

Introduction

- 3.1** Countryside cannot be easily replaced or restored and there are well-established national and county-based policies for protecting it. The aim of this Plan is to protect the countryside by restricting the spread of towns and villages.
- 3.2** Outside the main urban area and small rural towns and villages, the Borough is predominantly rural in character. The Metropolitan Green Belt covers the western extent of the Plan area, with its outer boundary situated broadly to the west of Paddock Wood and at the interface between Pembury, and part of Brenchley and Lamberhurst Parishes.
- 3.3** Within the Metropolitan Green Belt, there will be firm restraint against development in accordance with Government advice (PPG2) other than limited development for the purpose set out in the guidance. However, redevelopment or infill development within Major Developed Sites such as hospital and educational establishments within the Metropolitan Green Belt may be acceptable provided this would not compromise its openness or visual amenity and the surrounding countryside.
- 3.4** The Metropolitan Green Belt boundary should be drawn with the long-term future of towns and villages in mind, with a view to safeguarding land between the built up area and countryside which may be required to meet longer term development needs. For this purpose, this Local Plan designates areas of Rural Fringe.
- 3.5** A Limit to Built Development clearly defines the limit to growth around all urban areas and villages in accordance with the approved Kent Structure Plan (1996) and the Kent & Medway Structure Plan (2006) policy.

Aims

1. To prevent the unrestricted sprawl of towns, villages and hamlets into the surrounding countryside.
2. To maintain the separate identity and character of settlements and prevent their coalescence and the erosion of largely undeveloped gaps:
 - (i) between settlements with defined Limits to Built Development including:
 - Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough
 - Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury
 - Royal Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall
 - Southborough and Bidborough
 - Rusthall and Langton Green
 - Brenchley and Matfield
 - Goudhurst and The Chequers area
 - Hawkhurst and The Moor
 - (ii) between settlements with defined Limits to Built Development and settlements without defined boundaries including:
 - Cranbrook and Wilsley Green
 - Cranbrook and Hartley
 - Sissinghurst and Cranbrook Common
 - Hawkhurst and Gills Green
 - Hawkhurst and Four Throws
 - Hawkhurst and Sawyers Green
 - Lamberhurst and The Down
 - Sandhurst and Sandhurst Cross
 - Sissinghurst and Wilsley Pound

3. To assist in the renewal and regeneration of parts of the Borough's towns and villages by restricting outward expansion and encouraging the recycling of previously-used land and buildings.

Boundary Definition

- 3.6 A defined boundary has been drawn for the Limits to Built Development, Metropolitan Green Belt and Major Developed Sites within the Metropolitan Green Belt to ensure that the boundaries will endure and that there are clear indications of where the Borough Council will seek to concentrate new development. The boundaries are based on those contained in the adopted Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (1996), which in turn had reviewed the boundaries in the previous area-based Local Plans for Royal Tunbridge Wells, Southborough and Paddock Wood.
- 3.7 The Limits to Built Development and Metropolitan Green Belt boundaries for each settlement have been defined where the character of the area changes from being 'built up' or 'urban' and therefore belonging to the character of the built up area, to being 'rural', 'loose-knit' and more akin to the countryside. In some cases there is an abrupt change of character, where the built up area may abut, for example, dense woodland or open countryside. In other cases a change of character occurs at a break in development, marked by undeveloped land, between the more compact, densely developed built up area and 'loose-knit' groups of buildings or isolated dwellings which lie beyond this break. This change in character is the point at which boundaries have been defined.
- 3.8 Wherever possible, Limits to Built Development, Metropolitan Green Belt and Major Developed Site boundaries have been drawn close to the built up area along the inner boundary of readily recognisable features such as roads, watercourses, hedge or tree lines. However, where by following such a boundary this would enclose a substantial area of largely undeveloped land that is visible from, or visually related to, the countryside, or a smaller area at a sensitive location such as the entrance to a town or village or in an exposed location, the boundary has been drawn a reasonable distance (generally 10 metres) from the back edge of the existing principal building. This approach has also been followed where there is no strong boundary at the edge of a settlement.
- 3.9 Careful consideration has been given to the possible policy implications of including marginal areas within the built up area – for example, on the purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt and the possible visual impact of harmful outward expansion which might otherwise be permissible under policies for the built up area (such as residential infill development). Consistent with the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006, the Limits to Built Development, Metropolitan Green Belt and Major Developed Site boundaries have been defined with the aim of preserving the character of settlements and the countryside beyond.
- 3.10 This Local Plan allocates sites for development, some of which are at the periphery of settlements. Boundaries are specifically drawn to include such allocations within the Limits to Built Development. This signifies clearly that the Borough Council accepts that such development within the area allocated should take place. Exceptions have been made for the allocation of land for village primary schools and Park and Ride sites. Such sites remain outside the Limits to Built Development to indicate the lack of support for any other type of development. In any event, such exceptional development will remain primarily open in character with limited built form.

