

# DRAFT BIRMINGHAM PLAN - CONSULTATION JANUARY 2013

## Response by CPRE WARWICKSHIRE BRANCH

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CPRE Warwickshire contributes the following comments on the Draft Birmingham Plan 2031. These are submitted in addition to the response by CPRE West Midlands Regional Group, and address detailed impacts on the proposals on the Sutton Coldfield area. For other issues, see the CPRE West Midlands Region response.

### *Overall Strategy and Vision (Questions 1 and 2)*

We disagree with the overall strategy and vision because it is a predict-and-provide approach to developing more housing and allocating more land for employment. This is not what the City needs and is contrary to the interests of its inhabitants.

Because there has been an unusual increase in population in 2001-2011 does not mean that this growth will continue or should be provided for within the city boundary or the West Midlands Region. The claimed forecast population in 2031 is based on a series of assumptions which have yet to be tested; and on one key issue is likely to be wrong. It assumes the continuation of international in-migration on the scale that took place in the 1997-2010 period.

It is Government policy to greatly reduce this. If that policy change is implemented the numbers are 10,000 households fewer, according to the City Council's own Plan's text. In principle, this change in policy will enable the proposals for new development in the Green Belt around Sutton Coldfield to be dropped as the proposal is for 10,000 new houses in the Green Belt.

### *The importance of the Green Belt*

Green Belts continue to fulfil the valuable function they were designed to do when they originated 55 years ago and make a positive contribution towards more recent issues such as biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development.

The fundamental purpose of Green Belt policy, then as now, was to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The five purposes of including land in Green Belts, as reiterated in the consultation document, are even more relevant today.

The distinction between built-up urban areas and open country is appreciated so much by so many people and is needed more than ever today. Green Belt land has tremendous value as a resource in its own right. It is not merely "unbuilt space". Its value includes:

- Leisure and access to the open countryside for the urban population without the need to travel far, providing health benefits, relaxation and tranquillity essential to our wellbeing in an era dominated by concerns over stress, inactivity and unfitness. The Sutton Coldfield By-way Walk shows this - a route through the Green Belt using public rights of way and pointing out items of historic and natural history interest.

- For nature conservation and biodiversity through a variety of field, hedgerow, watercourse and woodland habitats.
- Acting as a historic asset – it is a hinterland of historic farmsteads and small settlements around the ancient market town of Sutton Coldfield, providing cultural benefits and maintaining tradition.
- Being an agricultural resource providing good quality productive farmland to feed the growing local population, helping to reduce the need for dependency on food imports, and providing a livelihood for local farmers. Much of the Green Belt around Sutton Coldfield is Grade 2 or 3a land – ‘best and most versatile’ which it is policy to protect where possible.
- Being a visual and amenity benefit to us all, to our children and to future generations, providing an attractive landscape setting with inappropriate development resisted and its intrinsic character and beauty respected.

The West Midlands Green Belt around Sutton Coldfield has survived attempts at encroachment in the past and should do so again. It should be retained to continue to fulfil its function rather than weaken at the onset of pressure.

### ***COMMENTS ON AREAS A – D (Questions 5, 6, 10, 11)***

CPRE Warwickshire is opposed to development of any part of Birmingham’s Green Belt for housing or for employment.

From a landscape point of view each of the Areas A to D includes attractive, productive agricultural land, woodland and hedgerows, undulating but mainly falling away from the urban area, with streams and pools in the valleys. The land is in use for arable, grazing and equestrian purposes and provides well-used public access along footpaths and country lanes. There are sweeping views across countryside of contrasting character, colour and textures. Farm and other names indicate hilly and wooded areas highlighting the undulating nature of the landscape

We make the following response about individual areas of the Green Belt identified in the Draft Plan and in the Questionnaire at Q5 and Q10.

#### **AREA A : Hill Wood, east of Watford Gap**

The western part (A2) is very visible. It has historic landscape features including a 19<sup>th</sup> century field system along Hillwood Common Road. It includes steeply sloping ground where development would be more evident and difficult to screen. It comprises a mix of large and small fields and parkland, with woodland copses, hedgerows along boundaries and lanes with hedgerow trees. The well-known landmark of the Sutton Coldfield TV transmitter dominates the south west of the area, reaching 271 metres high, and draws the eye – making the open appearance of the landscape that much more significant. The land is valuable Green Belt because it is immediately north of built-up areas around Mere Green and east of dense development around Blake Street station, where the city built up area suddenly stops.

#### **AREA B : West of M6 Toll / Bassetts Pole**

This is an area of good landscape quality, open and visible to the wider countryside. It includes ancient woodlands and a wildlife corridor, with ridges and high ground visible from the open countryside to the east. It has some steeply sloping ground on which development would be more evident and difficult to screen, and a mix of large and small fields with woodland copses, hedgerows and hedgerow trees. It contains the slopes of the valley of Lindridge and Langley Pools,

and historic farmsteads such as Wheatmoor farm and the estate of Ashfurlong Hall. Sites of Local Interest for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) and a SINC are found here.

Area B is very important as the rural approach to Sutton Coldfield from Tamworth and ensuring an effective Green Belt between the edge of the conurbation and the large urban area of Tamworth.

#### AREA C : west of Sutton Coldfield Bypass / East of Walmley

This area has large open fields as hedgerows have in some cases been removed. The high quality of the farmland means that it is permanent arable and can be farmed effectively up to the edge of the urban areas (Falcon Lodge, Reddicap Heath and Thimble End).

The north-east of the Area contains higher ground and valleys visible from surrounding countryside to the north and east with a mix of large and small fields, woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

#### AREA D : East of the Bypass / Walmley

There is a historic field system between Oxleys Road and Bulls Lane and to the north of the historic Peddimore Hall are ridges, high ground and valleys visible from the open countryside to the north and east. There is some medieval ridge and furrow.

Peddimore Hall is an important building in the Green Belt which, it is stated in the consultation document, “retains its original setting”. The Area contains a mix of large and small fields with woodland, hedgerows and trees.

As with Area C, there are large open fields where hedgerows have disappeared, but the agricultural land value is high and the land is effectively farmed. The land falls to the south. The Birmingham and Fazeley Canal runs along the southern boundary together with the Kingsbury Road corridor and the edge of the existing urban development.

### **IN CONCLUSION**

Birmingham City Council’s proposed options for accommodating future growth as defined in the consultation are unsustainable, in conflict with national policies on Green Belts and their purpose, and shortsighted.

There is no justification for releasing Green Belt land for employment purposes either. There is likely to be adequate land recycled by industrial and commercial change, while the major growth in jobs will continue to be in the City Centre.

The Options for housing and for employment which would use Green Belt should be rejected. The previous draft of the Plan, then called the Core Strategy (issued for consultation in 2010) had a very much sounder approach and protected the Green Belt and thus the setting of Sutton Coldfield. In principle it should be returned to for the Birmingham Plan.

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