & C6, with more detailed guidance in SPG [CD162]. The reference to diversification in para 7.2.5 refers to guidance in *Solihull's Countryside* [CD95], and the reference to *enhancement policies* refers to the Environment and Countryside policies, particularly Policies ENV6, ENV7, ENV8, ENV13 & C8. It would be helpful if this latter point is confirmed in para 7.2.5. The preference for *small-scale* proposals stems from *Solihull's Countryside*, is referred to in the SPG [CD162], and generally reflects the need for such proposals to be consistent or appropriate in scale, as advised in PPS7.
- 7.130 I recognise that SMBC's policy and guidance on the conversion of rural buildings and farm-based diversification proposals is spread around various policies and documents. There is much to be said for summarising the main criteria in one place in the SUDPR, along with cross-references to the relevant policies and documents. However, Policy C6 is primarily concerned with farm-based diversification projects, and the appropriate place for any further guidance on the conversion of rural buildings is in the text supporting Proposal C6/1. Para 7.2.6 summarises the current policy, but lacks any cross-references to Policy C2(v) and other relevant documents. Such additional cross-references should be made to address Packington Estate's concerns.

- 7.131 Both CPRE & HIAS are concerned about the implications of Policy C6, particularly since proposals for farm-based diversification will be located in the Green Belt. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that all proposals for farm-based diversification in the Green Belt would be assessed in the context of Green Belt policy, as confirmed in the wording of Policy C6 requiring *no harm* to the Green Belt. The re-use of existing rural buildings would also be considered in terms of Policy C2(v) and SPG [CD162]. Similarly, farm-based diversification uses, such as tourism and leisure, along with rural employment and intensification of use, would be considered against Policies C2, C7 & E10, reflecting the approved strategy in *Solihull's Countryside* [CD95]. The impact on the countryside of these types of proposals would be fully considered under the policy framework in the SUDPR, including the impact on the character and openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.132 I understand the reference to *farm shops* in para 7.2.5 (Rev 7/9) was included at GO-WM's request (1069/1051). Policy C6 addresses specific proposals for farm-based diversification, in line with national guidance in PPS7, and is appropriately included in the Plan without duplicating other policies. The specific reference to Green Belt in Policy C6 means that there is no need for para 7.2.4 to confirm that the Policy does not override Green Belt policy. Furthermore, sufficient guidance is provided on the re-use of farm buildings in the Green Belt without being too permissive or needing an additional policy. Consequently, I can see no justification for any further amendments to the Policy and supporting text in response to the objections from CPRE & HIAS.
- 7.133 Policy C6 positively supports agriculture within the Borough, especially when read along with Policy C4. However, most agricultural development, including some agricultural-based diversification, does not require specific planning permission. PPS7 (¶ 32) refers to equine-related activities and urges LPAs to include policies for supporting such activities. Rev 7/9 (¶ 7.2.5) gives examples of suitable farm-based diversification, specifically including horse-based enterprises. Non-agricultural equine development in the Green Belt, both on the urban fringe and in the countryside, would fall to be considered as a leisure and recreational use, which would be assessed against the terms of Policy C2(ii) and the recreation policies in the Plan. In my view, this provides sufficient guidance and support for agriculture and equine development to address CPS' concerns.
- 7.134 Rev 7/9 does not include offices, workshops or employment uses as suitable forms of diversification. PPS7 (¶ 30-31) confirms that LPAs should support well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes, subject to questions of scale, sustainability and amenity. However, given the sensitive nature of Solihull's Green Belt and the traffic, amenity and scale issues that can often arise, I consider these types of proposals should be considered on their merits and related to the particular circumstances of the scheme, along with Green Belt and other relevant policies, such as Policies C2, C7 & E10. Contrary to Packington Estate's view, I consider that these uses should not be specifically included in the list of examples of suitable forms of diversification.

Recommendation

- 7.135 I RECOMMEND** that the Plan is **modified** by:
- (i) amending paragraph 7.2.4 by:
 - (a) updating the text to refer to the latest guidance in RPG11;
 - (b) clarifying the reference to the **2000** edition of the Rural White Paper;
 - (c) updating the reference and details of **PPS7**, rather than PPG7;
 - (ii) amending paragraph 7.2.5 by including cross-references to relevant conservation and enhancement policies in the Environment and Countryside chapters;

(iii) *amending paragraph 7.2.6 by including cross-references to Policy C2(v) and other relevant documents.*

PROPOSAL C6/1: CONVERSION OF RURAL BUILDINGS

There were no objections to this proposal.