Metropolitan Green Belt

- 3.11 The Metropolitan Green Belt is a long-standing instrument of national and regional planning policy to which the Government attaches great importance. National guidance states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; and that the most important characteristic of Green Belt is its

openness. The general purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt as defined in PPG2 are:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 3.12** The outer boundary to the Metropolitan Green Belt was defined by the Kent Countryside Plan (1983).
- 3.13** The Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (1996) reviewed the Metropolitan Green Belt boundaries of the previous area-based Local Plans for Royal Tunbridge Wells, Southborough and Paddock Wood, which defined the Metropolitan Green Belt boundary adjoining these settlements. The 1996 Local Plan also defined, for the first time, the inner boundaries for the remainder of the settlements within the Plan area covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt. National guidance states that the essential characteristic of the Green Belt is its permanence. Green Belt protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead and, where detailed Green Belt boundaries have been adopted in local plans, they should only be altered in exceptional circumstances.
- 3.14** Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9) confirms that Metropolitan Green Belt designations still have an important role in preventing urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements and in protecting the countryside. Furthermore, the Green Belt policy concentrates development in existing urban areas and is an essential tool in promoting urban regeneration and renewal. The emerging South East Regional Spatial Strategy does not propose any change to the general extent and/or function of the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 3.15** RPG 9 states that the outcome of urban capacity studies and the review of all other alternative locations for development will determine whether exceptional circumstances have arisen to suggest the need to review Green Belt boundaries. The Tunbridge Wells Borough Urban Capacity Study (2001) and the allocation of sites outside the designated Metropolitan Green Belt indicate that the Borough can accommodate all necessary development without the need to modify the Metropolitan Green Belt boundaries. Tunbridge Wells Borough is located within an area of strategic development restraint in West Kent. A large proportion of the Green Belt within Tunbridge Wells Borough is designated as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the protection of which remains a priority, under national and Regional Planning Guidance. It is regional planning policy in RPG 9 to safeguard the setting of historic towns and villages. In addition, the conservation of the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells is a strategic planning policy. The purposes of the Green Belt remain relevant for the Plan period. There are no exceptional circumstances arising in this Plan period which justify the amendment of the existing Metropolitan Green Belt boundary and for these reasons no releases of land from the Metropolitan Green Belt are proposed in this Local Plan.
- 3.16** The Metropolitan Green Belt inner boundaries are defined around the principal towns and villages and are shown on the Proposals Map. Where a boundary is not drawn around the edge of a small hamlet or group of buildings, the area is included entirely within the Green Belt.
- 3.17** Within the Metropolitan Green Belt there will be a presumption against permitting new development, or changes of use of land or buildings, or engineering operations, other than those in accordance with PPG2, the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006 (and the South East Regional Spatial Strategy which will succeed it) and other relevant policies contained within this Local Plan.

POLICY MGB1

The openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be preserved and no development which would conflict with the purposes of including land within it will be permitted. Within the Metropolitan Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted other than for:

- (1) The construction of a new building or buildings for one of the following purposes:
 - (a) agriculture or forestry;
 - (b) essential facilities for outdoor sport or recreation, for cemeteries or other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes;
 - (c) limited affordable housing to meet local needs in accordance with POLICY H8;
 - (d) development within a Major Developed Site, as defined on the Proposals Map, and provided that any proposal is in accordance with POLICY MGB2;
- (2) Extension, alteration or replacement of a dwelling, provided it is in accordance with POLICIES H10 and H11;
- (3) The re-use of a building, provided any proposal is in accordance with POLICIES H13 and ED5 and does not include any associated uses of land around the building which might conflict with the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt or the purposes of including land in it; and
- (4) The carrying out of an engineering or other operation or the making of any material change in the use of land, provided that it maintains the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and does not conflict with its purposes.

