

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION: MATTER 2:  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY (POLICY SP2)**

**Statement from CPRE Hertfordshire**

1. I am Stephen Baker, DMS, BSc, Dip TP, MRTPI, Planning Manager at Campaign to Protect Rural England Hertfordshire (CPREH).
2. This statement supplements our original representations on Policy SP2 in Chapters 4 of the Proposed Submission North Herts Local Plan (the Plan), which still apply, and seeks to address the Inspector's questions as set out in his Schedule of Matters and Issues in respect of Category A villages in the proposed settlement hierarchy.
3. In introduction to this issue, I wish to emphasise the national planning policy context for villages in the Green Belt and repeat CPREH's continued objection the removal of land from the Green Belt without justification.
4. As made clear in our original representations, and in our Statements on Matters 5, 7, and 9, removal of villages currently 'washed over' by Green Belt designation is not consistent with section 9 of the NPPF. Villages washed over by a long established Green Belt with permanent boundaries are covered by paragraphs 79 to 81 and 83 of the NPPF. They are not subject to paragraph 86 which is only relevant to villages in newly-created Green Belt, for example in the area that the Council proposes to designate in the area south of Hitchin.
5. Removal of villages from established Green Belt can only be done if this is justified by the demonstrable existence of exceptional circumstances, both for taking villages out of the Green Belt in principle, and in each specific case.
6. This is not the case in respect of the villages of Breachwood Green, Graveley, Hexton, St Ippolyts or Weston, or the Potters Heath area next to Oaklands and Mardley Heath in Welwyn Hatfield Borough.

**CHAPTER 4 and Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy.**

**Issue 2.1 a): Is each settlement placed within the most appropriate tier?**

7. Several villages in the District currently have defined settlement boundaries distinguishing the area within which development will normally be acceptable

subject to meeting planning criteria set out in the Development Plan, from the surrounding countryside where development is more restricted by Green Belt or other planning policies.

8. CPREH does not consider that there is any justification in the Plan for the above six settlements to be removed from the Green Belt solely because of their proposed categorisation as Category 'A' Villages. The aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and push it towards towns and large villages excluded from the Green Belt in order to protect its countryside from urban encroachment.
9. Removal of these settlements from the Green Belt will achieve the opposite, by facilitating redevelopment and new development otherwise consistent with national policy to encourage house-building and economic development, in areas hitherto deliberately protected from it. This is clearly intended by the Council, in view of the proposal in Policy SP2 to allow 'general development' in all Category 'A' Villages, as noted in the Inspector's question 'c)' under his Issue 2.2.
10. Such significant policy and Green Belt boundary changes must be justified by the existence of exceptional circumstances, which the Council has not demonstrated in respect of the six settlements that this applies to.
11. We would also draw attention to the fact that the area of Hexton proposed for removal from the Green Belt is also within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and that the area of Breachwood Green proposed for removal is also within the area that has been put forward as an extension to the AONB by the Chilterns Conservation Board. Similar protection is given to AONB as to Green Belt by paragraph 14 and footnote 9 of the NPPF.
12. CPREH considers that the Council's proposed removal of the six settlements referred to above from the Green Belt is unsound because it is unjustified and inconsistent with national policy for the Green Belt, and that the Plan should be modified to remove all references to their exclusion from the Green Belt and to their inclusion as Category 'A' Villages in Policy SP2.