Background Technical Paper No.3
Green Belt
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Strategic Planning
Cardiff County Council
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW
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1. Introduction

1.1 This Technical Background Paper forms part of a series of supporting papers for the Deposit Cardiff Local Development Plan (LDP). The Deposit LDP identifies a Green Belt for Cardiff to assist in strategically managing Cardiff’s future urban form and protecting the setting of the city.

1.2 Planning Policy Wales (Edition 5) November 2012 (PPW) sets the context for managing urban form by means of Green Belts and Green Wedges. At present Cardiff does not have a statutorily designated Green Belt. PPW states that all local planning authorities in parts of Wales which are subject to significant pressures for development need to consider the need for Green Belts.

1.3 The purpose of a Green Belt is to:
   - prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements;
   - manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas;
   - assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
   - protect the setting of the urban area; and
   - assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land.

1.4 This paper responds to guidance in PPW by setting out a formal assessment of the potential role of Green Belts in Cardiff, and where, in locational terms, such a designation is considered suitable in accordance with national guidance.

2. Policy Context

2.1 PPW states that around towns and cities there is often the need to protect open land. Local planning authorities need to consider establishing Green Belts and making local designations, such as Green Wedges.

2.2 Both Green Belts and Green Wedges must be soundly based on a formal assessment of their contribution to urban form and the location of new development and can take on a variety of spatial forms. The essential difference between them is the issue of permanence. Land within a Green Belt should be protected for a longer period than the current development plan period, whereas Green Wedge policies should be reviewed as part of the development plan review process.

2.3 Both Green Belts and Green Wedges can:
   - provide opportunities for access to the open countryside;
   - provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation;
   - maintain landscape/wildlife interest;
   - retain land for agriculture, forestry, and related purposes;
   - improve derelict land; and
   - provide carbon sinks and help mitigate the effects of urban heat islands.

   However the extent to which the use of land fulfils these objectives is not a material factor in determining whether land should be included within a Green Belt or Green Wedge.
2.4 PPW states that the most important attributes of Green Belts are their permanence and their openness. In respect of permanence, the boundaries of Green Belts should be altered only in exceptional circumstances and land within a Green Belt should be protected for a longer period than the current development plan period. To maintain openness, development within a Green Belt must be strictly controlled. The general policies controlling development in the countryside apply in a Green Belt but there is, in addition, a general presumption against development which is inappropriate in relation to the purposes of their designation.

2.5 Before designating land around an urban area as Green Belt, local planning authorities must consider and justify which would be the most appropriate means of protection. When including Green Belt policies in their plans, authorities must demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not provide the necessary protection.

2.6 Since Green Belts require long term protection, when considering Green Belt designation local planning authorities will need to ensure that a sufficient range of development land is available which is suitably located in relation to the existing urban edge and the proposed Green Belt, bearing in mind the longer term need for development land, the effects of development pressures in areas beyond the Green Belt and the need to minimise demand for travel. This may require land to be safeguarded, and boundaries of a proposed Green Belt to be carefully defined to achieve this.

3. Local Context

3.1 Although Cardiff does not have a statutory Green Belt previous attempts to prepare a county-wide development plan for Cardiff have sought to designate one, for example:

- The Deposited Cardiff Unitary Development Plan (October 2003) proposed a Green Belt on land on the boundary with Newport (both north east and east of St Mellons) and on land north of the M4 Motorway at Caerphilly Mountain.
- The withdrawn Deposit Cardiff Local Development Plan 2006 – 2021 (March 2009) proposed a Green Belt on land north east of St Mellons and on land north of the M4 Motorway at Caerphilly Mountain.

3.2 Furthermore at the regional level in 1998 the South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) was set up to prepare regional planning guidance for the South East Wales Area, covering the authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Brecon Beacons National Park, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan. Strategic Planning Guidance for South East Wales Volume 1, published in January 2000, acknowledged that the regional importance of Cardiff would benefit from the strategic protection of a Green Belt designation around Cardiff that could also play an important role in the longer term development of the region as a whole. In particular the guidance identified the following two objectives in relation to a Green Belt around Cardiff:

- To prevent further coalescence between Cardiff and Newport in both local authority areas;
- To protect the setting of the city, on the southern slopes of Caerphilly Mountain.
3.3 It is important to consider any designations in Cardiff within the context of the policy designations implemented in the areas adjacent to Cardiff's boundary. Map 1 below illustrates the cross boundary policy designations currently in place which protect those areas immediately adjoining Cardiff's boundary.