Major Developed Sites within the Metropolitan Green Belt

~~3.18~~ Whilst there is a general presumption against development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, PPG2 makes specific provision for the identification of sites of substantial scale (such as hospital and educational establishments) as Major Developed Sites within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Within such areas limited infilling or complete or partial redevelopment may be acceptable.

~~3.19~~ In accordance with national guidance, the Borough Council defines Major Developed Sites as sites which have:

- ~~• an identifiable and substantial development core of permanent buildings (above 7,500 square metres floorspace); and~~
- ~~• some capacity to accept development without adversely affecting the openness; visual amenity or purposes of the Metropolitan Green Belt or other environmental designations.~~

~~3.20~~ Often, the operational sites are extensive. However, in order that the surrounding countryside is protected from the encroachment of development and the openness and visual amenity of the Metropolitan Green Belt is not compromised, the Major Developed Site boundaries are defined around the core of permanent buildings.

- 3.21 ~~There are three sites which meet the above criteria and are designated as a Major Developed Site on the Proposals Map:~~
- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Holmewood House School, Langton Green | (7,800 square metres) |
| Kent College, Pembury | (8,200 square metres) |
| Pembury Hospital, Pembury | (25,000 square metres) |
- 3.22 ~~On the deposit date of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review (May 2001), each Major Developed Site had a measured footprint of permanent buildings which is shown in rounded figures in brackets above. This footprint will be used as the basis for interpreting whether new infill development would represent a major increase in the developed proportion of the site, or, if redevelopment is proposed, that a footprint would not exceed that of the existing buildings.~~
- 3.23 ~~Where a site contains a mixture of building heights, the maximum height of any new buildings should not exceed the maximum height of any of the existing buildings. As to the amount of the new development reaching the same previously maximum height, this will be judged against the impact that the development would have on the openness of the Metropolitan Green Belt and the overall visual impact, including reference to the impact of the previous buildings. The scale, form and location of any proposal will be significant in judging such impact.~~
- 3.24 ~~The designation of a Major Developed Site does not set aside other planning considerations such as the access implications and the environmental impact of additional development.~~
- 3.25 ~~Given the restricted capacity of the identified sites, and the requirement of national planning guidance not to create a major increase in the developed proportion of a Major Developed Site, the Borough Council encourages the formulation of a site masterplan to ensure that any new development is comprehensively planned and makes efficient use of the available land.~~
- 3.26 ~~The designation of Major Developed Sites offers the opportunity for environmental enhancement in addition to meeting the longer-term needs of the sites identified. This may be achieved through the rationalisation of buildings.~~

POLICY MGB2

~~Infill development and redevelopment proposals within the designated Major Developed Sites at Holmewood House School, Langton Green; Kent College, Pembury; and Pembury Hospital, as defined on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:~~

- ~~1 Development would not have an adverse impact on the openness or visual amenity of the Metropolitan Green Belt;~~
- ~~2 Development would not exceed the height of any of the existing buildings;~~
- ~~3 Where infill development is proposed, development would not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the defined Major Developed Site; and~~
- ~~4 Where redevelopment is proposed, development would not occupy a footprint which exceeds that of the buildings to be replaced unless this would achieve a reduction in height which would benefit visual amenity.~~

- ~~3.27 At Holmewood House School, Langton Green there is potential to develop the site comprehensively whilst providing environmental enhancement to the character of the buildings and spaces within the identified boundary, including the preservation or enhancement of the setting of the Grade II listed building. Redevelopment of some of the buildings may enable this to be achieved. The site may absorb limited infill development, in the form of extensions to the existing buildings or development of additional buildings of an appropriate scale for this site.~~
- ~~3.28 At Kent College there is potential to provide for further limited infill or redevelopment within the confines of the identified boundary (shown in Appendix 1).~~
- ~~3.29 The Pembury Hospital site is proposed as the new District General Hospital in this Local Plan (POLICY CS1). This is likely to result in the redevelopment of the site within the Plan period.~~

