
Subject Advice regarding SLAA Site 60 (Pycroft Road/Grange Farm)
Date 20 December 2017 **Job No/Ref** 257142-00-4-05

1 Introduction

Following completion of the Green Belt Review Part 2 in March 2017, Arup was commissioned by Runnymede Borough Council to support the analysis of, and responses to, representations received through the Council's Regulation 18 Consultation on the Additional Sites and Options Consultation Document (May/June 2017). The aim of this exercise was to establish the need for any revisions or updates to the Green Belt Review Part 2.

Through this process, Arup identified a small number of representations which raised points worthy of further detailed consideration, and where amendments/additions to the Green Belt Part 2 were likely required. However, it was judged that one such representation relating to the Pycroft Road site would be better addressed through a separate advice note to the Council.

The Note refers to three different spatial areas throughout (illustrated in Figure 1):

- Pycroft Road Reserve Site
- SLAA Site ID 60
- Proposed Extension Site

1.1 Pycroft Road Reserve Site

The Pycroft Road Reserve Site is an existing Reserve Site allocation in the 2001 Runnymede Local Plan, but was originally allocated for residential development as early as the 1970s (see Figure 1). It lies outside of the Green Belt. However, the site has not, to date, come forward for development.

The site was assessed through the Green Belt Review Part 1 as General Area B. The Review considered all land that falls outside the urban area (as defined in the saved policies from the 2001 adopted Local Plan) that is not currently covered by a Green Belt designation. In practice, this corresponded with six extant Reserve Sites (including Pycroft Road) which were identified for long term consideration for housing development in the saved policies of the 2001 Local Plan.

The Green Belt Review Part 1 found that the Pycroft Road Reserve Site met Green Belt purposes 1 and 3 moderately and did not meet purpose 2. The Study concluded that there was merit in considering it further for Green Belt designation, but noted that the site would be more preferential for development as a result of the limited constraints affecting it.

1.2 SLAA Site ID 60

A revised site area (Chilsey Green Farm, Pycroft Road (SLAA site ID 60)) was assessed in the Council's Interim SLAA (June 2016). This included the Pycroft Road Reserve Site and an additional area of land to the north-west. The interim site assessment concluded that the site should be included in the SLAA 'with a capacity of 50 net dwellings in years 6-10', noting that the

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additional land outside the existing Reserve Site currently remains designated as Green Belt and is thus unsuitable for development.

Consideration was afforded as to whether SLAA Site ID 60 should be assessed as part of the Green Belt Review Part 2, but as the majority of the site area fell outside of the Green Belt and given the proposed amendment to the site area represented a relatively minor adjustment, it was judged to be outside the scope of the Study (which primarily focused on the performance of smaller areas of Green Belt against the Green Belt purposes). However, Arup provided informal advice on the identification of a more robust boundary feature with which to align the Green Belt Boundary along the western edge of the site.

Through its Regulation 18 Consultation, the Council consulted upon a revised version of SLAA Site ID 60 (see Figure 1). This drew on Arup's informal advice and the findings of the Green Belt Review Part 2 (March 2017), which recommended that adjacent weakly performing sub-area should be considered for potential removal from the Green Belt by the Council.

1.3 Regulation 18 Representation (Proposed Extension Site)

A representation relating to SLAA Site ID 60 was received from Carter Planner through the Council's Regulation 18 Consultation. The representation supported the enlarged site area but stated that it could be enlarged further still to contribute to meeting the Borough's overall housing need. It was noted in the representation that SLAA Site ID 60 provides a sustainable option, and can accommodate greater capacity without harm to the Green Belt. The representation suggested that land to the south of Grange Farm, and additional land to the west of Chilsey Farm, should be included as part of the housing allocation. The representation states:

'...what both versions of the GBR failed to do was to examine the area to the rear of or the south of Area 56, between it and the railway line. In other words a westward expansion of the existing reserve housing site. We submit that this exercise should have been undertaken.'

For the purposes of this note, the further enlarged site is referred to as the Proposed Extension Site (see Figure 1).

1.4 Scope of Additional Assessment

Through the analysis of the Regulation 18 representations, it was identified that further assessment could be undertaken in relation to Pycroft Road. As the Green Belt Review Part 2 was undertaken on the basis of the previously promoted sites, it is judged that this assessment fell outside of its scope of the Study (and thus any such addendum). As the Pycroft Road site was included as one of the Council's preferred options in the Regulation 18 Consultation, and relates (in part) to an existing extant Reserve Site (where the principle of development has already been supported), it was judged pragmatic to undertake additional assessment to establish whether the promoter's proposed further amendments to the site area would have any further impact upon the Strategic Green Belt, and whether robust Green Belt boundaries can be established (in line with the NPPF). This additional assessment is provided in the following sections.



Legend

- Proposed Extension Site
- SLAA Site ID 60
- Pycroft Road Reserve Site
- Runnymede District Boundary
- Green Belt

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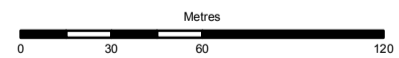
P1	04-12-17	ML	AB	AB
Issue	Date	By	Chkd	Appd

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Client
Runnymede Borough Council

Job Title
Runnymede Green Belt Review Part 2



**SLAA Site ID 60
Pycroft Road/Grange Farm**

Scale at A3

1:2,500

Job No
257142-00

Drawing Status
Issue

Drawing No
Figure 1

Issue
P1

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2 Additional Assessment

The additional assessment has been informed by desk based resources and a visit to the site in November 2017.

2.1 Harm to the strategic Green Belt

The Pycroft Road Reserve Site falls outside of the Green Belt and is therefore not subject to any further assessment.

