



NBPM
AG 8/2

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB
01-212 3434

My ref:

Your ref:

8 February 1984

Dear Andrew

DRAFT CIRCULARS ON GREEN BELTS AND LAND FOR HOUSING

My Secretary of State is publishing revised drafts of these circulars tomorrow morning. He announced this during oral questions this afternoon. We are sending copies to the many MPs who wrote following publication of the first drafts, and to the various interest groups.

In view of the wide public interest in the circulars you might like to have the enclosed copies of the revised drafts and of my Secretary of State's press release.

I am copying this letter and the enclosures to David Heyhoe, Janet Lewis Jones and Murdo Maclean.

Yours ever

Alan Davis

A H DAVIS
Private Secretary

Andrew Turnbull Esq

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PRESS NOTICE

GREEN BELTS AND LAND FOR HOUSING
REVISED DRAFT CIRCULARS PUBLISHED

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Mr Patrick Jenkin, today published revised versions of the draft circulars on Green Belts and Land for Housing which were issued in their original draft form last summer.

In a statement on the revised drafts Mr Jenkin said:

"I hope that the revised drafts get the message across more clearly. We are not changing the message - which is that the planning system must perform effectively its two essential functions: to maintain well established conservation policies and to make proper provision for necessary development.

In our General Election Manifesto we said "In our crowded country the planning system has to strike a delicate balance. It must provide for the homes and workplaces we need. It must protect the environment in which we live". This is what these two circulars are about - Green Belts and conservation on the one hand, and making proper provision for housing on the other.

I am inviting comments on the revised drafts by the end of March. We need to know, especially from those who commented on the earlier drafts, whether they can

accept that ^{the} new versions reflect a sensible and practical approach to the needs of development and the interests of conservation. We need their views on this broad issue rather than a further round of detailed textual amendments. It is impossible to find precise words which will satisfy everyone's particular interest in the subject but we have done our best to take full account of the responses to the original drafts and I believe that the revised versions have benefited from those earlier comments."

Circular from the
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB

Sir

LAND FOR HOUSING

1. The Secretary of State is concerned that the planning system should provide an adequate and continuing supply of land for housing. This Circular sets out the Government's policies on the provision of housing land. It emphasises the key role of the planning system in meeting the demand for housing, and it stresses the important contribution that the joint land availability studies introduced in Circular 9/80 can make in ensuring that suitable land is made available for development.

HOUSING AND PLANNING POLICIES

2. The Government wishes to encourage home ownership and to bring this within the reach of as many people as possible. The supply of new houses for sale is an essential part of this policy. The Government has set no limit to total private sector housebuilding and does not consider it useful or practical to forecast on a national basis future housing production over several years ahead. It is essential that the planning system should cater effectively for the demand for private sector housing, and that there should be an adequate supply of land available to meet that demand and other housing needs.

3. The Government also intends that well established conservation policies should be firmly maintained. It remains committed to the need to conserve and improve the countryside, natural habitats and areas of architectural, natural, historical or scientific interest and listed buildings. There is no change in the policies on national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty or conservation areas. Circular X/84 reaffirms the Government's commitment to Green Belt policy and there must continue to be a general presumption against any inappropriate development within them. Policies to protect agricultural land will be maintained and land of a higher agricultural quality will not be released for development where land of a lower quality could reasonably be used instead. The aim is to

accommodate necessary development in ways that protect amenity and ensure economy and efficiency in the use of land. The Secretary of State does not consider that these objectives are irreconcilable. The town and country planning system has served these purposes well and in ways that meet the interests of the community at large. It is essential that it should continue to do so.

LOCATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF URBAN LAND

4. In meeting requirements for new housing, full and effective use must be made of land within existing urban areas. Authorities should ensure that full use is made of the practical opportunities arising from conversion and redevelopment, the bringing into use of neglected, unused or derelict land including sites on Land Registers, and sites suitable for small scale housing schemes. Developments of this kind can make a useful contribution to house production and to the regeneration of older urban areas. This emphasis on the full use of urban sites and the recycling of urban land will also assist the preservation of agricultural land and conservation of the countryside and maximise the use of existing infrastructure. Private sector housebuilders and housing associations have shown that they are willing to undertake development on such sites, which may be particularly suitable for starter-homes, housing for single persons and small households who may prefer this type of location, with easy access to shops, transport and other facilities, and shorter journeys to work.

5. While the fullest possible use must be made of existing urban sites suitable for housing, most new housing will continue to be on new sites. The planning system must continue to identify, bring forward and permit the development of sufficient new land for housing to meet market demand.

