

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 S78

LANDSCAPE & GREEN BELT SUMMARY PROOF

of

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HND (LGD) BA Hons PGDip LA CMLI

on

Landscape and Visual and Green Belt Matters

on behalf of

Sigma Homes

in respect of

Mount Avenue, Chaldon

PINS: 6006497

LPA Ref: 2025/771

LVIA Ltd Ref: SIG1594lps

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1.0 Summary and Conclusions

1.1 Introduction and Scope of Evidence

- 1.1.1 This Summary Proof addresses landscape and Green Belt matters relevant to the appeal at Mount Avenue, Chaldon. The landscape evidence is uncontested. The Statement of Common Ground confirms that, following the incorporation of agreed mitigation measures, the Council identifies no substantive residual landscape or landscape-character harm, and both parties recognise that the proposed scheme, once mitigated, would not give rise to adverse landscape effects. Accordingly, there is no dispute between the appellant and the authority in respect of landscape character or landscape impact, and the appeal proceeds solely on Green Belt grounds.

1.2 Site Context and Physical Characteristics

- 1.2.1 The appeal site is a small, enclosed settlement-fringe pocket defined by residential curtilages to the north, east and west, and by Birchwood Lane and associated vegetation to the south. The SIG1594gba analysis records that the site is strongly enclosed and not experienced as open land. Vegetation, built form and landform prevent most views into or through the site, and the land is not perceived as part of wider open countryside. These physical characteristics—permanent boundaries, enclosure, and settlement-edge context—are central to understanding the site's limited Green Belt role.

1.3 Assessment Against Green Belt Purposes

- 1.3.1 The site performs as a Weak/None functioning part of the Green Belt. The SIG1594gba analysis concludes that the site makes no contribution to Purpose (a) (checking unrestricted sprawl), as development would not extend the settlement boundary or project into open countryside. The site sits within a pocket of built form and will not physically extend further into the countryside than the existing development boundary.
- 1.3.2 The site makes no contribution to Purpose (b) (preventing neighbouring towns merging), as it is not positioned within any gap between towns and development would not reduce settlement separation.
- 1.3.3 The site makes only a weak contribution to Purpose (c) (safeguarding the countryside from encroachment), because any encroachment would be limited and contained within an already developed settlement fringe.
- 1.3.4 The site makes no contribution to Purpose (d) (preserving the setting of historic towns), as Chaldon is not a historic town and there is no intervisibility with Caterham's historic core or any heritage assets.
- 1.3.5 Purpose (e) (urban regeneration) is not determinative in a district where 93.9% of land is Green Belt and where most housing sites will inevitably be Green Belt. Taken together, the site does not fulfil the core functions of the Green Belt and its development would not undermine the wider Green Belt's strategic role.

1.4 Openness Assessment in Accordance with the PPG

- 1.4.1 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) confirms that openness has spatial, visual and experiential dimensions. Applying the published methodology, the site exhibits limited spatial openness, limited visual openness, and no perceptible change in experiential openness.

Spatial Openness

- 1.4.2 Spatial openness relates to the physical absence of built form and the extent to which development would introduce volume or massing into the Green Belt. At Mount Avenue, spatial change would be confined entirely within a small, enclosed parcel defined by permanent, defensible boundaries formed by residential curtilages and Birchwood Lane. The SIG1594gba analysis confirms that spatial change would be restricted to the site only and would not extend the settlement edge or project into open countryside. As a result, spatial effects would be limited, contained, and incapable of influencing the spatial openness of the wider Green Belt.

Visual Openness

- 1.4.3 Visual openness concerns the extent to which development would be perceived from public vantage points and whether it would alter the visual experience of openness within the Green Belt. The SIG1594gba analysis identifies that the site is already visually enclosed by vegetation, built form and landform, and that the geographic extent from where visual change will be discernible will be very limited. No long-range views are available, and the land is not perceived as part of an open rural landscape. Any visual change arising from development would therefore be localised and limited to the immediate surroundings. The site does not contribute to wider visual openness, and development would not alter the perception or continuity of the Green Belt at a broader scale. These findings are consistent with the accompanying LVIA, which the Council does not contest.

Activity and Experiential Openness

- 1.4.4 The PPG also confirms that openness has an experiential dimension, and that the degree of activity generated by development may be relevant to assessing openness. It states that decision-makers may need to consider “the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation” when judging whether development would harm openness. The SIG1594gba analysis concludes that any additional residential activity would be absorbed within the existing settlement-fringe environment and would not become discernibly busier. The baseline context includes residential movement, local traffic, and human presence associated with nearby dwellings and Birchwood Lane. As a result, the experiential dimension of openness would not be materially altered, and the development would not give rise to any perceptible change in Green Belt activity beyond the site itself. Effects on openness are localised and not experienced at distance, and the development would not fundamentally affect the overall Green Belt. This satisfies NPPF 155(a).

1.5 Grey Belt Classification and NPPF Paragraph 155(a)

- 1.5.1 The NPPF glossary defines Grey Belt as land within the Green Belt that does not strongly contribute to Purposes (a), (b) or (d), and is not subject to any footnote 7 constraints. The site meets this definition. It makes no contribution to Purposes (a), (b) or (d), is physically enclosed by permanent features, does not extend the settlement edge, and is not part of any gap between towns or the setting of a historic settlement. Paragraph 155(a) confirms that development on Grey Belt land is not inappropriate where it would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area. Given the site’s enclosed nature, limited visibility, and weak functional relationship with the wider Green Belt, any spatial or visual change would be confined to the site itself, with no wider implications for Green Belt integrity. The proposal therefore accords with the NPPF tests for development on Grey Belt land.

1.6 Response to the Council’s Green Belt Reasoning

- 1.6.1 The Council’s assertion of a “strong” Purpose (a) contribution is unsupported by evidence and inconsistent with the PPG criteria, which require consideration of containment, defensible boundaries, and avoidance of incongruous “fingers” of development. The site is enclosed on all sides and does not project into open countryside. The Council’s reliance on parcel GBA010 is misplaced. That parcel covers a materially different landscape including open countryside and the golf course, bears no resemblance to the small, enclosed pocket forming the application site, and predates the revised NPPF and PPG methodology. The Buckinghamshire appeal decision cited by the Council is not comparable, as that case concerned an open, rural tract of countryside with expansive visual openness—qualities wholly absent at Mount Avenue.

1.7 Overall Conclusion

- 1.7.1 In conclusion, the landscape and Green Belt evidence demonstrates that the site is a Weak/None functioning part of the Green Belt, correctly categorised as Grey Belt under the NPPF definition. Development would not undermine the strategic purposes of the wider Green Belt, and openness effects are localised, limited and not significant. The proposal can be integrated within the existing settlement-edge context without substantial landscape or visual harm. There is no landscape basis for dismissal of the appeal, and no Green Belt basis either when assessed in accordance with the NPPF and PPG.

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