

COURSERS ROAD, COLNEY HEATH

GREEN BELT ANALYSIS

Prepared on behalf of

The Manor Group

MAG1561gba



Placing development well

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Green Belt Analysis	
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The aim of this report is to provide an assessment of the Site's performance against the purposes of the Green Belt and assessment of the site contribution to the Green Belt openness from both a spatial and visual perspective – having regard to the Samuel Smith Old Brewery case, as set out in the NPPF. It also considers the effect on the Green Belt as a result of development at the Site.
- 1.1.2 This analysis considers the development of 9 residential dwellings with associated landscaping.
- 1.1.3 This document also includes analysis relating to the site's location within and relationship with Green Belt.
- 1.1.4 A desk based study will identify any primary constraints.

2.0 The Green Belt

The Green Belt Designation

2.1.1 Green Belt is a policy with the purpose of controlling the sprawl of urban areas by keeping land permanently open; consequently the most important attribute of green belts is their openness.

2.1.2 The purposes of green belt were set out in 1955 by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government as being:

- To check the further growth of a large built up area;
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another; and
- To preserve the special character of a town.

2.1.3 The site falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt, which covers roughly 516,000 hectares.

2.2 Protection of Green Belt Land

2.2.1 The fundamental aims of Green Belt policy are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024.

2.2.2 The NPPF in section 13 *Protecting Green Belt land* sets out the following five purposes for the inclusion of land within Green Belt.

- 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.

2.2.3 The NPPF does not attribute a hierarchy to the five purposes, so it can be assumed that each of the purposes is of a similar level of importance.

2.2.4 An important component of the evaluation of the performance of any site in relation to Green Belt purposes, is consideration of the effectiveness of existing boundaries. The NPPF establishes that boundaries should be clearly defined, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

2.2.5 The following features are considered most likely to fulfil this requirement:

- Major transport infrastructure, motorways, main trunk roads and railways;
- Landscape features including woodland blocks and bands and watercourses; and
- Topography such as ridgelines.

2.2.6 Where these features are absent secondary boundaries could include historic field hedgerows or minor/private roads.

2.3 Green Belt in Colney Heath

2.3.1 Colney Heath is 'washed over' by the Green Belt policy.

3.0 The Site

3.1.1 The site is formed by an existing large scale residential curtilage and laid to cut grassland.



Image 1: Site Location on Aerial Photograph

3.1.2 The Site falls within a woodland , with existing residential dwellings situated to the north and to the west beyond Coursers Road. There is a presence of manmade elements and road noise and human activity is noticeable in the area. Frequent vegetative and built features create enclosure to longer range views through the site.

3.1.3 This enclosure that is formed by woodland and Coursers Road form strong boundaries to the site. The typical character of this area is settlement fringe, formed by the local transport corridors and existing built form.

3.1.4 The site is not covered by any policies or designations of relevance to landscape.

3.1.5 The site would not likely be considered a 'valued' landscape in respect of NPPF paragraph 187a.

3.1.6 The vegetation, built form and landform of the local area prevents potential views into or through the site, meaning that the area has a very enclosed character.

4.0 Green Belt Analysis – Site Specific

- 4.1.1 Green Belt is not considered a landscape designation, but as highlighted by the Sam Smith decision (R (Samuel Smith Old Brewery (Tadcaster) and others) v North Yorkshire County Council [2020] UKSC 3) the visual effects of a development on the openness of Green Belt can be considered of relevance to landscape.
- 4.1.2 There is a difference between impacts on visual amenity, which are normally considered within the process of LVIA and the visual aspects of openness which are considered as part of Green Belt Assessment.
- 4.1.3 In LVIA an assessment is made on the effects of development on views available to people and their visual amenity and how this may affect character and scenic quality. In consideration of Green Belt, an assessment is made on the effects of development on the visual openness of the Green Belt including impacts on views, links to the wider Green Belt, inter-visibility between settlements and whether measures could be proposed that would restore the baseline aspects of openness.
- 4.1.4 Openness can have both spatial and visual aspects meaning both visual impacts and volume of development can be of relevance. This is generally considered alongside the duration and remediability of the development and the degree of noticeable activity likely to be generated, such as traffic.

