

Examination into the soundness of the Oxford Local Plan 2036

Respondent: Robert Alexander (294) Matter 3: Green Belt

SP26 Hill View Farm

The Local Plan para **9.157** (re:) states that “careful design will be needed to ensure that the setting of the Conservation Area is conserved and enhance.”

Para **9.159** states that “access to the site will need to be taken from Mill Lane and localised improvements will be required in order to demonstrate that two vehicles can pass each other along the duration of Mill Lane.”

Any such “improvements” would detract from both the setting and the Conservation Area itself, as the two bends at the southern end of Mill Lane would require substantial modification requiring removal of raised and grass verges and possible demolition of walls and buildings.

Policy **SP26** states that “compensatory improvements should be made to surrounding areas of remaining Green Belt”. Land West of Mill Lane is such an area. This implies that if Hill View Farm is developed then the Land West of Mill Lane should not be.

SP27 Land West of Mill Lane

Para **9.161** states that “an access road from A40 already exists”. It does not – access would require a full additional junction to be built between Mill Lane and the A40.

It is not possible for “adequate separation from the village” to be achieved given that this land is *adjacent* to village houses in both Cumberlege Close and Mill Lane, and an additional “cluster of sites” could only exacerbate this.

Para **9.164** states

“there are currently two points of access to the site from Mill Lane”.

This would seem to include a farm track, or the track to the Victoria Arms, which is owned by the Oxford Preservation Trust and in Green Belt land. This is confusing and not properly described.

Para **9.164** also states that:

“localised improvements will be required in order to demonstrate that two vehicles can pass each other along the duration of Mill Lane.”

Any such “improvements” would significantly detract from both the setting and the Conservation Area itself, as the two bends at the southern end of Mill Lane would require substantial modification requiring removal of grass verges and raised walkways, both of which are a feature of the village.

SP26/27 General

The Inspectors have asked OCC:

“to reference the exceptional circumstances that justify the release of sites SP24 – SP31 from the Green Belt”

- and:

“Whether there are strategic and local level exceptional circumstances that justify the release of sites from the Green Belt for development, and whether the approach towards compensatory improvements is sound.”

To which the OCC responded:

“The City Council considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify a Green Belt boundary review due to the need to support Oxford’s economic success and its dependence on the delivery of additional housing to meet housing need”.

This is not a satisfactory response. It relies on anecdotal assessment of Oxford’s current and future “economic success” as “exceptional” and makes a judgment based thereon.

Even if this were true, It also assumes that further growth is a good thing - in an area which is attractive to businesses and families but lacks the capacity to support the demand without seriously damaging these qualities. Unsustainable growth is not a good thing.

The infrastructure requirements (A40/Mill Lane junction and Mill Lane widening) are not justified by the volume of new housing (75) projected.

The removal of the green belt is not justified, as it impairs the amenity value of the site (stabling, walkers and wildlife), spoils the context of a conservation area and impacts the green corridor from the city through the Cherwell Valley. OCC’s relative ranking of the importance of these sites to the Green Belt as “low” or “medium” does not obviate their amenity value. A key objective of the Green Belt is to avoid urban sprawl such as this – an objective which appears to have been ignored.