

BENP Examiner Questions on Housing site allocation sizes and Rural Buffers

Please clarify the following:

- ***How capacity for the sites was calculated on the basis that they all appear to have the potential to accommodate more than the number of dwellings indicated.***
- ***Why they are annotated differently on Fig 7***

Part A)

Two of the proposed sites (A and B) do indeed have capacity for more than 9 dwellings – the third (D) only has capacity for two.

Community approval (identified through consultation) was only achievable for small-scale residential development (following the definition inferred with the NPPF Glossary – i.e. major sites are 10 or more dwellings on 0.5 Ha or more).

Whereas sites A and B were put forward by promoters with extensive red line areas we asked all short-listed site promoters to confirm that they would accept a limit of 9 dwellings on the sites – which was confirmed. Therefore sites A and B were selected for small scale development up to 9 dwellings each within the red line areas put forward – i.e. it was intended that only part of the sites would be developed. Appendix J provides development briefs for each site, and as is shown on Figure 7, both sites A and B include large areas of proposed open space. In the case of Site A a 'village gateway garden' is proposed, and has been agreed in principle with the site promoter, whilst Site B includes land set aside for a football pitch, changing rooms and small car park. Both sites' net developable areas are also hindered by the presence of services and utilities running under the sites – and indeed easement corridors are shown for Site B.

Thus, while only 9 dwellings within the red line areas of both sites A and B may, on the face of it, seem an inefficient use of land, in reality it is expected that only part of these sites would be developed for 9 dwellings.

Part B)

It is accepted and recognised that the red line areas of Sites A and B are incorrectly stated as both being 1 Ha at Figure 8 – this should actually read 0.5 Ha – as the maximum net developable area for residential development – in accordance with the NPPF definition of minor or small-scale development.

Policy3: Rural Buffers:

Question

It is not clear why the proposed "buffer" areas were selected, why some areas were included and others excluded and what the "buffer" is intended to achieve in policy terms. Please can you clarify the selection process undertaken, how and why each area was finally selected and the intention of the policy when considering the areas selected.

Selection Process

In consultations that we had with the local community from the very beginning, the residents consistently suggested that Blunsdon should be maintained as a village and not 'swallowed up' by the growing conurbation of Swindon. This was supported by the Policies initially of the previous Local Plan which set rural buffers to protect the 'other villages' around the urban core, and subsequently the Adopted SBCLP2026 – which requires the individual character and identity of villages such as Blunsdon to be protected. When the urban strategic development of Kingsdown was introduced, Policy NC5f created a non-coalescence area ('rural buffer') between that development and the Settlement Boundary of the Village to avoid coalescence; however this didn't foresee the further development that has happened in Blunsdon.

As a result of these factors the BENP Steering Group considered that the settlement boundary and the outline of the conservation areas were the starting point of the process that was used to decide what

further protection the Village needed to remain distinct. Other physical constraints to development were examined and it was agreed that the scheduled ancient monument, Castle Hill, and the physical shape of the surrounding geographical setting of the escarpment would form a 'natural' protection of valued views and rural landscape that were highlighted in the LVSA. Also taken into consideration were the permitted housing sites, although initially some fell within those protection areas. Threats were also taken into consideration and with the progressive shortfall in housing numbers being built in the Borough and the development of the SHLAA and later the SHELAA it was decided to allocate areas of separation, or rural buffers, further to support the criteria set out in the SBCLP 2026 Policies to prevent coalescence with urban sprawl.

So initially the contours of the escarpment, allied to the settlement boundary and conservation areas was used along with field boundaries associated with local ownership. This provided a space or buffer around the village envelope.

Area 1 was allocated as an extension to the Kingsdown non-coalescence area, which was initially sufficient when associated with protection provided by settlement boundary policies. Subsequently as the settlement boundary along Broadbush (B4019) was breached through pressures on housing land supply, there was now nothing to prevent the coalescence of potential urban developments along that corridor and the south eastern end of the Village being absorbed.

Area 2 was the main tool to fulfil the Visions of both the SBCLP2026 and the BENP to protect the character and identity of Blunsdon and for the land between the village and any urban development to remain part of the countryside. To the south east of area 2 is an area to ensure non-coalescence with the Kingsdown development, and although current consented development is recognised, the pressure of further development applications along that corridor proves key to its inclusion. The Castle Hill scheduled monument and the escarpment contours, along with recognised special views from the escarpment provided the indication that the areas to the east and north following the land form should be included. The area to the North West again follows the landscape and protects the village setting from the further development of the Tadpole Garden Village strategic urban allocation. It also provides a buffer between a large area of land identified in the SHELAA, and offered in the SBC Local Plan Review 2019 Issues and Options consultation, as an option for development, along the eastern side of the A419.

Area 3 is within the Lower Blunsdon Conservation Area and will ensure a valuable piece of landscape is protected.

The Policy allocating rural buffers is defined in a sensitive and appropriate way taking into account:

- Topographical features
- Visual coalescence
- The setting of the Village in the Countryside
- Defensible boundaries

The Village was always defined by the surrounding farms and their land and as was stated in the LVSA (Appendix I) 'the balance between built form and the more natural environment, which characterises the local landscape is assessed as being of medium sensitivity to appropriately-located small scale development, but high sensitivity to large scale development, especially any which substantially extends or lies outside the existing settlement boundary'.

BENP Steering Group – March 2020.