POLICY C7: VIABILITY OF VILLAGES

Objections to First Deposit

1126/300 – Hampton-in-Arden Society.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- *Does Policy C7 provide an appropriate basis for protecting and maintaining the viability of villages, in accordance with national guidance.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.136 Policy C7 encourages development that provides or sustains local employment and services in villages, subject to specific criteria. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that Policy C7 reflects national guidance in PPG3 & PPS7. However, the text in para 7.2.7 needs updating to refer to the latest national guidance in PPS7 rather than PPG7.
- 7.137 Firstly, there is some doubt about which villages the policy applies to, since there is no list of applicable settlements. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that Knowle & Dorridge and Balsall Common did not fall within this definition, but the Policy would include settlements such as Barston, Ilshaw Heath and Chadwick End, and would effectively apply to all villages in Solihull. I recognise that there might be some difficulty in defining a list of applicable settlements, particularly the smaller hamlets at the lower end of the scale. However, in the absence of such a list, relevant proposals would be considered on a case-by-case basis, related to the particular settlement. Furthermore, many of these settlements are likely to be "washed-over" by the Green Belt, and the restrictions in Policies C7(iv), C2 & C3 would help to prevent inappropriate developments.
- 7.138 Secondly, HIAS is concerned about the provision of employment development in villages. However, Policy C7 is merely reflecting the need to facilitate a healthy and diverse rural economy, in line with the *Rural White Paper* & PPS7. Although the main focus for economic activity is in the main urban areas, it is important that the rural areas are not ignored. Policy C7 contributes to several of the Plan's fundamental principles, and helps to acknowledge the vital role of the community and maintain the sustainability of villages in providing employment and services. I understand that the initiatives envisaged in Proposal C7/1 are not limited to employment and services, but relate to Parish Plans, Village Appraisals and Village Design Statements, prepared in accordance with PPS7 (¶ 13), rather than Policy ENV2. Consequently, and particularly given the importance of maintaining sustainable rural communities established in PPG3 & PPS7, I consider that no further amendments are needed to Policy C7 or the supporting text.

Recommendation

7.139 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by updating the text in paragraph 7.2.7 to refer to the latest national guidance in **PPS7**, rather than PPG7.

PROPOSAL C7/1: VILLAGE APPRAISALS AND DESIGN STATEMENTS

The objections to this proposal have been withdrawn.

POLICY C8: LANDSCAPE QUALITY

Objections to First Deposit 1101/706 – Balsall Parish Council; see also Hockley Heath Schedule (Annex D).

Objections to Revised Deposit There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Should the Policy reflect the impact of intensive “factory” farming on nearby dwellings, existing residents and visual amenity;*
- *Should the Policy protect areas on the edge of the countryside and where development would be damaging.*

Inspector’s reasoning and conclusions

7.140 Policy C8 seeks to safeguard the countryside by protecting and enhancing the landscape and historic character and quality, retaining or restoring diverse landscape features and maintaining local distinctiveness. The UDP is only able to influence intensive farming where it constitutes *development* over which SMBC has control. Most forms of agriculture do not fall into this category, and so the SUDPR cannot control such development. Nevertheless, Policies ENV2(v), ENV19 & ENV20 would help to protect the amenity of existing occupiers, prevent unnecessary noise and protect residential areas from *bad neighbour* uses, whilst Policy C2 would protect the visual amenity of Green Belt areas. These other policies would satisfactorily address BPC’s concerns.

7.141 Policy C3 recognises the importance of the rural setting of villages in the Green Belt and confirms that Green Belt policies will apply to areas immediately beyond the inset boundary. In considering applications for development, SMBC will also consider the landscape attributes and impact on the character and rural setting of these villages, thus addressing the concerns of residents in Hockley Heath.

Recommendation

7.142 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

PROPOSAL C8/1: COUNTRYSIDE STRATEGY

There were no objections to this proposal.

