**Further thoughts on Section 4.9 Green Belt**

Weakening Green Belt protections is a short-sighted and ineffective response to the housing crisis. Building on Green Belt land primarily benefits developers, delivering high-value homes rather than the affordable housing people need. It destroys vital agricultural land, biodiversity, and carbon sinks while encouraging car dependency and urban sprawl.

Instead, we need creative, sustainable solutions: regenerating brownfield sites, building higher-density housing in towns, and maximizing existing infrastructure. Well-designed apartments and mixed-use developments can provide affordable, high-quality homes for younger people and accessible options for older generations, creating vibrant, walkable communities.

The Green Belt is essential for environmental resilience, food production, climate action, and public well-being as well as protecting the identity of our individual communities. Protecting it is not about resisting change—it is about advocating smarter, greener urban planning for future generations. A representation is attached developing these arguments further.

Further points about the methodology used:

The approach set out in the Plan is uncertain and the recent introduction of Grey Belt makes it even less clear, with Government requiring Local Authorities to undertake a Green Belt review. WDC/SDC have completed Phase 1 of a (3 phase) Green Belt review. This shows that the Green Belt has been assessed to perform well or moderately well in around 90% of locations.

There is also a strong correlation between well performing Green Belt sites and the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) which identifies that many Green Belt sites are also sites that provide the most productive and versatile agricultural land. The NPPF advises Councils to avoid development on such sites, and this hasn’t materially changed in the latest NPPF. However, the HELAA – B methodology only gives a 6% weighing to Green Belt as a factor and even less to agricultural value. Building on well performing Green Belt locations should be regarded as a Constraint to housing development, not just one small factor (6% weighting) in the overall HELAA-B assessment and this is a fundamental flaw in the methodology.

The call to weaken Green Belt protection and develop agricultural land for housing is driven by a need to respond to the “housing crisis,” yet this term is poorly defined. Is it a crisis of affordability, a shortage of social housing, or an issue of inefficient land use? Without clarity, the proposed solution of releasing Green Belt land becomes a convenient but lazy option that fails to address underlying issues. The Green Belt provides (5) functions that can generally be summarized as protecting the identity of smaller communities from the urban sprawl of larger ones. Building on protected land will not of itself solve housing shortages, and worse, it will undermine vital environmental, social, and economic principles. Instead, we need creative, sustainable, and urban-centred solutions that protect the Green Belt while delivering homes where they are truly needed.  The attack on the Green Belt diverts attention from what we really need to address the housing crisis – better, more affordable urban living – by saying it’s easier to “build out”, on the fringes, urbanising our agricultural heritage through conventional, bland, unconnected housing estates, reliant on cars, rather than to “build up” and modernise our urban heritage, maximising use of existing infrastructure and public transport.

First, development on Green Belt land is rarely focused on affordable housing. Market pressures incentivize developers to prioritize high-value homes over the genuinely affordable properties young people and key workers need. Executive houses on greenfield sites benefit profit margins, not social housing needs. Meanwhile, brownfield sites and underused urban land remain overlooked. A robust, sustainable housing strategy should prioritize these spaces, regenerating towns and cities while reducing urban sprawl and car dependency.

Urban areas already contain significant opportunities for sustainable, higher-density housing. Building up—rather than out—allows towns to deliver compact, affordable homes for younger buyers and accessible, single-level living for older residents. Well-designed apartment blocks and higher-rise buildings can meet diverse housing needs without encroaching on valuable green spaces. Thoughtful urban planning should focus on mixed-use developments, blending housing, retail, and leisure facilities to create vibrant, walkable communities where people can live, work, and play.

High-quality, higher-density living not only preserves the countryside but also maximizes existing infrastructure—transport networks, schools, and healthcare. Most people would prefer to live within easy reach of amenities rather than on the urban fringe, where access to services is limited, and car dependency increases. Bold, imaginative urban plans that promote sustainable design, energy efficiency, and communal green spaces are key to building vibrant, resilient towns.

Finally, protecting good quality agricultural land is not only about sustainable food production, it is also about safeguarding vital ecological services. It preserves agricultural land, mitigates flood risks, and supports biodiversity. Green spaces also contribute to physical and mental well-being, offering recreational areas and acting as carbon sinks to combat climate change.  The Green Belt adds an additional value layer on top of all of this by protecting the land that is most valuable in protecting communities from the loss of identity that results from unregulated urban sprawl.

Weakening Green Belt protections is a short-sighted approach to housing policy. We must reject this false solution and advocate for a truly sustainable vision: creative urban renewal that prioritizes affordability, environmental stewardship, and community resilience. Protecting the Green Belt is not about resisting change—it is about demanding smarter, greener choices for future generations.