

**Proposed Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan Examination  
Council's submission and Reporter's Conclusions and Recommendations on**

**ISS104 Green Belt - Helensburgh and Lomond**

<b>Development plan reference:</b>	<b>D413 - Green Belt, General S106 - Rhu/Shandon, Greenbelt S104 - Blackhill, Helensburgh Greenbelt</b>	<b>Reporter: David Russell</b>
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*The Council's submission to the Reporters starts on page 117 of the report  
It is in four parts,*

- 1. Summary of planning authority's representations,*
- 2. Modifications sought by those making representations,*
- 3. Summary of Planners responses with reasons*
- 4. Conclusions*

*It is followed by the Reporter's Conclusions and Recommendation*

**Body or person(s) submitting a representation raising the issue (including reference number):**

Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (01766)  
Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167)  
Helensburgh Study Group (00166)  
Helensburgh Community Council (00135)  
Brian Cook (00701)  
Jean Cook (01966)  
James Duncan (01978)  
Linda Duncan (01979)  
James S Johnstone (02009)  
Pat Pollok-Morris (00276)  
Rhu & Shandon Community Council (01260)  
David B Price (02063)  
Fiona Baker (01895)  
Jack Rudram (02117)  
David & Janice Cowan (00287)  
A Brian Aitken (01942)

**Provision of the development plan to which the issue relates:**

Chapter 2 The Settlement and Spatial Strategy

**1. Planning authority's summary of the representation(s):**

S104 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167) –

Before the creation of the small industry site at the top of Sinclair Street (subsequently the Argyll and Bute Council Depot) the Green Belt included the full length of the Blackhill Plantation north of Crawford Drive and Abercromby Crescent and the Blackhill Mire beyond it. When the industry site was taken out of the Green Belt a small section of the

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Blackhill Plantation immediately adjacent to the site was inexplicably also taken out of the Green Belt and included as settlement. During the process of the current local plan the Reporters agreed with HGBG representations that the small area should be re-designated as Green Belt but again for some inexplicable reason this recommendation was not taken up. We therefore object to this small area being designated as settlement and seek its designation as Green Belt.

S106 - Rhu & Shandon Community Council (01260), S106 – Jack Rudram (02117), S106 -James Duncan (01978) S106 and D413 - Helensburgh Community Council (00135), S106- Pat Pollok-Morris (00276), S106 - Linda Duncan (01979), S106 - Jean Cook (01966), S106 and D413 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167), S106 and D413 - Fiona Baker (01895), D413 - Helensburgh Study Group (00166), D413 – A Brian Aitken (01942)

The Green Belt should remain as in the current Local Plan and not shrunk as indicated in the Proposed Local Development Pan. In addition the area lying between the current green belt boundary and the National Park boundary should be included in an enlarged green belt. The main reasons given are:

1. Greenbelt is felt to be a more protective zone than Countryside. Whilst not under immediate pressure of development from, eg; urban sprawl or expansion, these areas do nevertheless form a protective rural zone around the settlements which should be maintained.
2. The arguments put forward in the Ironside-Farrar Report are considered weak and appear to be based on a starting presumption that less Green Belt is a good thing or that Countryside provides better protection.
3. Green Belt is understood to be a statutory concept and widely recognised (see for example Scottish Planning Policy Feb 2010, ISN17411203, para 159-164), whereas Countryside appears to be a zone defined by Argyll & Bute Council. In this regard Green Belt would appear to have a stronger and more supportive provenance.
4. Looking at the definitions within the Glossary of the Written Statement (pages 82 & 84) Green Belt is seen to be more protective in many ways against inappropriate developments than Countryside. This is confirmed in proposed policy LDP DM1 (G) which refers to control of development in the Green Belt, when compared with LDP DM1 (E) which refers to control of development in the Countryside zone.
5. Paragraph 159 of Scottish Planning Policy Feb 2010 refers to the purposes of Green Belt one of which is to protect and enhance the quality, character, landscape setting and identity of towns etc and another is to protect and give access to open space around towns and villages. The area also contains footpaths, including the new 50 km. "Three Lochs Way", and other access routes of local importance which relate to the third purpose of Green Belts given in SPP Paragraph 159: "access to open space within and around towns". It also has green tourism importance.