PROPOSAL C8/2: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

There were no objections to this proposal.

POLICY C9: LIGHT POLLUTION**Objections to First Deposit**

1126/299 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1275/166 – CPRE; 1305/240 – Berkswell Society.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issue

- *Does Policy C9 provide an appropriate basis for preventing unnecessary light pollution, bearing in mind the character of the countryside and urban areas and the need to prevent crime and provide safety for the community.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.143 Policy C9 seeks to protect the areas of countryside that have a dark sky from the impact of lighting schemes, in order to discourage new lighting in such areas. I understand that the impetus for this Policy arose from work on *Solihull's Countryside [CD95]*, and it is also important to comply with the *Crime & Disorder Act*, and reflect SMBC's *Crime & Disorder Strategy [CD87]*. I am also aware of the national guidance in Circular 5/94 on lighting in relation to crime, along with the research document *Lighting in the Countryside* and, more recently, *Safer Places*. Most objectors support the aims of Policy C9, but argue that it is not sufficiently strong or extensive.
- 7.144 At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that there are areas of Solihull's countryside which retain a relatively dark sky at night, and this helps to protect the rural character of such areas. However, if lighting already exists, the opportunity to provide a dark sky has effectively been lost. Different conditions exist in urban areas, where street lighting and crime prevention issues point to a higher level of lighting. The aim is to prevent upward light pollution and restrict external lighting in the countryside to that which is required. Although safety and security are essential to successful sustainable communities, there is clearly a need to strike a balance between the need for lighting and its visual impact on the countryside and on amenity, recognising the character of the countryside and the need to minimise the use and impact of lighting.
- 7.145 I recognise that the precise areas where this Policy will apply are not particularly clear. However, the wording of Policy C9 sets specific tests for development which are readily applicable, with further guidance in the supporting text. Careful analysis of the local situation will be important, but issues of crime prevention and community safety are as relevant in rural areas as in urban areas. However, I can see little justification for extending the Policy to urban areas, as suggested by HIAS, since the policy quoted in the Coventry UDP addresses a different aim and covers a much more urban area.
- 7.146 I can understand CPRE's concerns about floodlighting at sports and recreation facilities in the Green Belt. However, these would be subject to the tests in Green Belt policies and would have to take into account the particular circumstances and need for the development, as well as the requirements of Policy C9. Planning conditions could also be used to control the nature and operation of floodlighting. I recognise that the introduction of lighting can have a significant effect on the visual character of the countryside, but in the past, it seems that SMBC has been able to resist intrusive lighting schemes without any specific policy in the adopted UDP.
- 7.147 I note that SMBC intends to produce SPG to provide more guidance on avoiding light pollution, in line with PPG1 (Annex A2/A7) (*now PPS1 (¶ 38)*), which could include relevant planning conditions and would assist in the

operation of this Policy. However, I do not see an overriding need to include this as a specific proposal in the SUDPR.

- 7.148 Consequently, I conclude that the main aim of Policy C9 is soundly based, whilst recognising that there may be circumstances where external lighting is needed in new developments, but limiting such lighting and light spillage to the minimum. Para 7.3.6 specifically recognises that lighting may be justified on the grounds of crime prevention and community safety, which may outweigh any adverse impact on the countryside. In my view, this provides an appropriate balance between the need to avoid light pollution and consider crime prevention/ community safety issues. No amendments are therefore needed to the Policy or supporting text in response to these objections.

Recommendation

7.149 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

POLICY C10: RECREATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Objections to First Deposit

1126/298 – Hampton-in-Arden Society; 1175/633 – Sport England; 1275/167 – CPRE; 1492/1109 – Countryside Planning Services Ltd.

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.