6. Wherever possible, sites proposed for new housing should be well related in scale and location to existing development. They should facilitate economical layouts, be well integrated with the existing pattern of settlement and surrounding land uses, minimise the demands they make on public utilities and have good access to other services. This applies to development within or adjoining larger towns and cities, and also to sites in smaller towns and villages where new housing, sympathetic in scale and character, can be permitted. Such development can help to sustain smaller communities in rural areas. In a few cases it may be practicable to consider making provision in structure plans for new settlements. Any such proposals for structure plan alterations, and any specific proposals of this kind by private developers, must be subject to normal planning procedures.

STRUCTURE AND LOCAL PLANS

7. Structure and local plans should carry forward these planning policies. Some structure plans reflect assumptions and forecasts that date from the early 1970s when structure plans were first prepared and imply that population growth and new development can be directed by means of land allocation to areas that may not now be well related to present and future requirements. These assumptions need to be reassessed in relation to 1981 census results and demographic trends, including household formation and migration. They should also take account of economic development in the region, changing patterns of employment and travel to work, the current trends in market demand for housing, including the more varied types of housing requirement now met by the private sector such as single persons, small households and the elderly.
8. In the light of such reassessment, any alterations to structure plans should now be prepared covering the period for at least ten years ahead. These should show how future requirements for new housing can best be met, having regard to other planning objectives. Plans should indicate in broad terms the scale of provision to be made for housing in the area as a whole and in each District, and should identify those locations where provision for substantial growth is to be made. Proposals for alteration should allow flexibility in the rate at which land is made available for housing, subject to the need to relate this to the provision of new services, roads etc.
9. The provision made in structure plans for new housing has to be translated into specific land allocations in local plans and into planning permissions. In areas where substantial development is proposed in the structure plan, local plans should be prepared and should ensure that suitable land is allocated to implement those proposals in ways that take proper account of local conditions. Where structure plan alterations are proposed it may be appropriate to prepare a local plan in parallel.
10. The Memorandum on structure and local plans accompanying Circular X/84 provides more detailed advice on the review of structure plans and the preparation of proposals for alteration and of replacement plans.

AVAILABILITY OF LAND FOR HOUSING

11. It is essential that sufficient land is genuinely available in practical terms to enable the policies and proposals in approved structure plans and adopted

local plans to be carried forward. This means that sites must not only be free, or easily freed, from planning, physical and ownership constraints but be capable of being developed economically, be in areas where potential house buyers want to live, and be suitable for the wide range of housing types which the housing market now requires.

12. Local authorities should ensure that at all times land is or will become available within the next 5 years which can be developed (or is being developed) within that period and which in total provides at least 5 years' supply in terms of the general scale and location of development provided for in approved structure and adopted local plans. Within this context there should always be at least 2 years' supply available on which development can start straight away.

13. The Secretary of State emphasises that these are the minimum requirements that local planning authorities should meet if plan preparation and development control are to serve their proper purpose. Local planning authorities should be able to demonstrate from published plans, or other material already available, that the minimum requirement stated in paragraph 12 above can readily be accommodated.

LAND AVAILABILITY STUDIES

14. Joint studies by local planning authorities and house builders undertaken following Circular 9/80 have proved useful in identifying land suitable for development. They bring together the housebuilders' assessment of market demand and the development potential of particular sites, with the local planning authority's assessment of planning objectives. The Secretary of State hopes that planning authorities and housebuilders will continue to co-operate in this way. In urban areas studies have particular importance, by identifying sites suitable for development or redevelopment for housing, including disused sites which, if they are not likely to be required in future for their former use, may offer good opportunities for housing development. In order that the full potential of sites in urban areas may be realised the Government asks local authorities in urban areas to discuss the development of such sites with housebuilders

15. Annex B to this Circular contains advice on the preparation of land availability studies. Each study report should compare the housing provision in structure and local plans with the land which is agreed to be available for housing. The report should also comment on the adequacy of existing and prospective supply of housing land - recording difference of view where

necessary. In the light of the joint study, local planning authorities should consider whether they need to bring forward any alterations to structure and local plans. Such proposals would be subject to normal statutory procedures and would provide full opportunity for public comment. Local authorities and housebuilders are asked to adopt the method described in Annex B so that the results of all studies are comparable.

16. The Department's Regional Offices will be ready to help facilitate such studies and to advise on methodology and other matters dealt with in this circular. Studies already carried out should be kept up-to-date by means of regular joint review and revision, normally every 2 years or so. Local authorities are asked to send two copies of reports of completed studies, and later revisions, to the Department's Regional Office. In areas where there is no need for a full joint study, local authorities are asked to prepare a brief statement of the general situation and to discuss this with representatives of housebuilders.

