

City of York Local Plan
The Approach to the Green Belt Appraisal



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In November 1999 a public inquiry opened to examine objections to the City of York Local Plan. One of the first issues to be considered by the independently appointed Government Inspector was the York Green Belt. In January 2000 he published his provisional views which made it clear that York should seek to adopt a permanent Green Belt. This differed to the approach advocated by the Council which involved initially designating an interim Green Belt whose boundaries would endure only for the life time of the Local Plan. Taking its lead from the inspector in February 2000 the Council suspended the inquiry and officers began a Green Belt Review.

An essential aspect of any review of the Green Belt would clearly be to appraise the existing draft Green Belt as defined in the unadopted York Green Belt Local Plan (post mods draft 1995). It was considered that this work was essential to aid in the identification of those areas surrounding the City that should be kept permanently open.

1.2 Approach

The appraisal has consisted of three component parts each of which is described below.

- Desk Top Study – This comprised two parts: firstly a review of relevant written information including PPG2, the work of Baker Associates in the East Midlands, and previous work undertaken by the City of York and North Yorkshire County Councils; and secondly, the detailed consideration of maps both historic and current of the City of York Council area.
- Field Analysis – A considerable amount of time was spent in the field assessing the land outside the City's built up area.
- Data Collation & Analysis – The output from the two stages above was analysed and evaluated to determine which areas of land are most valuable in Green Belt terms. The results of this work are included within this document and illustrated in map form.

1.3 Report Structure

This report begins by examining the policy context surrounding Green Belt. It then draws on this analysis to define the purpose of York's Green Belt, before going on to indicate in map form where its most valuable components lie.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

Green Belt policy emerged following work by Abercrombie in the 1940s to be established in 1955 through circular 42/55 which recommended that authorities consider establishing a Green Belt wherever this was desirable in order :

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

The aims of Green Belt were expanded in a subsequent circular published in 1984 and Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 produced in January 1988 and updated in January 1995.

2.1 PPG 2 Green Belt (1995)

Government guidance(PPG2) states that the fundamental aim of GB policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It then goes on to state that there are five purposes for which land can be designated as Green Belt:

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

2.2 Green Belt Purposes

The five purposes highlighted above are of key importance in identify which are the most valuable areas of the countryside surrounding York from a Green Belt perspective. The meaning attached to each by the City Council is briefly considered below.

Purpose 1: To Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

Sprawl refers to ad hoc uncontrolled expansion of a built up area. This would clearly be undesirable as it does not allow for proper planning i.e. The direction of development to the most appropriate location.

Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another

This purpose of Green Belt is specifically about retaining the separate identity of towns. Its justification lays in the idea that by maintaining a several mile strip of open countryside between towns you are able to help maintain separate communities and a sense of place.

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

This purpose is similar to purpose 1 discussed above. It can however be applied much more widely as it is not qualified by reference to 'large built up areas' or 'towns'. Thus it can be used to justify the exercise of very restrictive control to prevent ad hoc or unplanned development, around or outside any settlement in the Green Belt, or within any washed over settlements.

Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and character of historic towns

This purpose is obviously very specific and refers to towns that can be recognised as having a high historic value. When designating a Green Belt for this purpose it is clearly important to define what is meant by the setting and character of the historic town in question. If this is defined fairly narrowly, for example just including land adjacent to and allowing views of a historic core it would lead to a very compact green belt. Conversely, if the historic character

and setting of a town is interpreted as including the open countryside around it and its spatial relationship with surrounding villages then the land designated as green belt for this purpose is likely to be considerable.

Purpose 5: To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

This purpose relies on the notion that if development is prevented in one place, it can be redirected into what is considered by government to be a more appropriate location. It relates specifically to the idea that the control of development on the periphery of a built up area by designating it as Green Belt will lead to regeneration as developers will be forced to utilise brownfield sites in the urban area. This purpose has led to a considerable amount of debate particularly from the point of view that failure to accommodate a developer may not lead to building in the town the Green Belt surrounds, but to the loss of the development along with any associated economic benefits to another town or city.