Key issues

- *Does Policy C10 appropriately reflect national guidance in PPG2 & PPG17 on recreation in the countryside;*
- *Should the Policy provide more positive consideration of noise-generating sports activities which, due to their nature, may only be accommodated in the open countryside;*
- *Should the Policy support secondary development essential to outdoor recreational activities, particularly high quality centres of excellence.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.150 Policy C10 seeks to protect existing sport and recreation facilities in the countryside and encourage the positive use of the countryside for outdoor sport and recreation, and sets out the criteria for supporting new outdoor recreation and sport and recreation facilities. At the inquiry, SMBC confirmed that Policy C10 reflects current national policy on recreation in the countryside in PPG2 (¶ 1.6), PPG17 (¶ 25/30) & PPG12 (¶ 4.14). I also note that the reference to *Regional Planning Guidance* in para 7.4.1 is to be replaced by a reference to *PPG2 [CD175]*.
- 7.151 CPRE argues that Policy C10 is not restrictive enough to prevent the erosion of Solihull's Green Belt from inappropriate built development, traffic generating or light polluting proposals. However, criterion (iii) of the Policy specifically refers to proposals needing to be consistent with Green Belt policy, in this case Policy C2(ii). A cross-reference to this specific policy would be helpful, as SMBC acknowledges [*UDP-165/166*]. The Plan is dealing with recreational *facilities* rather than *activities*, so this is the correct term. Policy C2(ii) would ensure that any built development is small-scale, in line with PPG17 (¶ 30), and cover significant traffic movements in terms of Policy T17. The remainder of the guidance in PPG17 (¶ 26/30) is covered in Policy C10 (i) & (iii).
- 7.152 In response to HIAS, SMBC accepts that there is some overlap with Policy T17 in respect of greenways and quiet lanes. However, both are Countryside Agency initiatives which relate to the countryside and, in my view, are relevant in this chapter. Consequently, I consider that Policy C10 is soundly

based and recognises the Green Belt context of recreation proposals in the countryside. Apart from a cross-reference to Policy C2(ii) in Policy C10(iii), no further amendments are needed to address these objections.

- 7.153 Sport England is concerned about providing a positive approach to noise-generating sports activities. PPG2 (¶ 1.6) confirms that one of the key roles of the Green Belt is to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation near urban areas, whilst PPG17 recognises the importance of the urban fringe for providing sports and recreational activities. PPG24 sets out national guidance on noise generating uses. SMBC confirms that Policy C10 would not necessarily rule out noise-generating sports activities, provided that they are located and managed so as to avoid a detrimental effect on the amenity and quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Sport England acknowledges that certain sports, such as motor sports and shooting, can be intrusive in terms of noise, and recognises the need to minimise environmental impact. I have no doubt that any proposal for a noise-generating activity would be subject to a noise assessment, including any necessary mitigation conditions. This would help to ensure that the amenities of neighbours are not prejudiced, in order to meet the test set out in Policy C10(ii). In these circumstances, I cannot see the need for any further clarification in the Policy or supporting text on this issue.
- 7.154 Policy C10 supports new outdoor sports and recreation facilities in the countryside, but this has to be tempered with the fact that Solihull's countryside lies in the Green Belt. Any proposals would therefore have to be consistent with the criteria in Policy C2(ii), or be justified on the grounds of very special circumstances. This may not necessarily rule out high quality facilities with an international reputation for excellence, provided that they meet the relevant criteria and could be justified in Green Belt terms. This addresses CPS' points.

Recommendation

7.155 I RECOMMEND that the Plan is **modified** by:

(i) amending criterion (iii) of Policy C10 to cross-refer to Policy C2(ii);

(ii) amending the reference in paragraph 7.4.1 to PPG2, rather than Regional Planning Guidance.

POLICY OMISSIONS

Objections to First Deposit

1389/1140 – Meriden Parish Council; 1402/969 – Redland Properties; 1423/1000 – West Midlands RSL Planning Consortium; 1492/1111 – Countryside Planning Services