17. Where there is found to be an inadequate supply of land to meet the structure plan provision for housing, local planning authorities should consider what action they should take to remedy the situation. This may include expediting planning applications, securing the provision of infrastructure for particular sites (which prospective developers may be prepared to finance in whole or in part) and, exceptionally, submission of an order for the compulsory purchase of a site which may be urgently needed either for development or to facilitate the development of other land.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

18. Planning applications for housing should be considered on their merits having regard to the provisions of the development plan and other material considerations. The results of land availability studies should continue to be treated as a material consideration in determining planning appeals. It is not the intention, however, that decisions on individual planning applications should turn on a precise calculation of whether the supply of identified sites for housing exactly matches or varies from the 5 year provision derived from the structure or local plan. Such calculations can rarely be exact, bearing in mind the constraints on land becoming available, the incidence of in-fill and other small sites, and variations in the capacity of allocated sites.

19. Further advice on planning permission for private sector house-building is given in Annex A to Circular 22/80; for convenience, that Annex is represented in Annex A to this Circular (references to Circular 9/80 should be read as referring to the advice in the present Circular on joint land availability studies). That advice remains valid and relevant to the present and future need for land for housing.

GREATER LONDON

20. In Greater London the factors affecting the availability of sites for housing are more complex, but authorities are asked to have regard to the objectives of the Circular and to co-operate with builders in the preparation of studies on the general lines indicated above: several such studies are already in progress.

CONCLUSION

21. The Secretary of State now looks to local planning authorities to take action in accordance with this Circular to make proper provision of land for new housebuilding to meet home ownership and other housing needs. He believes that this provision is feasible without prejudicing other planning objectives, including the need to strike a careful balance between conservation and development. These policies and objectives will be borne in mind in the determination of planning appeals by him and by his Inspectors and in the exercise of his other powers in planning and related matters.

FINANCIAL AND MANPOWER IMPLICATIONS

22. It is not considered that this Circular has significant additional public expenditure or manpower implications for local government. The provision of land for housing in structure and local plans is a vital part of the planning process, and the effective discharge of that function will reduce the time and costs involved in dealing with planning applications and appeals.

23. Department of the Environment Circulars 44/78 and 9/80 are cancelled.

The Chief Executive

County Councils)
District Councils) in England
London Boroughs Councils

The Town Clerk, City of London
The Director-General, Greater London Council
The National Park Office

Lake District Special Planning Board
Peak Park Joint Planning Board

For information:

The Chief Executive

London Docklands Development Corporation
Merseyside Development Corporation

The General Manager, New Town Development Corporations

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE-BUILDING

Constraints on Development

1. Among the major concerns of the planning system is the conservation of the rural and urban environment, the protection of agricultural land from development and the conservation of our architectural heritage. Within structure plans will be found statements of policy which guard against inappropriate development in national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, green belts and on better quality agricultural land.

Supply of Land

2. For any given area, the availability of land for housing will be governed primarily by the policies set out in the development plan. However development plan policies do not in themselves ensure that the housebuilding industry can produce the houses needed. For that there must be an adequate and continuous supply of land, with planning permission, suitable and available for immediate development, and situated where potential house buyers are prepared to live. That is why DOE Circular 9/80 (WO Circular 30/80) asks planning authorities to identify specific sites providing a five year supply of housing land in accordance with structure plan policies and, where the authority is approached by the housebuilding industry, to discuss with the industry whether that land is genuinely available for development.

Policy in the Absence of an Identified Supply of Land

3. In the absence of such an identified five year supply there should be a presumption in favour of granting permission for housing except where there are clear planning objections which in the circumstances of the case outweigh the need to make the land available for housing. The relevant factors should be apparent from the development plan. They might for example include the fact that the land was in a green belt, national park or an area of outstanding natural beauty; that other land of lower agricultural or landscape quality was available; that essential infrastructure was absent (or inadequate); that the land was important from the point of view of nature conservation or should be kept available for the working of important mineral deposits.

4. Where a structure plan has been approved by the Secretary of State, the identification of a five year supply of housing land in accordance with structure plan policies should not normally present any difficulty.

5. But the absence of an approved structure or adopted local plan is not a reason for failure to comply with Circular 9/80 (WO Circular 30/80). In almost all areas where there is not an approved structure plan, there are structure plans in an advanced stage of drafting. Where an old style development plan is still in force section 29(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 requires that it must be taken into account in deciding planning applications. The extent to which it will be relevant will depend on the time that has elapsed since it was prepared or last reviewed, the extent to which circumstances have changed in the meantime, and the stage reached in the preparation of structure or local plans for the area.

6. The suitability and availability of land allocated for housing purposes was investigated and analysed in detail in the "Study of the Availability of Private Housebuilding Land in Greater Manchester 1978/81" published by

the DOE in 1979. This study was limited to Greater Manchester but its methods are widely applicable. It identifies various factors which affect the feasibility of developing land as distinct from its availability in planning terms. One of the lessons to be drawn from the study is that the allocation of land for housing in a development plan or even the grant of planning permission does not necessarily mean that it is either suitable or available to be built on.

7. Where suitable land for development is shown to exist but is not available for immediate development and where its existence is used as a justification for refusing planning applications on less appropriate but readily available land, authorities should indicate what steps have or will be taken to make such land available. The absence of such firm proposals will mean that less weight can be attached to the objection.

8. Where a five year supply in accordance with Circular 9/80 (WO Circular 30/80) has been identified, this should not preclude residential development on other sites. The fact that the housebuilding needs of the area can be met from identified sites is not in itself sufficient reason for refusing planning permission elsewhere. Each case will still need to be considered on its planning merits having regard to any relevant provisions and policies of the development plan.

Infrastructure

9. Problems may arise when development is proposed where the necessary infrastructure is not available and pending its availability the consequences of development would be unacceptable. The issue in this type of problem is normally related in part to the scale of possible harm and in part to its likely duration. In preference to a refusal on the grounds that infrastructure is lacking it is better to consider whether the problem can be solved by an agreement with the developer under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. Even if it is a compelling objection that provision of the necessary infrastructure would be too costly, the possibility that the developer would offer a section 52 agreement which adequately met the objections should be explored before a refusal is issued.

10. Where the particular problem is one of creating or aggravating an existing sewerage overload pending new works in prospect, it may be right to grant permission if it seems certain that the houses will not be ready for occupation before the works are complete. Even if a slight lag is expected it may be in order to allow development, subject to a condition precluding the occupation of the dwellings before the completion of the necessary sewerage works. If the prospect of the works being completed on time is not firm, the situation might be covered by a section 52 agreement under which occupancy or rate of building depends on completion of the works as specified.

11. If local planning authorities contemplate refusing permission on the grounds that this would overload existing services they must be prepared to support their decision on appeal by specific evidence of overload.

Residential Densities

12. The Government's general policy is to encourage more intensive development in appropriate locations in order to preserve the countryside and protect better quality agricultural land. Detailed policies on densities are, however, normally contained in structure and local plans. Developers

are usually anxious to build at the highest density acceptable to their potential customers though what this is may vary from time to time according to the dictates of the market. When considering a planning application for a particular site the character of the site and its surroundings, together with the design and layout of the proposed development and the marketing possibilities, need to be taken into account as well as any density policies for the area as a whole. The Secretaries of State attach particular importance to the provision of low cost starter homes which may only be able to be built at higher than conventional densities. For many of the small redevelopment and infill sites now to be brought into use general density requirements cannot be a reliable guide.

Design and Layout of Estate Roads

13. Design Bulletin No 32 sets out recommendations on the design of roads and footpaths in residential areas. The Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of Transport have considered together the standards needed for roads on housing estates. They are not prepared to support any planning or highway authority requiring standards which are higher than those which would result from applying principles set out in Design Bulletin 32; and highway authorities are requested not to attempt to circumvent this policy by refusing to enter into agreements under Section 40 of the Highways Act 1959 for schemes where the estate roads conform to the recommendations in Design Bulletin 32 but not to costly standards of their own.

Other Aspects of Estate Development

14. Local planning authorities may need to control aspects of the design of housing estates where these have an impact on neighbouring development or agricultural land, for example access or overshadowing. But functional requirements within a development are for the most part a matter for the developers and their customers. Such matters would include provision of garages, internal space standards (whether Parker Morris or other) and sizes of private gardens. In making provision for open space and in considering the location of houses on plots and their relationship to each other local planning authorities should not attempt to prescribe rigid formulae. They should only regulate the mix of house types when there are specific planning reasons for such control, and in doing so they should take particular account of marketing considerations.

Extension of Urban Development into the Countryside

15. This circular supersedes DOE Circular 122/73 but the following general principles set out in that circular are still valid.

16. The bulk of future development must take place both by re-building within existing towns and by expanding the towns within the limits of employment of local community capacity eg infrastructure and social facilities. In considering proposals for development which involve the expansion of an existing town, regard should first be had to the amount of suitable cleared but undeveloped land within the town.

17. Expansion of a town into the surrounding countryside is objectionable on planning grounds if it creates ribbons or isolated pockets of development or reverses accepted policies for separating villages from towns, or if it conflicts with national policies for the protection of the environment such as those for safeguarding green belts, national parks, good farming land, areas of outstanding natural beauty or high landscape value, or for nature con-

ervation, or those relating to flood plains, run off problems, proximity to industry or noise, water or air pollution. Such an objection would normally rule out development unless the circumstances of the case are such that there is an exceptional need to make land available for housing.

Development in Villages

18. Some villages have reached the limit of their natural growth, but in others, useful provision for housing can be found by infilling on sites within the village itself and by modest expansion where this is consistent with the constraints set out in paragraph 17 above.

PREPARING A JOINT LAND AVAILABILITY STUDY

Organisation

1. Once local authorities' and builders' representatives have agreed to co-operate in a study they should nominate a "study manager" (or managers drawn from authorities and builders), to organise the work and set a tight but practicable time scale (say 6 months) for its completion.

Scope

2. Studies should generally cover whole counties, to facilitate comparisons of land available with the housing provision in structure plans. Occasionally, where there are special problems, studies for smaller areas may be appropriate; these should normally cover one or more complete districts.

Structure and local plan context

3. The general scale and location of land for housing should be derived from the housing provision policies in approved structure plans and adopted local plans. Where structure and local plans do not clearly indicate how the proposed housing provision is to be distributed between administrative districts, authorities will need to provide figures for each district. Local authorities should indicate whether the housing provision in plans includes gains from redevelopment, conversions and building on small sites and the proportion of the proposed housing provision they expect to be met from the private sector.

4. The amount of housing land required for the purposes of the land availability study should be calculated as follows. The number of dwellings already built before the base date of the study (ie the date when publication of the study is expected) should be deducted from the total plan provision. This residual provision should be divided by the number of years remaining in the policy after the base date of the study, giving a figure for average annual provision. Only where policies to phase development are expressly included in the approved or adopted plans, should phasing policies be taken into account. Informal phasing policies should not be used. In deciding how many houses are expected to be completed local authorities and builders will need to agree on the definition of "completed" dwelling, for example, dwellings which are ready for occupation.

5. When the housing provision in approved and adopted plans covers only part of the period of the land availability study, published modifications to proposed structure plan alterations may be used for land supply calculations. When there are no such modifications then the average annual provision for the last 5 years of the time covered by the policy should be extrapolated to give an estimate of the land required. It will only be appropriate to base calculation of the required housing land supply on an unapproved structure plan alteration or unapproved local plans when there are no figures for housing in the approved structure plan, or when the time period of the plan's provision for housing has expired.

Preliminary identification of sites

6. All studies should be based on comprehensive and up to date lists of sites which local authorities see as "available" (see para 11 of Circular) for both public and private sector housing development. They should look ahead 5 years from the date that the study is expected to be published and take into account all suitable sites. In urban areas it will be particularly important to include all suitable land including land from Land Registers and land which might be redeveloped.

7. Local authorities should complete a separate pro forma for each site for over 5 dwellings (or a limit agreed between builders and local authorities) identifying its location (grid reference, address, size and site plan if possible), information known about it (planning status, ownership or other development constraints, and any general comments), and the authorities' view of the likely number of completions on the site in each year of the study period, distinguishing between the public and private sectors. This preliminary list should include sites, or parts of sites, whether or not they have planning permission, where dwellings are under construction, or which are expected to produce completed dwellings during the study period.

8. The studies will not normally attempt to identify small sites (say less than one acre) or infill sites or similar sites that are not specifically allocated for development or redevelopment. Such sites, together with the conversion of larger houses into smaller units or the adaptation of non-residential buildings for use as housing, can make a useful contribution to total housing production and this is to be encouraged. If, on the basis of past experience and realistic appraisal of future potential, it seems likely to meet a significant part of future demand, the local planning authority and housebuilders should aim to agree on what allowance should be made for this in the overall assessment. It is, however, largely unpredictable and its contribution should not be exaggerated.

Assessment of Sites

9. The housebuilders' representatives should try to involve all house builders operating in the area. They may find it helpful to form a "panel" of representative builders to assess each site listed by the local authorities, say whether they agree with the authorities' views and suggest any other sites which they believe should be added to the list. The panel should then produce summary papers for each district for discussion with the local authorities and the builders. An overall meeting would then be held to agree the findings for the study area as a whole. It may be appropriate to involve relevant public undertakers on some occasions.

Final Report

10. The report should set out, normally by district, the structure and local plan housing provision on which the study is based and all assumptions behind the study (eg on conversions, redevelopment and small sites). It should compare the housing provision in structure and local plans with the land which is agreed to be available, and show whether:

- a. land is or will become available within the 5 years following the expected publication of the study which can be developed (or is being developed) within that period and which in total provides at least 5 years supply. This should include land on which dwellings are under construction and sites for dwellings which may be completed within the 5 year period;
- b. at least 2 years' supply is available after the expected publication date on which development can start without delay. Dwellings under construction should be excluded.

Studies should separately identify land for public and private sector building and include a note of any constraints which are preventing development.

11. The local planning authority may conclude that in the light of the report, or revision of an earlier study, the structure plan and/or local plans need to be reviewed and proposals prepared for alteration. The study and report provide a useful opportunity to discuss these aspects with the housebuilders, including trends in the demand for housing and the longer-term availability of land to meet those requirements. In undertaking plan revision, however, the local planning authority will need to consult more widely and any proposals that they bring forward for alteration of the plans will be subject to the normal planning procedures.

12. The brief statements on land availability prepared where there is no need a full joint study (para 16 of circular) should demonstrate whether there is sufficient land available for housing to carry forward the policies and proposals in structure and local plans.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND APPEALS

Area to be considered

13. When considering planning applications and in assessing whether sufficient land is already available, a realistic view must be taken of the extent of the area which should be considered. Normally it will be right to consider supply over the whole of an administrative district; exceptionally it may be more sensible to consider part only of a district, part of 2 or more districts or such areas as are used by the structure plan.

Circular from the
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham St, London SW1P 3EB

Sir

GREEN BELTS

1. The Government continues to attach great importance to Green Belts to check the unrestricted sprawl of built up areas and to safeguard the surrounding countryside from further encroachment. There must continue to be a general presumption against inappropriate development within Green Belts. The Government reaffirms the objectives of Green Belt policy and the related development control policies set out in Ministry of Housing and Local Government Circular 42/55.

2. Structure plans have now been approved for most parts of the country and these identify the broad areas of the Green Belt. Detailed Green Belt boundaries are now being defined in local plans and in many cases these are based on Green Belt areas defined in earlier development plans approved prior to the introduction of structure and local plans. This process of local plan preparation will continue and the advice in this circular relates to the definition of detailed Green Belt boundaries in local plans.

3. The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and their protection should be long-term. It follows from this that:

- a) Once a Green Belt has been approved as part of the structure plan for an area it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. If such an alteration is proposed the Secretary of State will wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered opportunities for development within the urban areas contained by and beyond the Green Belt. Similarly, detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans or earlier development plans should be altered only exceptionally. It is particularly important that full use is made of opportunities for bringing back into use areas of neglected or

derelict land and for recycling urban land, including obsolete industrial sites and buildings unlikely to be required in future for their original purpose. The development of such sites can make a valuable contribution to inner city renewal and reduce the pressures on undeveloped land. The maintenance of effective Green Belt policy will assist in this.

- b) Where detailed boundaries have yet to be defined in local plans - for example, where approved structure plans have extended the area of the Green Belt to include areas previously referred to as "interim" Green Belt - it is necessary to establish boundaries that can be maintained in the long-term.

4. Since the protection of Green Belts must be long-term, planning authorities in defining detailed Green Belt boundaries in local plans will need to relate their proposals to a longer time scale than is normally adopted in plans for new development. While making provision for development in conformity with the structure plan they should satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of that period. In some cases this will mean safeguarding land between the urban area and the Green Belt which may be required to meet longer term development needs. The normal process of development control serves this purpose and authorities should indicate in structure and local plans the policies that they intend to apply in those areas over the period covered by the plan.

5. It is especially important that the inner boundaries of Green Belts should be carefully drawn so as not to include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open for the purpose of the Green Belt. Otherwise there is a risk that encroachment on the Green Belt may have to be allowed in order to accommodate future development. If Green Belts are drawn excessively tightly around existing built-up areas it may not be possible to maintain the degree of permanence that Green Belts should have. This would devalue the concept of the Green Belt and also reduce the value of local plans in making proper provision for necessary development in the future.

6. Well defined long-term Green Belt boundaries will help to ensure its future agricultural and recreational value, whereas less secure boundaries would make it more difficult for farmers and other land owners to maintain and improve

their land. Local planning authorities can assist in this by giving particular attention to areas of land within the Green Belt, or adjacent to it, which are suffering from disuse or neglect. This is particularly important in parts of the Green Belt that are close to existing urban development and which can be especially vulnerable to neglect or damage. Such areas may form an important part of the Green Belt and, if so, need to be protected and maintained. But in considering whether to include such areas within the Green Belt, where detailed boundaries have not yet been established, authorities should also consider carefully whether the land could be better reserved for future development and thus ease the pressure on other land that should have the long-term protection of the Green Belt. The overall aim should be to develop and maintain a positive approach to land-use management which both makes adequate provision for necessary development and ensures that the Green Belt serves its proper purpose.

7. For convenience the two earlier circulars on Green Belts (MHLG Circulars Nos 42/55 and 50/57) are reproduced in the Annex to this circular. The policy advice that they contain remains valid but insofar as they relate to the earlier development plan system they are out-of-date and are replaced by the present circular.

The Chief Executive

County Councils)
District Councils) in England and Wales

London Borough Councils

The Town Clerk, City of London

The Director-General, Greater London Council

The National Park Officer

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Peak Park Joint Planning Board

For information:

The Chief Executive

London Docklands Development Corporation

Merseyside Development Corporation

The General Manager, New Town Development Corporations



MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1

3rd August, 1955

SIR,

GREEN BELTS

1. Following upon his statement in the House of Commons on April 26th last (copy attached), I am directed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government to draw your attention to the importance of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up areas, and of safeguarding the surrounding countryside against further encroachment.

2. He is satisfied that the only really effective way to achieve this object is by the formal designation of clearly defined Green Belts around the areas concerned.

3. The Minister accordingly recommends Planning Authorities to consider establishing a Green Belt wherever this is desirable in order:

- (a) to check the further growth of a large built-up area;
- (b) to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; or
- (c) to preserve the special character of a town.

4. Wherever practicable, a Green Belt should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable rural zone all round the built-up area concerned.

5. Inside a Green Belt, approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings for purposes other than agriculture, sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area.

6. Apart from a strictly limited amount of "infilling" or "rounding off" (within boundaries to be defined in Town Maps) existing towns and villages inside a Green Belt should not be allowed to expand further. Even within the urban areas thus defined, every effort should be made to prevent any further building for industrial or commercial purposes; since this, if allowed, would lead to a demand for more labour, which in turn would create a need for the development of additional land for housing.

7. A Planning Authority which wishes to establish a Green Belt in its area should, after consulting any neighbouring Planning Authority affected, submit to the Minister, as soon as possible, a Sketch Plan, indicating the approximate boundaries of the proposed Belt. Before officially submitting their plans, authorities may find it helpful to discuss them informally with this Ministry either through its regional representative or in Whitehall.

8. In due course, a detailed survey will be needed to define precisely the inner and outer boundaries of the Green Belt, as well as the boundaries of towns and villages within it. Thereafter, these particulars will have to be incorporated as amendments in the Development Plan.

9. This procedure may take some time to complete. Meanwhile, it is desirable to prevent any further deterioration in the position. The Minister, therefore, asks that, where a Planning Authority has submitted a Sketch Plan for a Green Belt, it should forthwith apply provisionally, in the area proposed, the arrangements outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 above.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. B. VALENTINE.

Under Secretary.

The Clerk of the Council,
Local Planning Authorities.
County District Councils (for information).
England and Wales.

Annex to Circular No. 42/55

STATEMENT BY THE RT. HON. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., MINISTER
OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, IN THE HOUSE OF
COMMONS ON 26th APRIL, 1955

"I am convinced that, for the well-being of our people and for the preservation of the countryside, we have a clear duty to do all we can to prevent the further unrestricted sprawl of the great cities.

The Development Plans submitted by the local planning authorities for the Home Counties provide for a Green Belt, some 7 to 10 miles deep, all around the built-up area of Greater London. Apart from some limited rounding-off of existing small towns and villages, no further urban expansion is to be allowed within this belt.

These proposals if strictly adhered to, should prove most effective. For this the authorities in the Home Counties deserve much credit.

In other parts of the country, certain planning authorities are endeavouring, by administrative action, to restrict further building development around the large urban areas. But I regret that nowhere has any formal Green Belt as yet been proposed. I am accordingly asking all planning authorities concerned to give this matter further consideration, with a view to submitting to me proposals for the creation of clearly defined Green Belts, wherever this is appropriate.

However, I do not intend on this account to hold up my approval of Development Plans already before me. Additional provisions for Green Belts can be incorporated later."

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MINISTRY OF HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT
WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W.1

19th September, 1957

SIR,

GREEN BELTS

1. I am directed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government to refer to Circular No. 42/55 about Green Belts.

2. A number of sketch plans have been received and considered, and the authorities can now proceed with formal proposals for the alteration of their Development Plans. This circular gives advice on the form of the submission.

Boundaries of Green Belts

3. The one-inch County Map will show the whole area of Green Belt falling within the County, apart from any areas covered by Town Maps. On the outer edges of a Green Belt it should be possible to choose a suitable boundary along roads, streams, belts of trees, or other features which can be readily recognised on the ground and which appear on the one-inch base map.

4. On an inner boundary, however, where the edge of the notation will mark a long-term boundary for development, treatment at a larger scale will be necessary. Where such boundaries fall in Town Map areas no difficulty of scale will arise; but where they do not, authorities are advised to adopt the 1:25000 (approximately 2½") scale, seeking the Minister's permission under Regulation 3 (2) of the Development Plan Regulations, 1948, for the submission of a section of the County Map at the larger scale. This larger scale inset is still legally part of the one-inch County Map and should show no more detail than is normally shown on that map.

5. The definition of a long-term boundary for development may involve detailed adjustments (either inwards or outwards) in the boundary of the area already allocated on a Town Map. Where land allocations are to be deleted or additional land allocated for development within the Plan period, the adjustments can be included in the same submission as the Green Belt proposals.

6. There may be some pockets of land, between the town and the Green Belt, which are not to be developed within the present Plan period but which could be developed later without prejudice to the Green Belt. It would be misleading to allocate such areas now, but to include them in the Green Belt for the time being might give rise to difficulties and undermine public confidence in the Green Belt at a later date if it were then decided to allocate the land for development. Such areas may well be left as pockets of "white" land. They are then bound to be especially attractive to developers

and it will be desirable to set out in the Written Statement the authority's policy for such areas in order to make it clear that they are not available for development at the present time.

Existing settlements

7. Where it is proposed to allow no new building at all, the Green Belt notation can be simply carried across the settlement. Where it is proposed to allow "infilling" but no extension of a settlement, and the form of the present settlement is such that it is clear what "infilling" would imply, the Green Belt notation can similarly be carried across the settlement. These settlements, however, will need to be listed in the Written Statement in order to distinguish them from the first category.

8. The need to map the limits for development of a settlement is likely to arise only where the authority propose to allow some limited measure of expansion, or where the existing development is scattered and the authority consider it necessary to show in the Plan their precise intentions, e.g. to permit the closing of some gaps by "infilling" but not others. In such cases a County Map inset on the 1:25000 (approximately 2½") scale will normally be needed.

Notation

9. The notation suggested for County Maps in revised (Circular No. 92) notation is an edging and open horizontal hatching with the initials GB where necessary. For County Maps in the full colour (Circular No. 59) notation an edging and open horizontal hatching in Green (2) is suggested.

Written Statements

10. The Written Statement forming part of the proposals for the alteration of the Development Plan should state:—

- (a) The reason for defining the Green Belt.
- (b) The kinds of development which the Council would be prepared to approve in the Green Belt. It will normally be appropriate for this statement to refer only to the categories of development listed in paragraph 5 of Circular No. 42/55, and to make no reference to the possibility of allowing other development in exceptional circumstances. These other exceptional cases would thus become proposals for development not in accord with the Development Plan and so be treated in accordance with the normal procedure in such cases.
- (c) The Council's intentions for development control in any border areas of "white" land of the kind referred to in paragraph 6 above.
- (d) The Council's intentions for development control in settlements where they are proposing to allow infilling or expansion.

Authorities may also care to include a reference to the special attention which will be paid to visual amenity when they consider proposals for development which will be in the Green Belt or conspicuous from it.

11. Most Green Belts will lie in the areas of more than one planning authority. It will clearly be desirable in such cases to secure a consistent development control policy over the whole Green Belt, and authorities will wish to consult with the other authorities concerned to secure such a policy. Specimen forms of words are set out in the Appendix to this Circular in order to provide a basis for co-operation in the drafting of Written Statements.

Rural Areas generally

12. It is important that the specially strict control in the Green Belts (and in the areas of landscape value) should not result in permission being given elsewhere for development which is inappropriate or detrimental to the countryside.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. H. STREET,

Under Secretary.

The Clerk of the Council.

Local Planning Authorities

County District Councils (for information)

England and Wales

(91220/3/4/3)

Note: In Wales and Monmouthshire any communications in regard to this Circular should be addressed to the Under Secretary, Welsh Office, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

Appendix to Circular No. 50/57.

SUGGESTED DRAFT PARAGRAPHS FOR WRITTEN STATEMENT

(a) Reason for the Green Belt

1. It is considered that any substantial expansion of the built up area of..... should be checked. Land adjoining this area has therefore been defined in the Development Plan as a Green Belt in which new development will be severely restricted.

OR 2. It is considered essential to preserve the open character of the land between the towns/urban areas of....., and, and to prevent these communities from merging into one another. Land between these towns/areas has therefore been defined in the Development Plan as a Green Belt in which new development will be severely restricted.

OR 3. It is considered that the special character of..... would be prejudiced by further development immediately around the town. Land around the town has therefore been defined in the Development Plan as a Green Belt in which new development will be severely restricted.

OR (for use by a County Borough)

4. It is proposed that a Green Belt be established around..... /between..... and..... A part of the proposed Green Belt lies within the County Borough boundary, and this land is defined in the Development Plan as an area of Green Belt in which new development will be severely restricted.

(b) Types of development which will be allowed in the Green Belt

The purposes for which building (and the change of use of existing buildings) will be permitted in the Green Belt are agriculture and forestry, sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in large grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area.

(c) Development in "white" areas between the Green Belt and the areas allocated for development in the Plan

In order to keep amendment of the Green Belt boundaries to a minimum the inner boundary of the Belt has been defined to leave unallocated certain areas of land between the Green Belt and the development proposals in the Plan; these areas may later be allocated to meet demands for development beyond the present period of the Plan. Meanwhile the authority will permit only such development there as would be appropriate in the neighbouring Green Belt.

(d) Development in existing settlements within the Green Belt

Of the settlements which lie within the Green Belt, it is intended that some slight expansion shall be allowed at..... and.....
..... and the limits within which development in those settlements will be allowed are shown on insets to the County Map. It is proposed to permit only a limited amount of infilling in..... and.....
..... and no limits of development have therefore been shown in these cases. No new industrial building will be permitted in any of the settlements in the Green Belt.

(e) Development detrimental to the visual amenities of the Green Belt

Care will be taken to ensure that the visual amenities of the Green Belt will not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which, although they would not prejudice its main purpose, might be inappropriate by reason of their siting, materials, or design.

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