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6. Extending the Green Belt zone would provide enhanced protection for Helensburgh and Rhu by including Tom na h'Airidh which, to quote Ironside Farrar page 16, "...forms the broader setting to the town (of Helensburgh) and a backdrop of open moorland and forestry." In the case of Rhu, Ironside Farrar on page 18 refers to "...the dark conifer plantations of Highlandman's Wood and the flanks of Tom na h-Airidh give it its wider landscape setting."
7. Thus Ironside Farrar themselves, who have suggested downgrading Highlandman's Wood (area B and C) from Green Belt to Countryside appear confused as to the role these areas play in landscape setting. The fact that it is currently a pine forest (as referred to by Ironside-Farrar) is irrelevant as these can be cropped leaving open hillside possibly vulnerable if zoned as Countryside. The objectors also believe Green Belt provides a better level of protection against, for example, development such as wind farms.
8. The proposed reduction would mean that the protection to the setting of Rhu and Shandon would be reduced to a narrow strip of Green Belt to the west of the West Highland Railway which would do little to provide and protect the overall setting and character of the villages. In addition the inner boundary is not as strong in places as it might be, eg; by St Andrews School, and hence is vulnerable to development pressures. Retention of the area to the north and east of the railway provides a broad distinctive and defensible Green Belt setting, whose existing boundaries are considered to provide a clear and unequivocal boundary to the Greenbelt, as suggested by paragraph 162 of Scottish Planning Policy Feb 2010.
9. Highlandman's Wood, and adjacent areas, are contained in a Local Nature Conservation Site. It would appear logical that the Green Belt zoning should apply to the whole of this LNCS which stretches from around Aldownick Glen in the west to the National Park boundary in the north, and the east edge of Highlandman's Wood. S106 - Brian Cook (00701) - Expresses concern about the downgrading of green belt to Countryside. Greenbelt provides better protection than Countryside and I don't want to see more developments in the area inland from our property. We have noticed a considerable rise in the water table over recent years due, we think, to the failure to keep culverts free from debris. Any development on what is currently green belt would exacerbate the flooding problems we currently experience through increased run off. Highlandman's Wood, is a valued recreational area and should be maintained as greenbelt for this reason. It is, also a Local Nature Conservation Site.

S106 - James S Johnstone (02009) –

I wish to express concern over the effect this change will have on residents at Stuckenduff (of which I am one). Vehicle access is by unadopted public road which is currently in poor state of repair due to its regular use by heavy commercial vehicles. In order to maintain

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normal car access to my home I have to repair the damage caused by these commercial vehicles at my own expense. My concern is that the increased commercial activity resulting from this change will render the road impassable to ordinary cars hence removing access for residents, visitors, healthcare professionals, etc.

D413 – David & Janice Cowan (00287) –

The objectors contend that there is no guidance or commitment within the plan on the means by which the authority will consult directly with the involved local residents on matters such as the change of use of Greenbelt land to that for development purposes.

D413 - Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (01766) –

The Objector contends that the definition of Greenbelt could be sharper/clearer/more meaningful.

D413 - David B Price (02063) –

The Objector contends that the former policies area around Camis Eskan House to the South and East are treated as a "NO MAN'S LAND". Limited sympathetic rural based use on the edge of the Green Belt should be allowed.

**2. Modifications sought by those submitting representations (p119)**

S104 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167) –

The small section of the Blackhill Plantation adjacent to the Argyll & Bute Council Depot at the top of Sinclair Street, Helensburgh currently shown as settlement is designated as Green Belt.

D413 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167) –

The Objector requests that the Green Belt, Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) and Open Space Protection Area designations from the town boundaries of Helensburgh and Rhu up to the boundary of the National Park, starting in the west at the Aldownick Glen (which is currently LNCS) to the A818 road from Helensburgh to Loch Lomond Park Boundary in the east be extended. The Objector further requests that the north area of Highlandman's Wood (marked HWOI by the Ironside Farrar, Green Belt Landscape Study) should be retained as Green Belt as part of the above rationalisation of the Green Belt and not downgraded to Countryside Around Settlement (CAS)

D413 - Helensburgh Study Group (00166), D413 - Helensburgh Community Council (00135) –

The Objector requests that the Greenbelt and Local Nature Conservation Site status be extended to the land north of Rhu and Helensburgh up to the boundary of the National Park, from Aldownick Glen in the west to the main road from Helensburgh to Loch Lomond in the east.

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D413 - Fiona Baker (01895) D413 - A Brian Aitken (01942) –

The Objectors requests that the greenbelt is retained as is. No development on greenbelt.  
No re-zoning as countryside, retain as greenbelt.

S106 - Helensburgh Community Council (00135) - None stated.

S106 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167) S106 - Linda Duncan (01979), S106 - James S  
Johnstone (02009), S106 - Pat Pollok-Morris (00276), S106 - Brian Cook (00701), S106 -  
Fiona Baker (01895), S106 - James Duncan (01978) –  
These areas should retain the classification of Greenbelt.

S106 - Rhu & Shandon Community Council (01260), S106 – Jack Rudram (02117) –

The proposal to downgrade the two areas from Green Belt to Countryside should be  
reversed and both retained as Green Belt. The broader area stretching from west of  
Aldownick Glen (including the totality of the Local Nature Conservation Site) towards the  
A818 in the east, and from the outer Green Belt boundary of Rhu and Helensburgh in the  
south, up to the National Park Boundary in the north should be re-zoned in its entirety  
from Countryside to Green Belt.

