

**THE original green belt policy established in 1947 seems a far cry from the green belt policies and future proposals being enforced and discussed at present.**

Green belts were introduced to prevent urban sprawl and provide access and create a definitive boundary between rural and urban areas, and is presently made up of some 14 green belts covering thousands of hectares.

We now see proposals for thousands of new homes on green belts and proposals to re-define green belt boundaries. What does it all mean for the future of the development and diversification within the countryside?

Planning in the countryside is constantly subject to change and it can be a challenge at times to achieve your goal and development within the green belt is no exception.

National green belt guidance is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 – Green Belts 1995 (PPG 2) and the Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) direction 2005. Both contain guidelines specifically for development within the green belt.

While this may be in need of some review the current policy only allows development in the green belt to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for urban populations and development is restricted to agricultural and forestry associated developments, outdoor sporting uses and ancillary facilities, limited infills and minor works to existing residential properties and works of national interest and importance.

While you must demonstrate that you are meeting the requirements of national policy it is also essential to consider local policies in place under local development plans.

Dependant upon the scale and nature of your proposed development, you may have to consider the impact of your development on the green belt. If it is considered to cause harm to the surrounding landscape, then in planning terms it will be classed as ‘inappropriate’, following which very special circumstances will need to be demonstrated to justify the development – for example, the creation of a maze maize, new building, farm park or outside storage may be classed as inappropriate development.

The reason for the inappropriateness may not just be the scale of your proposed development; it can be the associated uses that accompany the development such as creating areas of hard standing, car parking and/or the creation of new boundary features.

There are some developments within greenbelts that typically are not classed as ‘inappropriate’ and for agriculture the re-use of rural buildings is generally not classed as inappropriate development providing it does not materially have a greater impact on the openness of the greenbelt, for example, the buildings are capable of conversion and are in-keeping with the area.

Should your proposed development be termed ‘inappropriate’ then you should also consider the additional requirements likely to be asked for by the planning authority such as visual impact assessments, noise surveys and landscaping schemes. Details of such assessments will be necessary to accompany the application or imposed as one of the planning conditions attached to your development should you receive permission.

For diversification works and projects of any description it is essential not only to comply with policy but also to gain the support of the local community and industries associated with your proposed development, as their support will be relied upon when trying to demonstrate very special circumstances.

As green belts are coming under increasing pressure we already know that here in the East Midlands in accordance with the recent recommendations in the HM Government White Paper, the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS 8) for the East Midlands proposes to review and re-define the green belt boundaries of large cities within the area.

We feel that proposals of this nature are likely to happen elsewhere in order to accommodate the growth required in these larger cities.

The continued urban sprawl could mean that development connected with farm diversification may come under increased scrutiny as local authorities come under increasing pressures to provide opportunities and essential facilities for urban uses while trying to maintain the green areas and openness of the green belt.

While the new proposals contradict the original guidance (PPG2) of green belts this will not mean the end of greenbelts, but it could mean a tighter belt and braces approach to development and, more specifically, further restrictions associated with agricultural diversification and development.