Map 1: Summary of Cross Boundary Designations

3.4 In terms of the areas surrounding Cardiff, Newport City Council’s approved Unitary Development Plan (adopted May 2006) includes a Green Belt designation on land immediately east of Cardiff's boundary. The purpose of this designation is to prevent the coalescence of Cardiff and Newport and protect the openness of the land between Cardiff’s boundary to the east and Newport. This designation is carried forward in the Deposited Newport Local Development Plan (April 2012) which also includes a proposed extension to the adopted Green Belt designation adjoining Cardiff’s boundary between the A48(M) and M4 Motorways (see Map 1 above).

3.5 With regard to the other surrounding Local Authorities, whilst they do not have a Green Belt designation, much of the area adjacent to Cardiff’s boundary is covered by other designations which support development restraint and afford a degree of protection to the adjacent land beyond Cardiff’s administrative boundary. The adopted Caerphilly Local Development Plan (November 2010) designates the majority of the area adjoining Cardiff as a Special Landscape Area and Visually Important Local Landscape and the adopted Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Development Plan (March 2011) designates much of the adjoining land as a Special Landscapes Area. The adopted Vale of Glamorgan Unitary Development Plan (April 2005) designates both a Special Landscape Area and Green Wedges to protect the important areas adjoining Cardiff a situation that is carried forward in the Deposited Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan (February 2012).
3.6 It is considered that a Green Belt designation in Cardiff would therefore not create any obvious cross boundary issues or policy conflicts and would compliment policies set out in adopted LDPs that very much support development restraint. However it is important to note that Special Landscape Areas, Green Wedges, and Visually Important Local Landscapes do not provide the long term permanence and strong policy protection afforded by Green Belt designation.

3.7 Consultation on the Preferred Strategy in November 2012 revealed a high level of public support for a Green Belt in Cardiff. Consultees were asked if they thought Cardiff should have a Green Belt. Responses indicated a high level of support for a Green Belt with 82% of respondents from Cardiff’s Citizens Panel and 91.8% of Local Development Plan respondents supporting the need for such a designation.

3.8 The main reasons for support included protecting the setting of the city, protecting biodiversity/landscape interests, enhancing quality of life and providing long term protection. Organisations in support of a Green Belt included the Design Commission for Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, Cardiff Civic Society, Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales, Ramblers Cymru Cardiff Group, Cardiff Cycling Campaign and numerous Community Councils, Local Societies and Residents Associations. Other groups including landowners and developers raised concerns about the restrictive nature and implications of a Green Belt designation.

4. The need for a Green Belt in Cardiff and consideration of potentially suitable areas

4.1 Cardiff is the most populous urban area in Wales with the highest population density in Wales and has experienced significant population growth and development. As the capital city of Wales and the centre of a wider city-region providing an important source of jobs and services for the whole of South East Wales Cardiff has significant development needs therefore it is not surprising that much of the countryside around Cardiff experiences significant development pressures. The Deposit LDP proposes a range of development areas across the city including areas of countryside to help meet this identified need.

4.2 The Caerphilly Mountain Ridge, the Garth Hill and Pentyrch Ridges and Valley to the north of the city together with the Leckwith Escarpment to the west (in the Vale of Glamorgan) and the Severn Estuary to the south provide a physical framework for the city which merits special protection.

4.3 The extent of development pressures in this area is evidenced through planning applications for dwelling conversions, rebuilds and related structures, equine-related activities and other uses. Such developments are beginning to have a cumulative impact upon the quality of this highly visible and sensitive area of landscape, the setting of the city and the openness of the land in this area of Cardiff.

4.4 The very real development pressures for Cardiff necessitate the need to put in place long term mechanisms to protect land and to protect the setting of Cardiff. It is considered that the designation of a Green Belt will assist in the management of future urban growth and form by restricting expansion into areas that are considered...
to be important to the setting of the city. It is considered that existing policies are not sufficient to protect the open nature of this land in the longer term.

5. The benefits of Green Belt designation

5.1 The designation of a Green Belt in Cardiff will assist in the long term protection of those areas of the city considered to be important to the setting of the city and critical to Cardiff’s identity. The Green Belt designation, by restricting of development into these areas will help to ensure their long term protection for future generations.

5.2 Although Green Belts are not intended to be a tool to protect areas of high intrinsic value, the land proposed is of high environmental value and also a popular area for informal recreation. Green Belt designation can have a positive impact providing longer-term certainty of protection by putting in place support for management and enhancement measures. For example, the long-term protection can act as a stimulus to consider landscape-scale initiatives addressing such matters as carbon sinks, habitat creation and management initiatives and wider green infrastructure-related projects where long-term certainty would support planning and delivery.