D413 – David & Janice Cowan (00287) –

A clear commitment statement within the final Local Development Plan.

D413 - Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (01766) –

The objector requests that all wording after "Shandon" should be deleted and replaced  
with "The greenbelt designation of these named areas will: - direct planned growth to the  
most appropriate locations and support regeneration of the settlements, - protect and  
enhance the quality, character, landscape setting and identity of the settlements and -  
protect and give access to open space within and around the settlements. The cumulative  
erosion of a green belt's integrity through the granting of individual planning permissions  
will be avoided. The green belts can provide a range of opportunities for outdoor  
recreation, education and tourism in addition to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, the  
landscape and the historic environment."

D413 - David B Price (02063) –

The objector requests that limited sympathetic rural based use on the edge of the Green  
Belt should be allowed.

**3. Summary of responses (including reasons) by planning authority(p120)**

S104 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167) –

With regard to the green belt in the vicinity of the Blackhill Depot site, the Council does not  
agree with the objectors statement "During the process of the current local plan the  
Reporters agreed with HGBG representations that the small area should be re-designated as  
Green Belt". The Reporters recommendation with regard to this issue was "we support the

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modification to recognise the implemented use of the objection site" (see production PD134 chapter 16.1.19), and this is what is included in the Adopted Local Plan.

S106 - Rhu & Shandon Community Council (01260), S106 – Jack Rudram (02117), S106 - James Duncan (01978) S106 and D413 - Helensburgh Community Council (00135), S106 - Pat Pollok-Morris (00276), S106 - Linda Duncan (01979), S106 - Jean Cook (01966), S106 and D413 - Helensburgh Green Belt Group (00167), S106 and D413 - Fiona Baker (01895), D413 - Helensburgh Study Group (00166), D413 – A Brian Aitken (01942) –

The Council does not agree with the assessment made by the objectors in terms of Green Belt boundaries as defined in the Proposed Local Development Plan (See Production PD133). These have been informed by the Argyll and Bute Green Belt Landscape Capacity Study (Core Doc. Ref. CD036) commissioned by ABC Council from landscape architects Ironside Farrar in 2010. The study was commissioned as a result of a commitment made by the Council during the public local inquiry for the Argyll and Bute Local Plan, in response to objections raised in relation to a number of green belt issues. When commissioning the study the consultants were required to have regard to the key objectives of green belt policy as set out in Scottish Planning Policy (Core Document ref CD007 para 159). To:

- direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration,
- protect and enhance the quality, character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities, and
- protect and give access to open space within and around towns and cities.

In addition the commission for the study specifically asked that consideration be given to:

- Should the outer boundary of the green belt be extended eastwards to the boundary with the National Park, or does the current boundary appropriately reflect topography and landscape?
- The Landscape Assessment should evaluate the contribution the identified green belt makes to the character, landscape setting and identity of the settlements of Helensburgh, Cardross, Rhu and Shandon. The Landscape Assessment should identify any areas of the green belt which do not contribute to the character, landscape setting and identity of these settlements or if necessary identify any additional areas which may be required to secure these objectives.
- The green belt boundary should be capable of being identified on site with regard to obvious landscape features, the landscape assessment should assess the appropriateness of the current boundaries and if necessary recommend alterations to the boundary where stronger boundary features are required.

The green belt landscape capacity study adopts a clear and consistent methodology to assess the study area, involving its subdivision in to smaller areas relating to the landscape character, topography and setting of settlements within the green belt. Detailed assessments are provided for each of these areas together with an assessment of the contribution which they make to green belt landscape objectives of SPP as well as recommended changes are summarised in table 6.1 of the Landscape Capacity Study (core document ref CD036).

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The Landscape Capacity Study determined that the majority of the green belt is of a high landscape value. In particular the main areas of the green belt between the border with West Dunbartonshire and Rhu meet the principal SPP objectives by providing a setting for the principal settlements, preventing coalescence and providing, to various degrees, a gateway to these settlements. In some cases the study made recommendations for changes or improvement to the green belt boundary. Those recommendations for changes which have been taken forward in the Proposed Local Development Plan include those which address the SPP objectives in the following ways:

- Protecting the approach to Helensburgh from the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the setting of Helensburgh when viewed from across the Gare Loch by incorporating new areas between the A818 and the National Park Boundary.
- Improving the consistency and robustness of the green belt by rationalising its coverage to areas in which it can clearly meet core SPP development control objectives. In all cases these areas have been reassigned to other protective landscape designations more suited to their character and location. This has included
  - exclusion of hilltop areas above Helensburgh that are of clear upland character (moorland or forestry), that are relatively remote from the settlements and unlikely to be developed, and re-designation as Very Sensitive Countryside or Countryside;
  - exclusion of steeply sloped areas north of the West Highland railway line above Shandon and re-designation as Sensitive Countryside.

