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Authority: City of York Council

Type of consultation: Policy consultation

Full details of application/consultation: Proposed Modifications to Green Belt Policies - Huntington Parish Neighbourhood Plan

At land at: N/A

Type of response: Comment

Date of Submission: 6th January 2021

All responses or queries relating to this submission should be directed to the Secretary for the Trustees at the contact details shown above on this frontispiece.

All CPRE North Yorkshire comments are prepared by the charity using professional planners whose research and recommendations form the basis of this response in line with national CPRE policies.

External planning consultant used in this response:



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Comment

CPRE North Yorkshire ('CPRENY') welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed modifications to the Huntington Parish Neighbourhood Plan. CPRENY has read and reviewed the proposed amendments to the Neighbourhood Plan document and in principle have no objection. Equally, the principle of Neighbourhood Planning is supported by CPRE both nationally and locally.

Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and its updates in 2018 and 2019. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.

The Huntington Neighbourhood Plan ('HNP') was subject to independent examination and the Examiner issued his final report in February 2020 stating that subject to a series of modifications the HNP met all the necessary legal requirements and could proceed to referendum. However, following the receipt of the examiner's report, the Council received the outcome of a High Court Judgement (Wedgewood Vs City of York [2020] EWHC 780 (Admin)) pertaining to the approach to decision-making in relation to York's Green Belt in advance of the adoption of the emerging York Local Plan. The Council also received a challenge to Green Belt policy in the HNP through the examination process. As such, the Council consider that reflecting the outcome of the judgement would satisfy the challenge to policy and enable the HNP to meet the Basic Conditions Test required by the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations and have sought legal advice to this extent to inform the proposed modifications.

CPRE, both locally and nationally, are ardent supporters of Green Belt, having been responsible for the creation of Green Belts in 1938 and the charity continue to work passionately to support these valuable slices of the 'countryside next door'.

Research by the Government (in 1993) and the University of Sheffield (in 2009) have found it to have consistently been effective in protecting a largely open landscape, free of development around our largest, and some of our most historic, towns and cities, including the City of York which has over 73,000Ha of Green Belt land.

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Linked to this, the local extent of the designation should not be reviewed every time a local plan is reviewed. There are stricter controls over new development, particularly housing, within Green Belts than within most of the countryside.

The climate and ecological emergencies put increased pressure on how we use land and addressing them is the overarching priority. They will make the countryside around towns more valuable than ever. International comparisons suggest that Green Belt policy is vital to prevent urban sprawl and the loss of wildlife habitat and productive farmland, some of the most pressing land use challenges facing the world today.

Intensive farming practices in recent years have also put major pressure on natural systems and have contributed to pollution and significant losses in both habitats and species abundance. Increased centralisation of ownership in the farming industry also raises questions about whether agricultural land will be managed more sensitively in future than it has been in recent years. Land around large towns and cities is particularly vulnerable to degradation, uncontrolled development and pressures for carbon-intensive forms of transport and other infrastructure. The Natural Capital Committee has called for increased wetland and woodland cover in the countryside around towns, in order to play a still more significant role as a carbon sink and as a refuge from increased temperatures.

The countryside around towns also has a particular role to play in encouraging healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. Green Belts provide a breath of fresh air for at least 30 million people who live in urban areas surrounded by the Green Belts. The particularly strong planning controls provided by Green Belt policy provide a clear visual distinction between town and country on the edge of England's largest and most historic cities, and contribute to a good quality of life within them. Just being able to see an open green landscape is in itself a health benefit. There are also valuable assets for both formal and informal recreation, and 2016 CPRE research showed that Green Belts have particularly high concentrations of public footpaths and country parks, compared to the countryside as a whole.

CPRENY, therefore, support the retention of the Green Belt surrounding York as identified by the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Spatial Strategy as promoted by the Local Plan and support the proposed modifications required to meet the Basic conditions Test as set out in relation to Part 1 of the consultation document.

Part 2 of the consultation draft deals with the Proposed Modifications to the Huntington Neighbourhood Plan Submission Version and reflects the position of the High Court Judgment which CPRENY considers to be the most appropriate course of action, therefore has no objection.

CPRENY would wish to be kept informed of the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan.