

Matter 5 Written Statement – CPRE

Matter 5 Question 111. Development in Green Belt Villages.

The purpose of this update is to achieve compatibility with the NPPF which makes no reference to Housing Development Boundaries. CPRE feels that to replace the term 'Housing Development Boundary' by 'Infill Boundary' is of little consequence. But it does note that B&NES proposed update maintains the prohibition of building outside the HDT/Infill Boundary whereas the NPPF is more accommodative to development outside the infill Boundary. CPRE supports the B&NES proposal while recognizing a possible conflict with the NPPF.

In previous submissions to B&NES (unfortunately disregarded) a more significant anomaly between the Core Strategy and the NPPF is that the former refers to acceptable development in Green Belt villages being 'limited to' infill whereas the NPPF refers to 'limited infill' being acceptable. This small semantic difference is very significant because the Core Strategy gives a general green light to development provided the site can be justified as being infill as defined by the relevant SPD. This might be appropriate to certain types of village, say those with a fairly complete built up frontage to a main street where a gap might be considered an anomaly needing to be filled. But in many Somerset villages, much of the character is derived from the fingers of countryside breaking up the pattern of settlement. Turning a sparsely built community into a linear village through a policy of infill development can be very detrimental to both the character of that community as well as the natural environment.

These issues would become material considerations if the wording and intention of the NPPF were followed. There could be limited infill development within a village which would preclude anything that was not infill but would not necessarily favour developments just because they were infill. The LPA would be in a better position to resist development that was otherwise inappropriate, for example, because it put a strain on village facilities or was otherwise unsustainable. It would also give Parish Councils, who are often best placed to see the local picture, a more significant role in the preservation and enhancement of their villages.

Such a change, while entirely consistent with the NPPF, would require a modification of the existing SPD. CPRE recommends that this might be the opportunity to reexamine the ways in which planning policy can promote the health of our village communities. For example, the rule requiring extensions to properties in the Green Belt to be under a third of the original dwelling size does not operate fairly nor to the benefit of many traditional village properties, which are usual very small and require extensions much larger than 33% to bring them into line with 21st century living conditions.