While the landscape study had also recommended changes to the inner boundary particularly where these related to areas which had been developed for formal sports and recreation purposes these are retained in the green belt as proposed in the Local Development Plan, together with their designation as Open Space Protection Areas as appropriate. Those changes which have been made to the inner boundary of the green belt have been limited to those areas which have been identified to meet the need for additional housing land release in order to accommodate the housing requirements identified in the Housing Need and Demand Assessment as approved by the Scottish Government's Centre for Housing Market Analysis. The selection of which has been informed by the green belt landscape study.

S106 - Brian Cook (00701); S106 - James S Johnstone (02009) –

Where the Proposed Local Development Plan has removed areas from the outer edges of the green belt in accord with the recommendations of the landscape study these have been placed in either Countryside or Very Sensitive Countryside designations. In terms of the plans settlement strategy these areas do not have a general capacity to accommodate development, with development in sensitive countryside being limited to small scale infill rounding off and redevelopment in locations not adjacent to defined settlement boundaries. Within Very Sensitive Countryside development opportunities are even more limited to, essentially those with a locational or operational need. It is therefore not envisaged that such redesignation would give rise to the flooding and traffic problems anticipated by the objectors.

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D413 – David & Janice Cowan (00287) –

Outwith the Strategic Development Plan areas, the Local Development Plan is the established mechanism for review of Green belt boundaries. The Local Development Plan process, contains statutory requirements for public consultation, and includes a requirement for the annual publication of a Development Plan Scheme which sets out the program for plan preparation and identifies the opportunities which the public have to engage in the plan preparation process.

D413 - Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group (01766) –

This objection relates to the definition of green belt given in the glossary to the LDP. The glossary is not the appropriate place to reiterate green belt policy. Policy LDP DM 1(G) sets out policy for greenbelt and adopts an approach which is consistent with Scottish Planning Policy para 163 (see core document CD007).

D413 - David B Price (02063) –

There have been no changes made to the boundary of the green belt to the south and east of Camis Eskan House. The policies on applicable green belt uses are those which have been long established and are reflected in Scottish Planning Policy. This allows appropriate rural uses.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In view of all the above the Council recommends that no modification to the proposed LDPbe undertaken as a result of these objections made to the proposed LDP.

#### **Reporter's Conclusions (p123)**

1. I find that the independent review of the green belt which was commissioned by the council has provided a robust and consistent basis for the identification of the areas proposed for designation, as well as assisting in identifying the most appropriate sites to be released for housing development.
2. The recommendations of the review have been reflected in the proposed plan. This has included significant additions, for instance to ensure that land on both sides of the A818 to the north of Helensburgh is protected by green belt designation. Apart from the sites which have been specifically released for housing development, those areas removed from the green belt, including Highlandman's Wood and the land beyond the railway line north-east of Rhu, have been given different forms of protection which are more appropriate to their role and characteristics. It is not inappropriate that part of a local nature conservation site should lie within a green belt, while another part lies outwith it.
3. The exclusion from the green belt of the small area in the vicinity of the Blackhill Depot site reflects the current adopted local plan, and is in line with the recommendation made by the reporters at that time. They also suggested that this matter be addressed in the then forthcoming review of green belt boundaries. This review has now been undertaken. I note that it found that the

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transition from urban to green belt is less clear in this location north of Helensburgh, but made no specific recommendations for alterations to the boundary in the vicinity of the depot. In these circumstances, I consider that it would not be appropriate to amend the green belt boundary here.

4. I note that the policy on development within the green belt is set out in Policy LDP DM1, and it does provide for support to be given to certain, limited forms of development within the green belt. This would apply equally on land around Camus Eskan House. The policy which applies to areas designated as countryside separately applies a presumption against development which would extend an existing settlement.
5. I agree that it is not appropriate to incorporate policy statements within the glossary's definition of 'green belt'. However, it currently includes one and this element should be deleted from the definition. However the references in the glossary definition to the structure plan and to 'this local plan' are out of date and should also be removed.
6. Overall, however, I consider that the approach adopted by the council is appropriate and is consistent with that advocated in relation to green belts by Scottish Planning Policy.
7. The requirements for neighbours to be notified of any planning application submitted apply both within and outwith green belt areas. Effects on roads or on drainage would be a material consideration to be assessed by the planning authority in deciding whether to grant any planning application submitted, whether it lies within the green belt or the 'countryside' or the 'very sensitive countryside'.

### **Reporter's Recommendations (p134)**

Modify the plan's glossary definition of 'Green belt' to read: " a development management zone which comprises a substantial area of countryside peripheral to the settlements of Cardross, Helensburgh, Rhu and Shandon and which may be subject to considerable pressure for development."