Visual Openness

- 4.1.5 The visual aspect of openness as it relates to the green belt is not measured in the same way as would be the case with a visual assessment. That change is visible is proof of harm in terms of openness.
- 4.1.6 Consequently, if the proposals are visually intrusive they will affect openness regardless of residual visual effects. The site is currently seen in the context of the settlement edge and its urban influence.
- 4.1.7 The extent of the surrounding area from where the change will be discernible will be very geographically limited. This means that there is unlikely to be a perceptible reduction in the visual openness due to the current enclosed nature of the landscape.

Spatial Effects

- 4.1.8 Dwellings would be situated within the site, which would reduce spatial openness even when compared to the current settlement fringe character of the site.
- 4.1.9 The increase in development as proposed will reduce spatial openness on the site and this part of the Green Belt to an extent. This spatial change is considered in more detail within the planning submissions.

Activity

- 4.1.10 As a result of the proposed additional dwellings within the green belt the area will not become discernibly busier, as any additional walkers and vehicular movements related to the site's use as residential development will be experienced within a very busy local network of transport corridors where tranquillity is limited.

Section Conclusions

- 4.1.11 As with any scheme of a residential nature within Green Belt, a level of spatial harm will occur as a result of development. However, this change will be localised and limited due to the existing enclosed nature of the site and the settlement fringe in which it sits.
- 4.1.12 The visual aspect of the green belt will be affected in a very limited way, with any change localised and limited due to the enclosure formed by surrounding elements of the urban fringe in which it sits.
- 4.1.13 The additional movement created as a result of the proposed residential site use would increase activity in the surrounding area, but these would not be perceptible due to the nature of the current surrounding settlement fringe.

5.0 Review of the Site Against NPPF Paragraph 143 Purposes

- 5.1.1 This Green Belt Analysis forms part of the study of effects of the development proposals to demonstrate whether bringing forward development on this site will support the key purposes of the Green Belt in the context of Colney Heath. This analysis considers the current conditions on site and whether its development will detrimentally undermine the function and purposes of the wider designated Green Belt.
- 5.1.2 The site and the effect of the proposed development on it will be assessed against the national Green Belt purposes.
- 5.1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in section 13 Protecting Green Belt land sets out the following five purposes for the inclusion of land within Green Belt.
- 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.
- 5.1.4 The NPPF does not attribute a hierarchy to the five purposes, so it can be assumed that each of the purposes is of a similar level of importance.
- 5.1.5 The NPPF does not offer guidance on how to assess the performance of Green Belt land so a clear methodology will be adopted as detailed below.
- 5.1.6 To provide an analysis of the site's performance against the Green Belt purposes a five point scale will be used as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Level of Contribution to Green Belt Purposes

Level of Contribution	Typical Indicators
Strong	Land makes a meaningful contribution to this purpose and should remain in the Green Belt
Strong/Moderate	Land performs well against this purpose.
Moderate	Land performs moderately well against this purpose
Moderate/Weak	Land makes some contribution to this purpose
Weak	Land makes limited contribution to this purpose
None	Land makes no contribution to this purpose

- 5.1.7 An important component of the evaluation of the performance of any site in relation to the Green Belt purposes, is consideration of the effectiveness of existing boundaries. The NPPF establishes that boundaries should be clearly defined, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

5.1.8 The following features are considered most likely to fulfil this requirement:

- Major transport infrastructure, motorways, main trunk roads and railways;
- Landscape features including woodland blocks and bands and watercourses; and
- Topography such as ridgelines.

5.1.9 Where these features are absent secondary boundaries could include historic field hedgerows or minor/private roads.