Objections to Revised Deposit

There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft

Key issues

- *Should the Plan recognise that the conversion of rural buildings for housing is not always appropriate, resist the loss of commercial uses and include rural design standards that have strong regard for local style and flavour;*
- *Should the Plan include a policy covering Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt, specifically related to Arden Brickworks;*
- *Should the Plan include a rural exceptions policy to secure affordable housing in rural areas where need is established;*
- *Should the Plan include a policy covering agricultural development.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.156 MPC fully supports Policies C2(v), C6, C7 & E10(iii), which cover the re-use of existing buildings, encourage farm diversification, provide guidance on the conversion of rural buildings, help to secure the viability of villages and support the needs of small businesses. SMBC's *Rural Buildings Conversion SPG [CD162]* provides further guidance and recognises that conversion to residential uses may not be as appropriate as employment/commercial uses. I recognise that there may be some loss of employment opportunities in the rural areas of Solihull, affecting the balance, mix and diversity of uses. However, I am satisfied that the policies in this UDP Review, along with the SPG, provides adequate guidance on the conversion of rural buildings and gives sufficient support for employment and commercial uses in the rural areas, particularly given that Solihull's countryside lies within the Green Belt.
- 7.157 Redland Properties seek a specific policy covering *Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt*, including the redevelopment of Arden Brickworks. I have dealt with this matter under Policy C2 (see above), and I deal with the objections on housing and employment matters in Chapters 3A & 4 of my report.
- 7.158 I have dealt with the issue of affordable housing in rural areas under the Housing policies in the Plan (Chapter 3; Policy H4), and also addressed it under Policy C2. In Solihull, the rural areas of the Borough are relatively close to the main urban areas where a range of house types and prices are available, including affordable housing on urban sites. The strategy of the SUDPR is to focus new housing development in the main urban area, in line with RPG11. Some affordable housing may come forward as a result of proposals for residential development within the smaller settlements inset in the Green Belt, but most affordable housing needs are intended to be met within the main urban areas. To establish a rural exceptions policy in Solihull would run counter to this strategy, as well as conflicting with regional guidance. Furthermore, PPG3 (Annex B5) confirms that the rural exceptions policy is not intended to apply in most Green Belt areas, which are close to the main conurbations where conditions are not typical of most rural areas.
- 7.159 *However, recent amendments to PPG3 (January 2005) encourage the provision of adequate housing provision in rural areas, and support the provision of affordable housing by a "rural exception" policy. In the Housing chapter of my report (Policy H4), I recommend that SMBC gives further thought to this possibility in subsequent reviews of this UDP. This would help to address WMRS's concerns in the medium-longer term, although I consider it would be inappropriate to include a specific policy establishing a rural exceptions policy for affordable housing in the Countryside chapter of the SUDPR at this time.*
- 7.160 CPS seeks a new policy recognising the part agriculture plays in forming the countryside, promoting agriculture where it contributes to the landscape and recognising the needs of modern agriculture for buildings and services. I have touched on this issue earlier in this chapter (see Policy C6). Most agricultural operations and buildings constitute *permitted development*, as the GPDO confirms, over which SMBC and this UDP have little control. Policies C2(i), C4 & C6 confirm that agriculture is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, protect the best and most versatile farmland, support farming and encourage farm-based diversification, in accordance with PPG2 & PPS7 (¶ 30-31). Further guidance is available in SMBC's *Rural Design SPG* which covers barns and agricultural buildings, along with the strategy in *Solihull's Countryside [CD95]*. I consider this provides sufficient guidance and support for agricultural development in Solihull.

Recommendation

7.161 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to meet these objections.

National Motorcycle Museum, Bickenhill**Objections to First Deposit** 1394/983 – National Motorcycle Museum.**Objections to Revised Deposit** There were no objections to the Revised Deposit draft.**Key issue**

- *Should the Plan include a policy providing guidance on the application of Green Belt policies to the National Motorcycle Museum, with a defined curtilage shown on the Proposals Map.*

