
Local Plan Sub-Committee MINUTES

**Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on
Wednesday, 8 October 2025 from 7.00 - 9.11 pm**

Present: Councillors Stephen Giles-Medhurst OBE (Chair), Louise Price, Oliver Cooper, Steve Drury, Vicky Edwards, Philip Hearn, Stephen King, Chris Mitchell and Sarah Nelmes

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Narinder Sian and Jon Bishop (Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association)

Officers in Attendance:

Marko Kalik, Head of Planning Policy & Conservation
Emma Lund, Senior Committee Officer
Martin Ross, Principal Planning Policy Consultant

LPSC21/25 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

LPSC22/25 Minutes

The minutes of the Local Plan Sub-Committee meeting held on 9 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

LPSC23/25 Notice of Urgent Business

There was none.

LPSC24/25 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

LPSC25/25 Local Plan: Green Belt Review

The Head of Planning Policy & Conservation presented a report which provided an overview of the 2025 Green Belt review, with a recommendation that it should be agreed for publication on the Council's evidence base page on the website.

In response to a point raised about the length of time taken to produce the review, the Head of Planning Policy & Conservation reported that an initial delay of a month had been incurred due to the methodology not having been published by government within the Planning Practice Guidance. There had also been a need for the consultants to meet with MHCLG to clarify how the new policy, which had not previously been part of Green Belt reviews, should be interpreted. The final report had been received in September and had been used since that time to inform other pieces of work.

The Head of Planning Policy & Conservation highlighted the key policy points arising from the review as: the expectation that housing need constitutes exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release unless this would fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt; the introduction of Grey Belt; and the sequential test prioritizing development in previously developed land in the Green Belt, followed by Grey Belt, and finally undeveloped Green Belt.

The Head of Planning Policy & Conservation highlighted that the Grey Belt map identified strategic parcels with a view to assisting in the development of plan making proposals and decision making. However, a site could still be assessed as Grey Belt in an area which was not strategically defined as Grey Belt where there were relevant site-specific circumstances.

Jon Bishop of Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association spoke on agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

The Head of Planning Policy & Conservation responded to questions and provided clarifications. Points raised in debate included the following:

- The report considered only one of the factors used to define Grey Belt. A number of other factors (such as heritage, natural landscape or Sites of Special Scientific Interest) might prevent an area being designated as Grey Belt.
- As development occurred, some ratings may need to change.
- A Committee Member commented that the report appeared to have used the same language and tests for the purpose of identifying Grey Belt land as had been used in the Stage 2 Green Belt Study, rather than using the new tests in the Planning Practice Guidance which had been recently tested at appeal (for example in relation to openness and physical boundaries). It was considered that the reasons why the tests were considered to be aligned had not been fully explained. The Member expressed the view that this was not the correct approach and would constitute a risk to the plan at examination. Officers undertook to re-visit this with the consultants.
- The map showing the provisional Grey Belt in assessed Green Belt parcels at section 6.2 and the parcel IDs at Appendix 2 were considered to be not particularly helpful in enabling residents to identify exactly where they were situated. It was recommended that the locations of the parcels should be made as clear as possible when the document is published on the evidence pages. Officers confirmed that they were in possession of the associated overlay maps and intended to produce a more user-friendly map for the website.
- Whilst noting that there were further questions arising from the report, and clarifications were required from the consultants as outlined above, several Committee Members expressed concern with regards to any delay in publication. An alternative approach was considered of publishing the report, with additional information and clarifications from the consultants to be published separately at a later date. However, some Members considered that early publication offered no benefit, and recommended postponement until the information was complete.
- A Committee Member noted that there were also some minor language and typographical errors which required correction (such as references to Chorley Wood instead of Chorleywood) and recommended that additional detail is added at A.1.5 in relation to appeal decisions (particularly the Dacorum (Leighton Buzzard Road) and Data Centre appeals) and how these would support the Council's case in protecting the Green Belt.
- A Committee Member recommended that the consultants be asked to review the wording used in relation to the fundamentally important area north of Abbots Langley and the protection of Kings Langley.

- A Committee Member commented that there were a number of examples within the district where the M25 would not be considered to 'visually separate' parcels of land and recommended that further work was done in evidencing this within the report.

Given the points raised in debate, the Chair moved a revised recommendation that the Sub-Committee agrees to publish the Green Belt review on the Council's evidence base page on the website following further advice and clarification from the consultants on the points raised and any necessary updates to the report. The updated report to be circulated to Lead Members of each group prior to publication.

RESOLVED:

That the Sub-Committee agrees to publish the Green Belt review on the Council's evidence base page on the website following further advice and clarification from the consultants on the points raised and any necessary updates to the report. The updated report to be circulated to Lead Members of each group prior to publication.

LPSC26/25 Local Plan: Draft Settlement Appraisal

The Sub-Committee received a report which provided an overview of the draft 2025 Settlement Appraisal which had been prepared to assist in the formulation of the Local Plan.

The report was presented for noting at this stage, and Members were invited to submit any further comments or proposed corrections to officers separately in writing.