5.1.10 The five purposes of Green Belt as defined in the NPPF are outlined earlier in this document. The site and how it performs against to these purposes are detailed below.

Purpose 1

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.

5.1.11 The Site falls within woodland and is surrounded by residential curtilage and Coursers Road.

5.1.12 The site will not physically extend further into the countryside than the existing surrounding dwellings that form this part of the boundary of Colney Heath in any direction, as the existing settlement edge extends further in the landscape to the north, east, south and west than the site's extents.

5.1.13 A combination of the scale of the site, its containment and relationship with the existing built development boundary, will help ensure that development of it will not result in urban sprawl. As a result, the site has no function when assessed against the first purpose.

Purpose 2

To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.

5.1.14 The site currently sits within woodland and has existing residential development to the north, and west beyond Coursers Road. These elements form strong physical enclosure.

5.1.15 The site's development footprint will result in development extending no further towards any other settlement and will not reduce the gap between the current built edge of Colney Heath and neighbouring settlements. Development of the site would not result in any merging of settlements and as a result has no function when assessed against the second purpose.

Purpose 3

To assist in the safeguarding of countryside from encroachment.

5.1.16 The site is currently surrounded on all sides by woodland and residential curtilage to the north and west beyond Coursers Road. Slightly to the east of the site River Colne and its associated riparian vegetation form a strong physical barrier.

5.1.17 Whilst development will normally inevitably cause an element of encroachment, the contained nature of the site and relationship within the established urban fringe will minimise adverse impact in this respect. Development of the site would therefore result in limited encroachment and the site has a weak function when assessed against the third purpose.

Purpose 4

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

- 5.1.18 The site sits adjacent to and within the current built edge of Colney Heath and very few views into the site from the local area are available.
- 5.1.19 There is no intervisibility between the site and the core of Colney Heath, nor with listed buildings or other features of interest within the settlement or surrounding countryside. Development of the site would therefore have no impact upon the historic setting of the settlement and as a result no function when assessed against the fourth purpose.

Purpose 5

To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 5.1.20 The site sits adjacent to and within the current built edge of Colney Heath and is formed by cut grassland that is related to the adjacent residential dwellings.
- 5.1.21 As the site relates to the existing residential development that forms the settlement fringe, it will reduce this effect, but the site represents land related to agricultural use rather than the residential use that sits in close proximity.
- 5.1.22 However, given that this site is being considered in the context that the local authority has exhausted most opportunities for development within the existing settlement boundaries and non-Green Belt locations, many of sites brought forward to meet the uplift in housing need will be Green Belt and will have a level of effect on Purpose 5. Therefore, purpose 5 should effectively be disregarded in the consideration of sites through the Local Plan for allocation.

5.2 Evaluation

- 5.2.1 What this review of the main purposes of Green Belt for the site shows, is that the site represents a very low functioning part of the Green Belt which does not contribute towards the main functions of keeping land permanently open due to its currently sitting within woodland, it is a very enclosed site and is experienced by few receptors.
- 5.2.2 In these regards, the site comprises a low or weakly functioning part of the Green Belt when assessed against the five purposes as set out in the NPPF.
- 5.2.3 The site is surrounded by defensible boundaries, with access currently provided into the site via Coursers Road. The proposals would not result in a protrusion of built form and would be strongly contained by existing urban fringe features i.e residential curtilages, transport corridors (Coursers Road), and by the dense landscape features (woodland) that is situated around the site's boundaries.
- 5.2.4 Table 2 below details the assessed outcomes of the site specific analysis when compared with the five aims of Green Belt within the NPPF.

Table 2: Level of Contribution to Green Belt Purposes

The Site	Assessment of GB Purposes					Overall Rating
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	
Findings of this report	None	None	Weak	None	Weak	None/ Weak Function

Section Conclusions

- 5.2.5 Overall, it is the conclusion of this report that the site performs as a None/Weak functioning part of the Green Belt and does not contribute to the fundamental aim of Green Belt; preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The current site boundaries and surrounding landscape features mean that the site is strongly enclosed and not experienced as open land.