2.3 Strategic Guidance

In addition to the guidance in PPG2 further strategic guidance is provided in the North Yorkshire County structure plan which was adopted in October 1995, although the principle was adopted much earlier in the 1980 Structure Plan. It indicates

"the North Yorkshire Green Belt will consist of a belt whose outer edge is about 6 miles from York City Centre". (Policy E8)

It also states, in policy E8a, four points that should be taken into account when defining precise boundaries of Green Belt in Local Plans. Unfortunately the value of this policy in terms of this assessment is limited as its contents suggest that it was written prior to the publication of the revised PPG 2 in January 1995. The Government's view is therefore likely to be that PPG2 should take precedence.

The issue of Green Belt is also addressed in Regional Planning Guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber (October 2001). This document acknowledges the valuable role Green Belt play particularly from the point of view of creating urban renaissance and conserving the countryside. It suggests that there general extent should not be changed, but indicates that localised reviews of Green Belt boundaries may be necessary in some cases to meet the wider principles of sustainable development. This plan however provides nothing that can be used to evaluate different areas of Green Belt.

Given the lack of detail contained in both Regional Planning Guidance and the Structure Plan it was considered that, for the purposes of this study, PPG 2's stated purposes should be used as the key point of reference by the City of York Council in defining precise boundaries for the first time.

3. THE PURPOSES OF YORK'S GREEN BELT

Purpose 1, 3, and 5 outlined in 2.1 & 2.2 above represent relevant principles which are important elements of all Green Belt, but when considered alone in the case of York, do not

assist in a spatial assessment of which areas are the most valuable in Green Belt terms. The two remaining points 2 & 4 however provide the basis on which an evaluation can be made and are therefore most useful for the purposes of this study.

The Council considers the most important of these to be the purpose relating to the 'preservation of the setting and special character of historic towns'. It was therefore essential that this study attempts to define what is meant by the historic character and setting of York in this context.

4. THE HISTORIC CHARACTER AND SETTING OF YORK

Using the information gathered as part of the desk top study it was felt that the historic character and setting of the City in this context could be defined in terms of the following elements.

(i) Open approaches to the city.

The setting of York is characterised by open approaches leading towards the city. Long views are achieved across the relatively flat landscape with only occasional woods to interrupt extensive views. The series of green wedges enables long vistas to be experienced from the outskirts towards city landmarks. The encircling Ring Road is largely set back from the urban edge and positioned at grade or at an elevated level, enabling this open impression to be experienced.

Open approaches enables the city to be experienced within its wider setting establishing a close relationship between the urban area, green wedges, surrounding countryside and the villages. The retention of openness is one of the central purposes of Green Belts.

(ii) Green Wedges.

The green wedges are a characteristic feature of York. They form large tracts of undeveloped land which largely extend from the countryside into the city. They prevent the lateral coalescence of different parts of the urban area and help retain the distinctive characteristics of earlier periods of individual settlements. The green wedges bring a feeling of the countryside within a close proximity to the centre of the city. Their open nature allows views of the city to be enjoyed including important vistas towards the Minster.

The green wedges have helped shape the character and form of the urban edge and the pattern of built development which contributes greatly to the local distinctiveness and attractiveness of York. The green wedges provide an extended interface between the urban edge and the surrounding countryside.

The green wedges comprise the historic "strays" and the Ouse "ings" and additional areas of undeveloped land which separates the existing urban form.

The strays are illustrated on map 1 and comprise over 800 acres of open land, mainly under grass. They are the remaining areas of common land over which the Freeman of York held long established grazing rights. They include Bootham Stray, Monk Stray, Walmgate Stray and Micklegate stray. Whilst some parts of the strays are still retained for grazing, others have

acquired additional uses. They have been retained for public use and are now managed by the City of York becoming highly valued spaces for informal recreation with close access to the city. The strays represent an important link with the past to which great value is attached.

The "ings" are the flood plain water meadows defining a distinctive landscape character and a long and rich history, a number of which were referred to in the Domesday Book. The management of the "ings" was by the Lammas System. Originating in the early medieval manorial, it was a system of farming individual strips as a hay meadow until Lammas day in August after which the "ings" became open to communal grazing. Some areas escaped Parliamentary enclosure and the "ings" at Clifton and Acaster are still essentially managed as Lammas Lands. Their open grassland character, pattern of ditches and seasonal flooding remain an important landscape feature of the Ouse floodplains.

Whilst the strays and the "ings" are important for their distinctive character and their historical associations, additional areas of undeveloped land adjacent to the strays and the "ings" also provide value in terms of their open aspect, open views which they afford, their feeling of the countryside close to the town, and the separation of urban form.

(iii) Views of the Minster

York Minster is the most important landmark in the city. Built between the thirteenth and fifteenth century of magnesian limestone, it is a fine example of medieval gothic architecture. The prominence of the monument, whether by clear view or occasional glance is an unmistakable feature of York. Views of the Minster from the wider countryside form an important association between the historic city and the surrounding landscape and helps reinforce the impression of a compact city set within a rural framework.

The Minster can be viewed clearly from numerous positions within the surrounding landscape including, the Ring Road, many approach roads into the city and from the green wedges. It provides a sense of orientation and a definite sense of nearing a historical city. Views of the Minster are widely held to be very important in defining the special character of York and its setting.

(iv) Character of the Landscape

The landscape is broadly characterised as relatively flat and low-lying agricultural land dominated by the wide flood plain of the Ouse, rising slightly to the east and surrounded by a relatively evenly spaced pattern of villages. In more detail it includes distinctive water meadows adjacent to the Ouse, a pattern of fields divided by hedges or ditches and occasional blocks of deciduous trees, bog, heath land, coniferous plantation and some former evidence of strip farming.

The character of the landscape contributes to the overall setting of the city in its own right and through its influence upon other defining elements. For example, the way in which the relatively level topography enables important views of the Minster to be enjoyed and the strong governing influence of natural features upon the pattern of settlement.

The built form in the rural areas surrounding the city is traditionally characterised by red brick buildings with red pan tile roofs. The agricultural villages are situated at relatively evenly

distributed intervals and are largely linear or around a green. Some villages, particularly those nearest to York have expanded in size and changed in form and character.

(v) Urban form

The urban area of York broadly comprises a central historic core surrounded by an amalgamation of formerly separate villages. The villages were previously physically independent of the city but connected by the provision of services and social networks. The spaces separating the villages from the city were reduced by the growth of the city over time, however, the presence of the strays and "ings" have restricted their lateral coalescence helping to retain some of the characteristics of earlier settlement form.

(vi) Relationship between the urban edge and the countryside

The urban fringe is the broad area of land situated at the interface between the edge of the urban area and the countryside. It includes the built and unbuilt and is also defined by the relationship between the two. It takes a variety of appearances and functions.

In some areas the relationship between the urban edge and open countryside is harmonious in terms of form, character, orientation, architecture, boundary design and landscape character. In other areas, the urban edge bears little relationship with the surrounding landscape and takes an abrupt relationship and has usually emerged over a short period of time

In locations where conservation areas are situated at the urban fringe the form, siting, character of the area and the architecture is considered to make a positive contribution to the setting and special character of York.

(vii) The relationship with the surrounding villages

The villages surrounding York contribute to the setting and the special character of the city through their intrinsic form and character, distribution, and relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape.

Formerly of agricultural origin, most of the villages began as linear and green villages. Many dwellings along main streets had long paddocks behind reaching into the agricultural landscape beyond. The settlement form bore a close relationship with the supporting agricultural landscape and their distribution was determined by the agricultural land which was required to support the community.

Some villages have retained their earlier form and character, retaining a close and visually harmonious relationship between the built and cultivated or grazed landscape. Others, particularly those situated close to the outer edge of the city have expanded, significantly detracting from their earlier form, and visual and working relationship with the agricultural landscape. Notwithstanding this many of these villages have retained their earlier architectural character even if the village form beyond and the reference to the surrounding landscape has changed. This has helped engender their separate sense of community distinct from the urban area of York.

5. CITY OF YORK – MOST VALUABLE AREAS OF GREEN BELT

Using the analysis of the historic character and setting of York in section 4 officers considered how these seven points could be translated into broad categories that could be identified spatially. It was recognised that many of the elements overlap or have close relationships with each other. This led to the identification of categories 1 to 3 below. In addition using the analysis of Green Belt purposes earlier in the report category 4 below was also identified.

MOST VALUABLE AREAS OF GREEN BELT – CATEGORIES OF LAND

1. *Areas which retain, reinforce and extend the pattern of historic green wedges.*
2. *Areas which provide an impression of a historic city situated within a rural setting.*
3. *The setting of villages whose traditional form, character and relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape of which is substantially unchanged.*
4. *Areas which prevent the coalescence of settlements to retain their individual identity.*

In sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 of this report each of these categories are defined and the area to which they relate on the ground identified. These sections are supplemented by map 2 enclosed. It should be noted that areas identified on the map are identified in terms of the primary reason why the area is considered to be important and in some areas there is more than one reason.

6. AREAS WHICH RETAIN, REINFORCE AND EXTEND THE PATTERN OF HISTORIC GREEN WEDGES

This category relates to historic strays and "ings", and those areas of adjacent undeveloped land that reinforce the existing development patterns and retain this special pattern for the future. The different types of land falling into this category, the reason for its importance and its spatial location is considered below.

(A) The Strays:

The strays comprise of Bootham Stray, Monk Stray, Walmgate Stray and Micklegate Stray. The strays are important for the following reasons:

- (i) Undeveloped open space with a rural feel reaching close to the centre of the city.
- (ii) Provide an open aspect and views towards important city landmarks including the Minster.
- (iii) Physical separation between urban form of a different character.
- (iv) Long historical associations of public land use.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area A1: Bootham Stray

- Historical importance including long established grazing rights.
- Current management for open space in perpetuity.
- Open approach to the city from B1363 and Scarborough railway line providing views of city within rural surroundings.
- Intermittent views of the Minster.
- Situated adjacent to New Earswick conservation area, the setting of which is enhanced by the setting of the stray.

Area A2: Monk Stray

- Historical importance as common pasture and strip farming, now managed as open space.
- Narrow corridor of green space to either side of B1036 providing an open approach to the city.
- Intermittent views of the Minster

Area A3: Walmgate Stray

- Historical importance as common grazing presently maintained as public open space.
- Open views of the city and the Minster set against a rural foreground.
- Situated adjacent to the Retreat and Heslington Road conservation area, the setting of which is enhanced by the presence of the stray.

Area A4: Micklegate Stray

- Historically important for common pasturage, and the site of key historical events including the hanging of Dick Turpin.
- Offers public recreation including the racecourse which occupies a large area.
- Situated within Tadcaster Road and The Racecourse and Terry's Factory conservation area, the setting of which is enhanced by presence of the stray.
- Open approach to the city from within the stray and extensive views through the stray viewed from the ring road providing an open setting to the city .

(B) The "ings":

The "ings" are the unimproved (and semi-improved) water hay meadows situated on the broad river floodplains of the Ouse. The "ings" are important for the following reasons:

- (i) Undeveloped natural open space with a rural feel reaching close to the centre of the city.
- (ii) Allow an open aspect and views towards important city landmarks including the Minster.
- (iii) Physical separation between urban form of different character.
- (iv) Historical continuity of land use, management and tenure.
- (v) Landscape character distinguished by seasonal flooding.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area B1: Rawcliffe Meadows

- Flood meadows of unimproved grassland, cropped for hay and later grazed by livestock.
- Open approach to the city providing a rural setting and a historically well established management practice.

Area B2: Clifton Ings

- Flood meadows of unimproved grassland, cropped for hay and later grazed by livestock.
- Open approach to the city providing a rural setting of a historically well established land management practice and good views of the Minster.

Area B3: Fulford Ings

- Hay flood meadow, tall herb fen and marsh contributing to the open rural approach to the city.
- Site of the battle of Fulford in 1066.

Area B4: Middlethorpe Ings

- Grazed meadow contributing to open rural historic setting of the city.
- Adjacent to Middlethorpe conservation area, the character of which is enhanced by the setting of the ings.

Area B5: Naburn Marsh

- Flood meadow, cropped for hay and later grazed by livestock.
- Open rural approach to the city of historically well-established land management.

Area B6: Bishopthorpe Ings

- Flood meadow, cropped for hay and later grazed by livestock.
- Open rural approach to the city provided by a historically well-established land management practice.

Area B7: Church Ings

Area B8: Naburn Ings

Area B9: South Ings

Area B10: Naburn Grange

- Flood meadow, cropped for hay and later grazed by livestock by a historically well-established land management practice.

(C) Green Wedges:

The green wedges refer to the broad areas of undeveloped land usually bounded on three sides by urban development part of which may comprise of the historic strays and "ings" and river floodplains. They extend up to the Ring Road and are important for the following reasons:

- (i) Undeveloped open space with a rural feel reaching close to the centre of the city.

- (ii) Allow an open aspect and views towards important city landmarks including the Minster.
- (iii) Physical separation between urban form of a different character.
- (iv) Open areas which build upon the presence of the strays and form a more pronounced separation between areas of different urban form, character and history.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area C1: Extension to Bootham Stray

- Open grazed pasture and arable fields between Clifton Moor and New Earswick.
- Open approaches providing a rural setting to the city.
- Good views of the Minster.

Area C2: Extension to Monk Stray

- Open agricultural fields between Stockton Lane and A1036 and between A1036 and Monks Cross.
- Open approaches provide a rural setting of the city.
- Glimpses of the Minster.

Area C3: Extension to Walmgate Stray

- Open grounds of the Retreat situated within the Retreat and Heslington Road Conservation Area.
- The open setting of the city and open space adjacent to the Barracks.
- Open approaches providing a rural setting to the city affording good views of the Minster.

Area C4: Extension to Middlethorpe Ings and Fulford Ings

- Open agricultural and semi-improved grassland adjacent to the river Ouse providing an open setting to the river valley and approach to the city.

Area C5: Extension to Micklegate Stray

- Open grassland and allotment gardens between Bishopthorpe Road and the Knavesmire providing an open setting along this approach road into York.
- Knavesmire wood provides well established deciduous woodland framing the edge of Micklegate Stray.
- Affords good views of Terry's factory tower.

Area C6: Extension to Rawcliffe Meadows and Clifton Ings

- Open agricultural and semi-improved grassland adjacent to the river Ouse between residential Rawcliffe and York Business Park providing an open setting to the city.
- Affords views of the Minster.

(D) Extensions to the Green Wedge:

Areas of undeveloped land situated outside the ring road and connecting with Green Wedges. It is important for these broad areas to remain open in order to;

- (i) Retain the open approach and rural setting of York.

- (ii) Ensure the future extension of the Green Wedges.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area D1: Extension of green wedge: West of Haxby and Wiggington

- To retain the open approach, rural and historic setting of York adjacent to the B1363, an important approach road into the city.

Area D2: Extension of green wedge: East of Monks Cross

- To retain open approaches, rural and historic setting of York adjacent to the A1036, an important approach road to the city.
- Situated adjacent to Stockton-on-the-Forest conservation area, the character of which is enhanced by the adjoining agricultural landscape.

Area D3: Extension to green wedge: Heslington Common

- To retain an open area south of the A64 in order to continue a wedge of countryside outside the ring road.

Area D4: Extension to green wedge: Naburn and Bishopthorpe lngs

- To retain an open area of river valley east of Bishopthorpe and west of the Designer Outlet, and continuing south to include Naburn and Acaster Malbis in order to continue the open approach to the city along the river valley.

Area D5: Extension of green wedge: Between Poppleton and Skelton

- To retain open approach, rural and historic setting of York between the east coast railway line and A19, both routes of which are important approaches to the city.

7. The setting of villages whose traditional form, character and relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape is substantially unchanged.

This category relates to areas of existing countryside around the settlement limit of villages which have retained their historic character. The different types of land falling into this category, the reason for its importance and its spatial location is considered below.

(E) The Villages:

Villages or parts of villages whose traditional form, character and relationship with the surrounding landscape have remained substantially unchanged. This relates to those villages, the large part of which, or the outer part of which, is designated as a conservation area. They are important as the form, character, scale and pattern of the agricultural villages is considered to contribute to the setting and character of York.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area E1: Askham Bryan and Askham Richard

- These villages have substantially retained their historical village form and a close relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape.

- The large proportion of both villages are designated as a conservation areas, part of the character of which is defined by the relationship with the open surrounding landscape.

Area E2: Upper Poppleton and Nether Poppleton

- Parts of the western edge of the village is designated as conservation areas, the character of which has a close relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape and is clearly visible from the A59 and minor roads to the west of the village.

Area E3: Skelton

- The north western edge of the village is designated as a conservation area, the character of which is enhanced by the relationship with the surrounding landscape.
- This area is particularly important in terms of its relationship with the A19, an important approach road into the city.

Area E4: Bishopthorpe

- The northern edge of the village is designated as a conservation area, the character of which is enhanced by the setting of the relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape.
- This area is important given the views of the village provided by the A64 and preventing coalescence between the urban area and Bishopthorpe.

Area E5: Middlethorpe

- Middlethorpe village has substantially retained its historical village form and a close relationship with the surrounding agricultural and river floodplain landscape.
- The village is designated as a conservation area.

8. AREAS WHICH PROVIDE AN IMPRESSION OF A HISTORIC CITY SITUATED WITHIN A RURAL SETTING.

This category relates to significant tracts of undeveloped land providing an open foreground of rural character enabling good views of the Minster or towards an urban edge of a historic character which is visible from a prominent and frequently used place. The different types of land falling into this category, the reason for its importance and its spatial location is considered below.

(F) Impression of a historic city within a rural setting:

Areas of open countryside which provide an impression of a historic city set within a rural setting. These are important for the following reasons:

- (i) Open countryside visible from a prominent location enables views of the city, the historic character of which is particularly important.
- (ii) Areas afford either good views of the Minster or the urban edge comprised of a Conservation Area, the historic character of which it is important to retain.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area F1: East of Tang Hall:

- Open agricultural landscape affording good views of the Minster.

Area F2: South of Heslington:

- Open agricultural landscape affording good views towards the Minster and Heslington village.

Area F3: South and West of Woodthorpe:

- An open agricultural landscape including the woodland of Askham Bogs affording prominent views of Minster.
- Also has an important role in preventing the coalescence of Copmanthorpe and the urban area.

9. *Areas which prevent the coalescence of settlements to retain their individual identity.*

This is achieved by retaining open areas of land between the outer edge of the urban area and an adjacent village and between neighbouring villages in order to retain the physical separation, individual character and identity. The different types of land falling into this category, the reason for its importance and its spatial location is considered below.

(G) Preventing coalescence:

Areas of undeveloped land between the outer edge of the urban area and the villages and between villages are important in order to;

- retain the physical separation of settlements with a separate identity and physical character;
- retain the pattern of villages set within a rural setting.

Spatial Location & Importance

Area G1: Haxby, New Earswick, Earswick, Huntington and Strensall.

Area G2: Murton the village.

Area G3: Bishopthorpe and Copmanthorpe

Area G4: East of Knapton

Area G5: Upper Poppleton and Nether Poppleton

Area G6: Skelton

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