The Proposed Extension Site was assessed in the Green Belt Review Part 1 as part of the wider General Area 16. General Area 16 scored:

- **moderately** against purpose 1 (criterion (a)), preventing the outward sprawl of Chertsey;
- **strongly** against purpose 1 criterion (b) as a result of the lack of durable boundaries between the Green Belt and the large built-up area;
- **weakly** against purpose 2 as a result of the scale of the gap between Chertsey and Thorpe;
- **moderately** against purpose 3, preventing encroachment into countryside with a largely unspoilt character.

The Proposed Extension Site demonstrates a similar level of openness to Pycroft Road Reserve Housing Site, comprising pastoral fields (Purpose 3). However, the Proposed Extension Site is orientated visually towards the existing Reserve Site and the urban area of Chertsey beyond as a result of the steeply rising topography in the west, thus limiting any substantive additional encroachment into the countryside. The topography of the Proposed Extension Site, together with other existing physical features (including dense woodland to the north, tree-belt to the west and the railway line to the south), ensure a sense of separation from the wider countryside. These features also restrict the scale and form of outward growth (Purpose 1), thus limiting the role of the Proposed Extension Site in preventing the sprawl of Chertsey. Given the wider General Area already performs a limited role in preventing the merging of settlements (Purpose 2) (as assessed in the Green Belt Review Part 1), it is judged that Proposed Extension Site would not physically or perceptually reduce the gap between Chertsey and Thorpe.

Overall, it is judged that the Proposed Extension Site plays a limited role with respect to the wider strategic Green Belt and its removal from the Green Belt would not cause further harm to the integrity of surrounding Green Belt. Furthermore, it would provide an opportunity to establish a stronger, more logical Green Belt boundary.

It is judged that the Proposed Extension Site would not materially increase harm to the wider strategic Green Belt subject to:

- Establishing a readily recognisable boundary that is likely to be permanent (discussed below);
- Retention and enhancement of existing visual buffers to the south and west;
- Sensitive layout which minimises visual harm to the Green Belt beyond.

It is suggested that these requirements could be necessitated through policies in the new Local Plan.

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2.2 Green Belt Boundary

The existing Green Belt boundary along the western edge of the Pycroft Road Reserve Site (as allocated in the 2001 Runnymede Local Plan) is partially aligned with a small ditch and the access road to Grange Farm, but otherwise cuts across open fields. In its current form, it is therefore neither readily recognisable nor likely to be permanent (as per the requirements in paragraph 85 of the NPPF).



Figure 2 Annotated plan of key boundaries around SLAA Site ID 60

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The proposed alteration to the Green Belt boundary around SLAA Site ID 60, as set out in the Council’s Regulation 18 Consultation would, to some extent strengthen and regularise the boundary, aligning it with the small ditch along its full length, as well as a tree belt and the edge of a woodland plantation. When surveyed in November 2017, it was clear that the ditch to the south of Grange Farm would require strengthening and additional buffering to ensure its visibility and permanence in the longer term (see Figure 2). Historic Ordnance Survey mapping dating to 1869, however, illustrates that a feature has existed in this vicinity in the landscape for at least 150 years (and likely considerably longer) (Figure 3). Therefore, drawing on the Green Belt Review Part 2 which stated that *‘where remnant or degraded features exist...the potential to restore / replace these features should be explored’*, this would appear to be a logical and reasonable feature with which the Green Belt boundary could be aligned.



Figure 3 Extract from Middlesex XXIV Ordnance Survey Six-inch England and Wales (1869)

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Figure 4 Facing south along the ditch at the western edge of SLAA Site ID 60

The Proposed Extension Site would extend westwards to the summit of the ridgeline and would be bounded to the north by the densely wooded plantation and to the south by the railway line (which, at the western edge of the site, is in a cutting). These features are readily recognisable and it is judged that there is a reasonable likelihood that they will be permanent (see Figure 5).

The westernmost boundary, as proposed, would be aligned with a fragmented tree belt at the edge of the promoter's landholding. The southern half of this tree belt is well established (as illustrated in Figure 7), but the planting in the northern half (illustrated in Figure 5) has been removed. While this would not preclude this Green Belt boundary alteration, the tree belt would require strengthening and further buffering to ensure it is suitably recognisable and to ensure a greater likelihood of permanence in the longer term. Such strengthening could be secured through a detailed policy requirement in the forthcoming Local Plan.

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Figure 5 Annotated plan of key boundaries around Proposed Extension Site

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Figure 6 Facing west from the eastern edge of the Proposed Extension Site, illustrating the established tree belt which weakens further north

Also of particular note to the site is the substantial change in topography. Beyond the ridgeline at the westernmost part of the site there are long vistas across Chertsey and other parts of Runnymede Borough. The crest of the hill is therefore visually sensitive in the context of the surrounding town; should development be located on the upper parts of the ridge, this would likely have a negative impact on the rural context of Chertsey and impact visually upon the countryside beyond, thus increasing perceptions of “encroachment into the countryside” (Purpose 3). A lower contour line could provide an alternative boundary alignment for the allocation site, ensuring the upper part of the ridge is protected from development; for example, the existing ditch at the edge of SLAA Site 60 (as illustrated in Figure 5) would be consistent with this principle. Alternatively, if the boundary were to sit further west, this would require the establishment of a completely new defensible boundary for the Green Belt. Otherwise, the westernmost part of the site could be removed from the Green Belt and protected through alternative policy designations.

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Figure 7 Facing south along the proposed western boundary of the Proposed Extension Site, illustrating the transition in the boundary's strength and regularity



Figure 8 Long vistas across Chertsey and the wider Borough, facing east from the westernmost edge of the Proposed Extension Site