

# Oliver's Battery Parish Council

## WCC Local Plan Review August 2020 - A Green Belt for South Hampshire - submission to WCC

### Introduction

Oliver's Battery Parish Council (OBPC) supports the notion of a Green Belt for South Hampshire, including Oliver's Battery and South Winchester Golf Club and land further south to the east of the A3090 (Romsey Road).

The arguments presented by Hampshire CPRE in their document 'Planning for a South Hampshire Green Belt' (September 2019) and in the NEF Consulting Report 'Introducing a South Hampshire Green Belt - Exploring the socioeconomic and environmental value' (June 2020) provide a powerful case for greater protection of open green spaces.

It is understood that City of Winchester Trust also support the idea of a 'Green Belt' around Winchester, with specific concerns mentioned about the SW quadrant.

Current Local Plan policies are often not effective in protecting our countryside and green spaces.

The up-coming Winchester City Council Local Plan Review affords a perfect opportunity to strategically protect the countryside.

This paper concerns itself with the importance of a new green belt to the south west of Winchester in the development of the new Winchester District Local Plan.

### 1. Local Context - Oliver's Battery

1.1 The civil parish of Oliver's Battery is encircled to the east, south and west by open green spaces. The altitude of the settlement affords long distance, panoramic views over the surrounding countryside. The quality of the landscape surrounding Oliver's Battery contributes overwhelmingly to the character and setting of the settlement itself.

1.2 The community in Oliver's Battery places a high value on the setting of the settlement in relation to quality of life. In the Oliver's Battery Plan (2018), the Questionnaire (overall 73% response rate) revealed 96% of the community rated 'Access to the Countryside' as very important/important, followed by 'Peace and Quiet', 95%, 'Views' 95%, and 'Low levels of air pollution' 94%. One of the conclusions in the Plan is *"The overwhelming responses to questions relating to environment, and to protecting the surrounding countryside give clear direction and a high priority for future action."* (<https://www.oliversbattery.info/parish-plan/>)

1.3 Given this prevailing opinion within Oliver's Battery, the Parish Council began the process of listing the large open field at the southern boundaries of the parish as an Asset of Community Value. This open 46 acre field was widely and extensively used for recreational

and social well-being purposes by local residents and people from outside Oliver's Battery. It is the only open, undeveloped land within the Parish itself, excluding the Recreation Ground and Oliver Cromwell's Battery (a listed Scheduled Monument), both owned by the Parish Council. In November 2019, the landowner's Appeal to the First Tier Tribunal on this listing was dismissed. The judge's decision was clear -

*"57. I have concluded that it can no longer be said that agricultural use of the Land is the main or primary use, such that the use by the local community must be ancillary. The evidence supports a view that the use of the Land has changed over time as a consequence of its having been set-aside as agricultural land. The public's use of the Land is now, in effect, use as a recreation field. It cannot be said that this is incidental to the public's use of the PROW. I find that the public's use of the Land other than on the PROW is sufficiently frequent and well established to be an actual current use that is not ancillary.*

*58. I have considered whether it is realistic to think that the public's use of the Land might continue and have concluded that it is. Although the Appellant intends to develop the Land for housing, it is not certain that planning permission will be granted and that the scheme will go ahead. It is therefore not fanciful to think that the local community's use of the Land may continue for some time."* (<https://www.oliversbattery.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ACV-Decision-Notice.pdf>)

1.4 Since March 2020, lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into even sharper focus the local need for open green space for exercise, recreation, social well-being and positive mental health. More than ever before, people of all ages have seen many benefits in the countryside and green spaces around them.

## **2. Wider Context - the South West Quadrant**

2.1 Development pressure on the south west quadrant of land around Winchester is acute. To the east, the area is impacted by the development restrictions within the South Downs National Park, to the south, by the borough of Eastleigh, whilst further to the South, again the New Forest National Park limits house building within its borders, driving development northwards. Equally, growth around Romsey drives even more housing estates to the north east, towards Hursley.

2.2 Land to the south west of Winchester is as yet, predominantly untouched. Largely open rolling arable farm land, open chalk downlands, stretches of deciduous woodland and panoramic views, Crab Wood, Farley Mount Country Park. South Winchester Golf Course, Yew Hill Butterfly Reserve, the Clarendon Way long-distance walking trail, a network of footpaths, bridleways, cycling routes, with the prevailing south westerly winds bringing good air quality. Similar in character and geology to the South Downs National Park, yet unprotected and susceptible to development.

2.3 The quadrant of the land to the south west of the city of Winchester needs added protection against development for the well-being of current and future generations. A Green Belt is the most effective legislation available.