Inspector's reasoning and conclusions

- 7.162 The National Motorcycle Museum (NMM) is a complex of exhibition halls and conference suites on the southern side of the main A45, close to the M42 (J6). It lies in the approved Green Belt, originally defined in the Solihull Green Belt Plan and confirmed in the adopted UDP. It has a long planning history, having first been established as a replacement for a transport café in 1988. In 2003, it was subject to a serious fire, but is now open to the public and available for functions. This objection stems from current proposals for major investment in the museum and seeks specific policy guidance on its future development, recognising its special circumstances as an important tourist and visitor attraction, similar to that in the adopted UDP [CD111; ¶ 5.11].
- 7.163 This matter was previously considered at the 1991 & 1995 UDP inquiries, when it was concluded that the NMM constituted inappropriate development in the Green Belt, but recommended that its unusual circumstances were recognised in the supporting text of the UDP [CD129; p185-188 & CD128; p.145-146]. After setting out the background to the NMM, the adopted UDP (¶ 5.11) confirms that it should not be permitted to expand beyond its present authorised curtilage and any further development would only be permitted where justified by very special circumstances, along with environmental and traffic implications. The policy now suggested by the objector would support the principle of further proposals for expansion of the NMM within the defined curtilage shown on the Proposals Map, subject to being justified by very special circumstances. NMM also suggests that the supporting text should recognise the importance of the NMM to the cultural heritage of the West Midlands, and support the principle of future investment at the NMM to support its role as a museum of national and international status.
- 7.164 The objector fully accepts that the NMM is an inappropriate development in the Green Belt and recognises that further development has to be fully justified, but seeks more certainty in terms of a positive policy background. However, although the text in the adopted UDP recognises the unusual historical circumstances of the NMM, it does not amend or add to the application of Green Belt policy to this site. An additional policy could not give specific support or approval to future applications for development, since this would conflict with PPG2 (¶ 3.1) & UDP Policy C2. Apart from the recent fire, little has changed since this site was confirmed in the Green Belt; it remains inappropriate and any development which has or does take place has to be justified on the grounds of very special circumstances. There is also little evidence to suggest that the existing reference in the adopted UDP has led to any speedier or easier handling of planning applications for development at the NMM in the past.

- 7.165 The objector does not suggest that the NMM should be designated as a *Major Developed Site in the Green Belt*, under PPG2 (Annex C), or be made an exception to Green Belt policy, and I can see no reason for it to be so considered. To do so would give unnecessary and unfair priority to this established business, as well as being contrary to national policy in PPG2, since there are many other commercial activities and businesses in Green Belt that are subject to similar development constraints. The reinstatement of the text in the adopted UDP is therefore unnecessary, since it adds nothing to existing Green Belt policies. The suggested text goes much further, by giving specific support for future development, which would be inappropriate and contrary to PPG2, especially given its location in a particularly vulnerable part of the *Meriden Gap* Green Belt. I also note that, at the inquiry, SMBC did not accept that the principle of expansion of the NMM was acceptable.
- 7.166 Like SMBC, I fully acknowledge the importance of the NMM in both regional and national terms to tourism, heritage, education and culture, particularly in terms of the restoration and display of motorcycles, and its contribution to the local economy and employment. I can also recognise the potential to upgrade the NMM to provide a significantly enhanced visitor attraction and appreciate the wish for a more positive policy background to guide future investment decisions. However, contrary to the objector's view, there is no policy vacuum in this case; the policy is clearly apparent and is based on long-established Green Belt considerations, with no justification for any exception to be made. I also note that Policy R8 of the Plan provides some guidance for leisure and cultural activities in appropriate locations.
- 7.167 At the inquiry, there was some discussion about the extent of the present curtilage. This has been established, and is a matter of fact at the time, so there is no need for it to be shown on the Proposals Map in the absence of any special policy. I recognise the implications of the recent fire, but planning permission has now been granted for the reinstatement of fire-damaged areas, with some minor alterations and extensions. I realise that the NMM is an independent commercial enterprise, rather than solely a non-commercial museum. I also understand the economic viability of the NMM, and the need to supplement visitor income with other events. However, it may be that further commercial sponsorship will be forthcoming when the museum is fully re-established after the fire. I note that the current plans envisage a major expansion of the NMM, doubling its current floorspace, but in my view, it would be inappropriate to consider such proposals other than against the established Green Belt policy.
- 7.168 I can find nothing in national Green Belt policy, or in other national guidance, including PPG1 (¶ 41) (*now PPS1 (¶ 32)*), PPS7 & PPG12, that would support the inclusion of a specific policy supporting further development at the NMM. There is also nothing in RPG11 to suggest that the NMM or museums in general are special cases in Green Belt terms. In view of its Green Belt location, I conclude that it is wholly reasonable and appropriate that any further developments at the NMM should be subject to the established Green Belt tests, as well as having regard to other relevant policies in this UDP Review. Consequently, I cannot support a proposal for a specific policy for the NMM or the designation of its present curtilage on the Proposals Map.

Recommendation

7.169 I RECOMMEND NO MODIFICATIONS to the Plan to address this objection.