Rural Fringe

- ~~3.30 In order to ensure that the Green Belt boundaries endure over successive reviews of the Local Plan, the Green Belt has been carefully drawn, with a view to safeguarding, where appropriate, land between built up areas and the Green Belt which may be required to meet longer-term development needs.~~
- ~~3.31 The adopted Local Plan (1996) identified six Rural Fringe sites. Since adoption, an out-of-town entertainment development has been permitted and constructed on part of the Home Farm Rural Fringe site, Royal Tunbridge Wells.~~
- ~~3.32 The Home Farm Rural Fringe site has been extended to include the Sherwood Park and Greggs Wood area. The extension area was originally designated as a fringe site within the Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough Local Plan (1988). However, the adopted Local Plan (1996) allocated the site for informal outdoor recreation or a low-key tourist use. As this development has not come forward and is not required prior to 2011, the site is re-designated as Rural Fringe land.~~
- ~~3.33 In accordance with PPG 2 and 3, Rural Fringe areas have been identified at six locations. All sites abut the defined built up area. The sites are located close to the urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, and they may provide a valuable contribution to meeting long-term development needs whilst achieving a sustainable pattern of development.~~

POLICY RF1

Land is designated as Rural Fringe at the following locations, as defined on the Proposals Map:

- 1 Culverden Down, Royal Tunbridge Wells;**
- 2 Grange Road Allotments, Rusthall, Royal Tunbridge Wells;**
- 3 North Farm Tip, Royal Tunbridge Wells;**
- 4 Home Farm, Sherwood Park and Greggs Wood, Royal Tunbridge Wells;**
- 5 Speldhurst Road Allotments, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and**
- 6 Hawkenbury Farm, Hawkenbury Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells.**

- 3.34** — Government advice indicates that the essential characteristic of the Green Belt is its permanence. The achievement of this objective and the fulfilment of the functions of the Green Belt are closely related to the control of development within the land designated as Rural Fringe. Early release of land designated as Rural Fringe in this Local Plan would increase pressure for an early review of the Green Belt boundary and pressure for encroachment into the surrounding countryside, which in most cases is designated of national or strategic importance.
- 3.35** — It should be stressed that even in the longer term it is not expected that every part of the designated Rural Fringe sites will be suitable for built development. Whilst some of the Rural Fringe sites are visible from within the built up area, many of the large designations around Royal Tunbridge Wells are also highly visible from the surrounding countryside and form an important part of the setting of the built up area. Additionally, some sites encompass wildlife habitats of importance, contain important landscape features, or form amenity space serving local residential areas. The pattern of hedgerows and tree cover may be an important element of these landscapes.
- 3.36** — The designated areas of Rural Fringe have varying degrees of constraint, and detailed appraisals of constraints and features for retention will be undertaken. However, the main constraints associated with each site are readily identifiable as follows:

(i) — Culverden Down, Royal Tunbridge Wells

This site, particularly the central part, forms an important part of the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells. There are extensive views into and out of the site, particularly to the north and west to David Salomon's House and Speldhurst Road, which are situated on higher ground. The Bennett Memorial School buildings are set in a prominent position and have the character of a large institutional building in a parkland setting. It is important to retain the character of this part of the site. Other parts of the site are subject to nature conservation policies and landscape protection policies. Retention of the extensive tree group at the centre of the site, together with associated tree belts, as defined on the Proposals Map, is regarded as essential to protect the character and visual amenity of the site.

(ii) — Grange Road Allotments, Rusthall, Royal Tunbridge Wells

This site is situated on the ridge overlooking Hurst Wood Valley, with long views across to Culverden Down and Speldhurst. The north eastern boundary of the site is bounded by a hedgerow which should be protected and enhanced.

(iii) — North Farm Tip, Royal Tunbridge Wells

This site has been landscaped, following completion of the refuse tip, and forms a prominent artificial knoll in the landscape. The site is important to the setting of the town and is visible from Sherwood, the Longfield Road and railway approaches to the town. Ground conditions and environmental constraints dictate that only open uses are likely to be suitable for at least 25 years. The prominence of the site makes much of the area unsuited to development which would be visually intrusive on the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells from the wider countryside.