## **3. Why a Green Belt in the SW Quadrant?**

3.1 A green belt is intended to prevent urban sprawl into undeveloped countryside. The situation in the SW quadrant closely matches this definition. The Winchester Village development and the unsuccessful Pitt Vale application sprawled south from Winchester into green landscapes, Chandlers Ford and Romsey encroach upon Hursley, whilst Compton Shawford and Otterbourne resist pressure from Eastleigh borough, itself currently without a Local Plan. The OBPC has consistently resisted suggestions from developers wanting to build dwellings on the open field, which is listed as an Asset of Community Value. The current SHELAA document gives visual indication of just how little green space would be left in the SW quadrant, were all who had listed possible sites been given permission to build. Winchester would be surrounded by housing; unique and valuable open green space gone forever.

3.2 Maintaining settlements as distinct and separate places is equally a part of a green belt purpose. Again, in the SW quadrant, the fear is that the character of settlements as distinct as Pitt, Hursley, Oliver's Battery, and Compton be seen as one vast conurbation stretching up from Southampton, via Eastleigh, Chandlers Ford and Romsey to Winchester, all west of the M3.

3.3 A green belt preserves the setting and special character of historic towns. The ancient, beautiful and historic city of Winchester deserves better than to be engulfed by housing developments. Strategic vision for the future of Winchester has never been more necessary. A green belt has to be part of that vision. Covid-19 has changed all our lives, changed the future for planners, workers and residents alike. Working from home rather than in offices in town centres, the decline of the High Street, the realisation that green spaces have value, all these issues demand that future strategic development takes a more wide ranging vision than the idea that just building more houses around Winchester is the answer.

3.4 A green belt drives the process of urban regeneration within its boundaries. There can exist a focus on brownfield sites and their development, together with a post-Covid understanding of possibilities for inner city development. The future of sites like the Sir John Moore Barracks, the Bushfield Camp site, the former Leisure Centre site, as well as Saxongate and the Station Approach, can powerfully protect the countryside from encroachment, whilst creating exciting, vibrant places to live and work within the centre of the city of Winchester.

3.5 A green belt helps moderate climate change. Given that Winchester City Council's Cabinet has formally adopted a Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, subsequent to its declaration of a Climate Emergency in June 2019, it follows that establishing the SW quadrant section of a green Belt for Winchester needs to be at the forefront of the Local Plan Review. WCC's aim is to reduce the carbon emissions that are cause climate change and to support environmental improvements in the district. The focus is on the biggest sources of carbon emissions – transport, property and energy, all to the fore with establishing development on open green space. Green belt land, open and undeveloped, can manage water to prevent flooding, reduce carbon dioxide levels through woodlands and vegetation, improve air quality and maintain and develop biodiversity.

3.6 Finally, a green belt can provide continuing space for recreation and well-being, as well as for growing food or timber. The area to the south west of Winchester, west of the M3, provides so many opportunities for leisure activities, recreation, tourism well-being and positive mental health. Its close proximity to the city of Winchester itself allows easy access. Residents and visitors come from all around to visit the Oliver's Battery Recreation Ground, and to walk, run or ride on the open field which is listed as an Asset of Community Value and beyond. Skylarks nest unhindered, peregrine falcon and red kites hover in the skies, butterflies roam about and beyond the Yew Hill Butterfly Reserve. Rare native orchids are flourishing. Children and families fly kites and fitness groups hold open air classes. The South West Quadrant of land has networks of footpaths, byways, panoramic views of open country and long distance walking trails. Cycle runs and walks are promoted through the OBPC website. Port Lane, from OB down to Hursley, is used daily for running and cycling. During lockdown, this SW area was recognised by so many people as open green space where one might exercise the body, mind and spirit.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

4.1 Strategic Local Plan Review requires careful, yet dynamic balance. The inclusion of open green space in the mix, a recognition of the notion of Natural Capital and a sympathetic understanding of just how much people need connection with 'the countryside next door', need to be carefully considered alongside further housing development. In the opinion of OBPC, this applies particularly to the SW Quadrant of land surrounding the city of Winchester.

4.2 *"The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence."* (NPPF 2019, para 133.) The time has come to recognise the application of this principle in relation to a Green Belt for South Hampshire, which would initially include the south west quadrant of land around the city of Winchester, namely, Oliver's Battery, parts of Compton and Shawford west of the M3 motorway, South Winchester Golf Club and land further south to the east of A3090 (Romsey Road) to the village of Hursley.

#### **5.0 Proposal**

That this submission be approved and sent to WCC Strategic Planning.

Oliver's Battery Parish Council

August 2020.