

Bents Garden Centre, Glazebury Representation to Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan

The representor seeks an amendment to the Green Belt boundary to exclude all land at Bents Garden Centre, Glazebury from the Green Belt. This land is within the red line on the attached drawing reference MSC-1650-50.

We believe Policy GB1 – Green Belt and the proposals map are unsound since they are inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework in that they include land at Bents Garden Centre within the Green Belt.

Paragraph 140 of the Framework states that:

Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans

The following exceptional circumstances exist to justify the removal of the land at Bents Garden Centre from the Green Belt.

Internet retailers such as Amazon and Crocus / Waitrose are making great inroads into the UK garden market. Garden centres are also having to make plans for increasing their online purchasing capabilities and at Bents Garden Centre the range of products now available has been increased by around 350 per cent over the past year or so. These market trends are expected to continue.

Bents solely a retail outlet since over the past decade it has become more of a destination where people can gather for both a leisure experience and to participate in educational activities. The centre offers the following:

- Display gardens
- Four catering outlets
- An adventure golf course
- A Santa's Grotto
- Bents Gardening Classes

Plans have also been approved for a Cookery School and a School of Horticulture.

The centre is now an important retail, leisure and educational facility for the local community and a wider catchment. The removal of the site from the Green Belt would enhance the ability of the site to evolve in this respect, subject to the other policies of the plan and the usual planning control process. This would be in accordance with the economic development objectives of the Framework as expressed in paragraph 84.

The removal of the land from the Green Belt would accord with paragraph 141 of the Framework since there are no other reasonable options for meeting the needs identified above since the strength of Bents Garden Centre compared to other garden centres is its size and the synergy created by the provision of a wide range of facilities on a single site.

Furthermore, the site is brownfield land and is suitable for development. As required by paragraph 142 the land is in a sustainable location and is accessible by public transport.

The release of the land is also justified by its limited Green Belt function.

Within this context, the ARUP Green Belt Assessment identifies two parcels of land within and partially within the garden centre's ownership, these being parcels GB2 and GB3, respectively. These parcels are to the north of the main garden centre building.

Following our response to the assessment dated 22 September 2017, the assessment was amended to recognise that parcel GB3 makes a weak contribution to the to the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Therefore, development in parcel GB3 would have negligible impact on the Green Belt and could take pressure off other parcels which make a stronger contribution (for example parcels GB1, 12 and 13).

Approximately half of parcel GB2 comprises a visitor attraction being the Wildlife Gardens open to the public which include a Bird of Prey flight zone (developed under planning permission reference 2016/29468). Therefore, in the representor's view, this part of the parcel is not 'open countryside.'

We also note that parcel GB6 has been assessed as making a weak contribution and yet it is the garden centre's display garden and is no different to parcels GB2 and GB3.

Regarding GB13 we note that this is partly developed as allotments including a car park, garden sheds and paraphernalia and yet it has been assessed as making a "Strong Contribution".

Given the above, the inclusion of the land in question within the Green Belt is inconsistent with the Framework and the plan is unsound in this respect.

Accordingly, it is the representor's view that the land should be removed from the Green Belt by the insertion of "Land at Bents Garden Centre, Glazebury" as site K in part 3 of Policy GB1. The site should also be shown as removed from the Green Belt on associated Figure 6.

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