The Principal Planning Policy Consultant introduced the report, highlighting that a settlement appraisal had last been undertaken in 2010. Changes in the 2025 appraisal had included adding the hierarchy and revising the terminology in relation to the new NPPF to provide clarity for decision making in terms of the naming of settlement types.

The Principal Planning Policy Consultant outlined the methodology which had been used in scoring the sustainability assessments according to the criteria of facilities, railway services, bus services and road infrastructure. The most sustainable locations had been identified as Rickmansworth, Chorleywood, South Oxhey, Croxley Green, Leavesden and Garston. However, it was highlighted that the document was a work in progress and currently draft, and that scoring or thresholds for categories may be subject to change. There may also be a need to change some settlement boundaries. Additionally, only settlements as far down as considered to be Service Centres (Tier 3) had been assessed so far. All other settlements with 100 residents and above would be assessed in the near future. It was noted that the appraisal provided a high level overview of the sustainability of settlements in order to assist strategic planning: individual site assessments would consider the sustainability of individual development locations.

The Principal Planning Policy Consultant responded to questions and provided clarifications. Points raised in the debate included the following:

- Distance measurements were taken from the geographical centre and this may not be the same as what residents would consider to be the 'centre' in terms of where services were located. It was also measured by road, not 'as the crow flies'.
- A Committee Member commented that there was some inconsistency in the approach taken where schools were located in a neighbouring authority. This may also apply to some other services such as convenience stores.
- A Committee Member commented that it would be helpful to include some detail on how the settlement boundaries were defined.

- A Committee Member questioned the approach of treating all types of sports facilities in the same way because the amenity they provided could be very different (for example, a leisure centre might carry a greater weighting than a single tennis court).
- It was suggested that access to accident and emergency services might be added as a criteria for sustainability, as well as access to pubs and social clubs.
- A Committee Member commented that whilst road infrastructure may be available in a settlement, there may also be constraints to sustainability arising from issues such as congestion. Officers were asked to consider if there was another way to reflect accessibility to the road network, or to add supporting text to highlight issues. It was noted that individual site assessments would provide further detail on road accessibility.
- A Committee Member questioned why Northwood School was recorded as the secondary school for South Oxhey, given that The Grange Academy was closer and took more pupils from South Oxhey than Northwood.
- A Committee Member questioned whether cycle paths and footpaths should be included, and officers responded that work was already underway with a view to including these.
- A Committee Member suggested that it would be helpful to have greater transparency around how the geographical centres had been identified.
- Notwithstanding that the appraisal was draft and not yet completed, it was noted that there were a number of areas where Members' local knowledge could be helpful in identifying anomalies. It was recommended that the draft document and maps with draft amended boundaries (Chorleywood and Leavesden and Garston so far) be circulated to all Members for comments / amendments / updates with a deadline for responses and a reminder that the document was draft and therefore not for publication or wider circulation. It was also recommended that Members should be approached for any suggested changes to settlement boundary maps.

RESOLVED:

That the Local Plan Sub-Committee:

- (i) notes the draft Settlement Appraisal;
- (ii) requests that officers circulate the document to all Members and the Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association with a covering note asking for comments, a link to the overlay map layers, and a deadline for receipt of comments.

LPSC27/25 Local Plan Timetable Update

The Chair highlighted that no further Local Plan Sub-Committee meetings were currently scheduled. However, further evidence work would need to come to the Sub-Committee, including transport and sustainability assessments for individual sites, as well as updated policies and the final sites proposed for inclusion in the Local Plan. At least one further meeting would therefore be needed.

Two potential dates were proposed: Tuesday 25 November or Thursday 27 November (if the Audit Committee meeting scheduled for that date was cancelled). These dates had been selected to allow the maximum amount of time for production of the required information; however, it was likely that some information may still remain outstanding. It was possible (although officers considered it unlikely) that a proposal for a Regulation 19 Consultation could then go on to the December Full Council meeting; the fallback position would be for a special Council meeting to be held in January to agree the Regulation 19 publication of the plan. The

latest date for this would need to be 27 January in order to avoid the statutory consultation period falling within the pre-election period.

The Head of Planning Policy & Conservation reported that officers continued to push the Council's external consultants for the remaining evidence work to be completed as soon as possible. The Transport Assessment was currently considered to be the biggest risk to timescales; however, a work around had been discussed with the consultants with a view to mitigation.

Committee Members expressed a preference for the date of 27 November for the next meeting, which would also give officers the maximum amount of time to produce the reports. However, a meeting on that date was contingent on the cancellation of the Audit Committee meeting currently scheduled for the same date. The Chair pointed out that if business was not finished at that meeting a further meeting in the week of 1 December might be required to complete the business.

RESOLVED:

That the Local Plan Sub-Committee agrees that a further meeting should be held on either 25 or 27 November 2025, with a meeting to be held in the week of 1 December if required to complete the business. Whilst the intention is to bring the Regulation 19 proposal to the December Full Council meeting, if that is not possible then a Special Council meeting be held on 27 January 2026.

CHAIR