6. Cross – boundary considerations

6.1 PPW does not prescribe a methodology for assessing and defining Green Belt areas. The boundaries of the proposed Green Belt have been carefully identified using physical feature and boundaries to include only land which is considered necessary to keep open in the longer term and provide an additional level of protection for.

6.2 In line with PPW the following areas are proposed as Green Belt:
- Land north of the M4 Motorway around Pentyrch as shown on Map 2 below.
This area includes the Garth Hill Uplands and the Pentyrch Ridges and Valleys. The Garth Hill Uplands form part of the important backdrop of hills that encircle the city, which are visible from much of the city and surrounding countryside. This upland area is highly visible and open in character and forms a strategically important, prominent and distinctive landscape in the extreme north of the city. The Pentyrch Ridges and Valleys represent a distinctive area of open land and form a strategically important historic landscape asset in the north west of the city.

- Land north of the M4 Motorway at Caerphilly Mountain as shown on Map 3 below.

![Map 3: Proposed area of Green Belt north of the M4 Motorway at Caerphilly Mountain](image)

This area includes the high ground of Fforest Fawr and Caerphilly Ridge and the lower foothills of Caerphilly Mountain. This area forms an important and valued backdrop to the city and development in this area would significantly impair this important backdrop to the city.

6.3 The boundaries of these designations are considered to form a logical, well defined area which is very much ‘Cardiff – facing.’ The boundary to the north is predominantly along the County boundary which forms a particularly strong demarcation between Cardiff and the South Wales Valleys to the north. The proposed boundary, as previously mentioned, has very good synergy with the Special Landscape Area and Visually Locally Important Landscape Area to the north. In line with national guidance settlements have been excluded from the designation, as only settlements where no new building or infilling only is proposed should be included.

6.4 Other areas have been assessed for their suitability to be included in the Green Belt designation. In terms of land to the east and west of the city the tightness of Cardiff’s administrative boundaries to parts of the existing urban area here limits the scope for including land in these locations, in particular along Cardiff’s eastern boundary with Newport there is limited scope to include this land within the designation. However as Newport’s adopted Unitary Development Plan contains a Green Belt on land
immediately east of Cardiff’s boundary extending from the M4 to the coast measures are in place to prevent the coalescence of Cardiff and Newport.

6.5 The Leckwith Escarpment to the west of the city, whilst visually important to the setting of the city, is within the Vale of Glamorgan administrative boundary. Much of the land immediately adjacent to the Cardiff boundary within the Vale is protected by either Special Landscape Designations or Green Wedge (around Culverhouse Cross).

6.6 Whilst a large area of the land north of the M4 Motorway has been designated, the lower lying land north of Junction 33 and south and west of Creigiau has not been included as this area is not considered to perform the same strategic role as the higher and more prominent land included within the proposed designation. This location forms part of the main north-west transport corridor linking Rhondda Cynon Taff and Cardiff.

6.7 In line with national guidance on Green Belts it is important that a sufficient range of potential development land remains available in the longer term. To this affect large areas of countryside remain outside of the proposed Green Belt designation to allow for flexibility and options for future growth thereby not removing the capacity for future development to take place in the city.

6.8 The proposed areas for designation as shown on Map 4 below are considered to be those locations which require long term protection now. However, their designation at this point in time would not preclude any future dialogue on the inclusion of additional areas from taking place, for example Newport City Council have proposed an extension to their designated Green Belt in their current Deposit LDP, following further assessment, to form a more logical boundary to their existing statutorily designated Green Belt.
7. Conclusions

7.1 In conclusion it is considered that a Green Belt designation is necessary to strategically manage the urban form of Cardiff and provide longer term protection to the setting of the city, in line with national guidance.

7.2 The case for a Green Belt for Cardiff is considered compelling due to reasons outlined in this assessment and the designation of a Green Belt within these areas is now urgently required. Importantly, the designation provides a long term commitment to the protection of Cardiff’s green backdrop and provides a balance to areas of countryside allocated for development in the plan.

7.3 This area of land north of the M4 Motorway shown on Map 4 above unquestionably forms part of a distinctive, prominent and well known green backdrop to the city and forms a strategically important setting to the urban area. The area is generally well contained by the strong physical boundary of the M4 Motorway to the south and the County boundary to the north.

7.4 The designation of a Green Belt with its strict policy to preserve the open nature of this land is the only tool available to prevent the long term deterioration of this visually prominent area which provides the strategic setting to the city and very much recognised by the public as being a key element which helps define the very nature of Cardiff.