Southend-on-Sea Green Belt Assessment

Sender	Recipient(s)
LUC	Southend-on Sea City Council
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Revised Green Belt boundary for Bournes Green New Neighbourhood

Proposed site allocations in the draft Southend Local Plan include BG001: the Bournes Green New Neighbourhood. This encompasses sites CA002, CA003, HEA143 and HEA145 and the small intervening areas between these sites (see Figure 1 – top map below). Southend City Council has requested LUC's opinion regarding amendment to the Green Belt boundary to accommodate this development.

Aside from site HEA145 and existing washed-over development immediately to the east and south of this (off Wakering Road), land within the area has been assessed in the Southend Green Belt Assessment (2026) as making a strong contribution to Green Belt Purpose A, preventing the sprawl of a large built-up area, and therefore does not meet the criteria for definition as grey belt. Most of the area also makes a strong contribution to Purpose C, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Accordingly, there are no realistic adjustments that could be made to the proposed site allocation that would avoid the release of strong performing Green Belt land. See assessments for parcels SO15 and SO17 to SO21 (in Appendix E of the Southend Green Belt Assessment) for further details.

The principal point of consideration in determining the most suitable boundaries relates to the impact that development would have on the remaining Green Belt, as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) requires consideration as to whether development proposals would fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes within the plan area. The Southend Green Belt Assessment discusses potential for fundamental impacts in paragraphs 4.7 to 4.19, concluding that removal of the district's potential development sites from the Green Belt would not fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes. However, there is still potential for harm to the remaining Green Belt – discussed in the paragraphs below.

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In the western part of BG001 (sites CA002 and HEA145), existing washed-over development to the north and east, and tree cover to the west, would limit the impact of development on adjacent open Green Belt land either in Southend or across the border into Rochford. The northern edge of CA002 follows the local authority boundary, which for a distance of around 270m runs across an open field some 50-70m south of housing along Rebels Lane, so development would result in the small area of intervening open land in Rochford being substantially contained by urbanising development and, therefore, becoming grey belt. This would not, however, be considered a significant impact on the remaining Green Belt.

The remainder of BG001 is aligned to the north with the Southend-Rochford local authority boundary, which in part follows Southend Road but for much of its length follows an unmarked course parallel but approximately 60m to the south of Southend Road. Release of the draft allocation would leave this narrow strip of land considerably weakened in terms of its contribution to the Green Belt purposes, but in practice it is Southend Road that would provide the principal boundary distinction between BG001 and the wider Green Belt. There would be some urbanising influence on land in Rochford to the north of Southend Road, which is not in itself a strong boundary feature, but as open farmland lacking any significant outer boundary features the fields to the north would continue to make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes A and C.

Paragraph 149(f) NPPF 2024 (carried forward for development management purposes by Policy GB4 of the NPPF 2026) requires Green Belt boundaries to be clearly defined using readily recognisable and defensible features, and these are not currently present where the boundary runs across open fields. However, assuming the strips of land in Rochford noted above are to be retained as Green Belt, a clear boundary could be created through implementation of development proposals, whether this takes the form of a development curtilage or a new landscape feature such as a hedgerow.

Potential for harm to remaining Green Belt land is most significant at the eastern end of the proposed BG001 allocation, where the eastern edge of site CA003 follows the Southend-Rochford boundary parallel to the urban settlement of Great Wakering and only around 50m away from it. The Green Belt contribution assessment for parcel SO21 notes the role of this land in preventing the merger of Great Wakering into Southend, an eventuality which in terms of Purpose A would be considered an incongruous impact on the settlement pattern. Although not specifically referenced in the Southend Green Belt Assessment, the assumption was also made that land to the east of Star Lane in Rochford District (south of houses on Sandy Crescent and Kiln Lane) that was removed from the Green Belt and allocated for employment development under the Rochford Local Plan (2014) Policy NEL2, will be developed.

For land to make a strong contribution to Purpose A it must, according to the PPG guidance (now carried forward in NPPF 2026 Annex E), “lack physical features in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development” and must be in a location which, if developed, would form an incongruous pattern in relation to the large built-up area. The release of land to the eastern edge of site CA003 (labelled Option A on the aerial view on Figure 1 below) would leave no meaningful gap in this area between Southend and Great Wakering and would also increase the urbanising containment of remaining open Green Belt land in Rochford to the east of Star Lane. Consequently, the remaining land would make a weaker contribution to Purpose A, as the key change to settlement form would already have occurred through the release of

land identified as Option A. The very narrow gap would therefore cease to make a strong contribution to Purpose A and would become grey belt.

The release of land up to the line labelled Option B on Figure 1 would leave a wider gap of almost 300m but would still create a significant degree of urban containment around the remaining open land between Southend and Great Wakering. The sense of a clear gap extending between the settlements and connecting open uncontained Green Belt land at either end would be substantially weakened. The land within this remaining gap would no longer perform a strong role in relation to Purpose A and therefore would become grey belt.

To retain a gap with a strong contribution to Purpose A would, in our view, require pushing the development boundary back to the line labelled Option C on Figure 1. The gap between urban edges would be almost 600m, retaining a stronger link between land in the gap and the wider Green Belt to the north. There would be a degree of urbanising influence, but the gap would be less contained and a stronger sense of settlement separation would be preserved. Also, the larger the retained gap the greater the scope for introduction of landscaping measures to limit intervisibility between the two urban areas whilst also allowing visual links through the parcel to open Green Belt land to the north in Rochford.

These three ‘options’ provide an indication of Green Belt harm but as none of these would fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes it will be a question of weighing up development need and environmental and sustainability considerations against the benefits of limiting loss of Green Belt contribution.



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Figure 1 - top: potential development sites within proposed BG001 allocation; bottom: boundary options (A, B and C) for Green Belt release