6.0 Revisions to NPPF

6.1.1 The revisions to the NPPF introduce the concept of "Grey Belt," which refers to areas within the Green Belt that may not contribute significantly to its purposes and are thus candidates for immediate development through development management decisions and or release through local plan reviews. This concept is relevant to the site, which, due to its enclosed nature and minimal contribution to Green Belt purposes, could be considered under this emerging policy.

6.1.2 The ongoing NPPF review defines Grey Belt as:

For the purposes of Plan-making and decision-making, grey belt is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising Previously Developed Land and any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes (as defined in para 140 of this Framework) but excluding those areas or assets of particular importance listed in footnote 7 of this Framework (other than land designated as Green Belt).

6.1.3 Given the definition and given that the site makes only limited contribution to Green Belt purposes the site qualifies as Grey Belt under the NPPF.

6.1.4 Paragraph 152 of the NPPF provides a test to define inappropriate development:

152. In addition to the above, housing, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where:

a. The development would utilise grey belt land in sustainable locations, the contributions set out in paragraph 155 below are provided, and the development would not fundamentally undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan as a whole; and

6.1.5 Other parts of paragraph 152 are related to planning balance.

6.1.6 The development would not fundamentally undermine the Green Belt as a whole. The enclosure of the site by strongly defensible physical barriers is clearly demonstrated on the ground.

6.1.7 Any spatial change as a result of the development would be restricted to the site only. Any change to visual openness would be seen from only the area surrounding the site and no long range views of the development would be available. Therefore, development of this parcel would not fundamentally affect the overall Green Belt.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1.1 What this review of the main purposes of Green Belt for the site shows, is that the site represents a low or weakly functioning part of the Green Belt which does not contribute towards the main function of keeping land permanently open. It is a generally enclosed site and is experienced by few receptors.
- 7.1.2 In these regards, the site comprises a None/Weak functioning part of the Green Belt when assessed against the five purposes as set out in the NPPF.
- 7.1.3 The existing Green Belt boundary of the site is formed by the transport corridor (Coursers Road), residential curtilage, and woodland. The proposal will only be experienced from a very limited geographic extent, as it would be strongly contained by the existing settlement fringe elements and the dense landscape features that sit around the site boundaries and in the local landscape.
- 7.1.4 Overall, the site performs as a None/Weak functioning part of the Green Belt and does not contribute to the fundamental aim of Green Belt; preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The current site boundaries and local landscape features mean that the site is strongly enclosed and not experienced outside of a very limited geographic extent.
- 7.1.5 The site plays a limited role in fulfilling the core purposes of the Green Belt. It does not significantly prevent urban sprawl due to its containment by existing infrastructure, nor does it contribute to the merging of settlements, given the clear separation provided by natural and built features. Additionally, the site's proximity to urban development means it does not safeguard the countryside from encroachment in a meaningful way. As such, its development would not undermine the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt, particularly when compared to other, more open and rural parcels within the Green Belt.
- 7.1.6 The revisions to the NPPF introduce the concept of the "Grey Belt," which refers to areas within the Green Belt that are already influenced by urban infrastructure and contribute less to the Green Belt's primary purposes. The site fits well within this "Grey Belt" designation. Its development would be consistent with policy, which recognises the need for flexibility to accommodate sustainable growth in areas where the contribution to Green Belt objectives is minimal. The strong physical boundaries and the site's proximity to existing urban development make it a logical candidate for development under the Grey Belt criteria.

7.2 Section Conclusions:

- 7.2.1 In conclusion, the site forms a limited impact on openness, has a minimal role in fulfilling Green Belt purposes, and aligns with the "Grey Belt" concept. The site's specific characteristics, strong physical boundaries, and proximity to urban areas make it a logical parcel of land to develop. By adhering to the planning policy framework, development can be achieved in a way that respects the overarching aims of the Green Belt.



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