

1.1 Green Belt designation covers approximately 76% of the area of Three Rivers. The fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl and coalescence of settlements by keeping land permanently open. As set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

1.2 Within the Green Belt, there is a general presumption against inappropriate development which should not be approved except in very special circumstances. **Following the update to the NPPF in December 2024, the concepts of grey belt and “Golden Rules” were introduced and form part of assessing whether exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt apply.**

1.3 Protection of the Green Belt and open countryside is a key objective of the Three Rivers Local Plan. However, the Green Belt boundary is tightly drawn around urban areas, and local evidence (including the Urban Capacity Study 2020) has demonstrated that future development needs cannot be accommodated entirely within the urban area.

1.4 **The NPPF sets out that once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. However, the NPPF does clarify that authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in the NPPF and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt, when considered across the area of the plan.** As part of its evidence base for the Local Plan, the council has undertaken a Green Belt Review (dated **X**) to review this in more detail. This Green Belt Review also includes a spatial analysis of grey belt (of land close to settlement edges) across the district.

1.5 **Exceptional circumstances to alter Green Belt boundaries include where an authority cannot meet its identified need for new homes, commercial or other development through other means.** The Council has considered alternative options for meeting its identified housing need through prioritising development on suitable brownfield sites, optimising the density of development and through discussions with neighbouring authorities in accordance with the NPPF. **However, the lack of previously developed land and tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries means that we will be able to provide approximately 5% of our identified need without incursions into the Green Belt.** As such, the council considers that the exceptional circumstances for alterations to Green Belt boundaries have been met.

1.6 Additionally, the council's Local Housing Needs Assessment (2024) analyses the needs for different types and tenures of housing, highlighting an acute need for affordable housing across the district. This need, together with the needs for future generations, accommodation for other demographic groups such as the elderly and the delivery of much needed infrastructure, is considered to further constitute the exceptional circumstances required for alteration of Green Belt boundaries.

Appendix 11 – Green Belt

1.7 While the main focus for development in the district will be the main urban areas, there is also a need for some minor adjustments to the Green Belt boundary to accommodate growth in the most sustainable locations on the edge of existing settlements. Boundary changes are expected to provide land for housing and employment development and may also provide land for school sites and other infrastructure.

Green Belt
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The revised Green Belt Boundary is shown on the Policies Map.2) The council will seek to protect Three Rivers' Metropolitan Green Belt against inappropriate development, as defined by national policy.3) Inappropriate development will not be permitted in the Green Belt, unless very special circumstances are demonstrated to outweigh the potential harm, including harm to the openness of the Green Belt and any other harm and the purposes of including land within it.4) Exceptions to the definition of inappropriate development are set out in national policy and those further exceptions set out in Appendix X will be permitted where they comply with other relevant policies in this plan.5) Development proposals, including those involving previously developed land and buildings in the Green Belt, will be considered in accordance with relevant national planning policy and more detailed provisions set out in Appendix X.6) Measures to improve public access to the Green Belt, and to enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity will be encouraged.7) Guidance on the factors that will be considered in assessing applications for agricultural or forestry dwellings in the Green Belt is contained in Appendix X.

Reasoned Justification:

1.8 The Metropolitan Green Belt is a long-standing instrument of national and regional planning policy. Whilst much guidance is provided in national policy, Policy X and Appendix X supplements this with other relevant local criteria and seek to provide the context for protecting the Green Belt in Three Rivers.