(iv) — Home Farm, Sherwood Park and Greggs Wood, Royal Tunbridge Wells

This site is important to the setting of Royal Tunbridge Wells. There are extensive views into the site from High Brooms, Southborough, Bidborough Ridge and the railway line. The site comprises woodland and an area of open pasture. Greggs Wood and part of the pastures of Home Farm are designated as a site of Nature Conservation Interest. The open part of the site contains a prominent, north-south running 'ridge' which is highly visible and is particularly important to the character of the setting of this part of the town. The topography and surrounding woodland make a positive contribution to the intrinsic character of the locality, providing a strong landscape structure within which the pasture is set and a visual link with the adjacent landscape. Retention of the tree cover and the undeveloped north-south orientated ridge are essential to protect the character and visual significance of the site.

~~(v) — Speldhurst Road Allotments, Royal Tunbridge Wells~~

~~This ridgeline site has a backdrop of modern, fairly high-density residential development to the north and east and is occupied by allotments.~~

~~(vi) — Hawkenbury Farm, Hawkenbury Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells~~

~~The patchwork character of the site formed by hedgerows enclosing open spaces is important to the setting of this part of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The northern part of the site is situated on a prominent ridge running east-west across the allotments and forms an important part of long views from the south and allows views out across the site to open countryside. Part of the site has been subject to landfill in the past and this may constrain the nature and extent of development. There are a number of free-standing trees which contribute to the character of the site and should be protected. In addition, the southern edge is an important buffer zone which should be retained in order to protect the ecological interest of the Site of Nature Conservation Interest to the south.~~

~~3.37 — Rural Fringe land is a constrained and finite resource which is not allocated for development. In the future the release of some parts of Rural Fringe land to meet long-term development needs will only be made by means of reviews of this Local Plan. In accordance with PPG2 it is intended that its release will be carried out in an orderly and controlled manner, extending over successive reviews of the Plan.~~

~~3.38 — It is not the aim of the Rural Fringe designations to preclude existing uses from continuing to occupy the site and adapt to current needs. Development which would meet the needs of an established use such as a school on a Rural Fringe site or temporary development, particularly that which would assist in ensuring that the land is properly looked after, may be appropriate on sites designated under POLICY RF1, provided it would not prejudice later development. Such development should respect the special characteristics and constraints of each site.~~

POLICY RF2

~~Land within the Rural Fringe, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be safeguarded from development as a reserve of land to meet longer-term development needs beyond the Plan period unless the proposals:~~

- ~~1 — Would meet the needs of an established use on the site, or~~
- ~~2 — Would be for temporary development.~~

~~Proposals should not prejudice the longer-term comprehensive development of the Rural Fringe land and should respect the special characteristics and constraints of the site.~~

Limits to Built Development

3.39 There are long-established, nationally-recognised and county-based policies for protecting the countryside of the Plan area because of Metropolitan Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape designations, and for its own sake. Once taken for built development, the countryside cannot be easily replaced or restored. Clear Limits to Built Development will direct development to the appropriate locations within the Borough. Consequently, this Local Plan defines the Limits to Built Development around all the principal settlements and Local Plan allocations, in order to restrict the encroachment of built form into the surrounding area and to meet the strategic objectives within the Plan to ensure sustainable development patterns. The Plan's strategy is to concentrate most development within the built up area whilst

limiting development in the surrounding countryside. The Limits to Built Development are shown on the Proposals Map.

- 3.40** Under policies of the adopted Local Plan (1996), a number of sites outside the Limits to Built Development have been developed for affordable housing to meet local needs. These sites remain outside the Limits to Built Development, indicating a lack of support for either a relaxation of planning conditions attached to the permission granted or further development pursued on the basis of the exceptions permission. These sites are designated on the Proposals Map as Rural Exception sites.

POLICY LBD1

Outside the Limits to Built Development, as defined on the Proposals Map, development will only be permitted where it would be in accordance with all relevant policies contained in this Local Plan and the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and the Kent & Medway Structure Plan 2006 rural settlement and countryside policies.

Implementation

- 3.41** The policies and paragraphs in this Chapter will be applied by the Local Planning Authority to guide development to the appropriate location in accordance with the sustainable objectives of this Plan.

