

# Brown Not Green Chesham Ltd

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“Protecting the Green Belt around Chesham”



## GUIDANCE NOTES FOR RESIDENTS TO COMMENT UPON WHEN RESPONDING TO THE BUCKS SURVEY FOR THE EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

These Guidance Notes have been prepared to assist local people who often respond to such surveys with good intention but accidentally weaken their own objection by saying things like “*we just don’t want any more houses*” (which planners can — and do — ignore).

What actually carries weight in a Local Plan consultation is when residents challenge whether the **policy tests have been properly met**.

Here are **strong, planning-relevant points** local people can raise (but in their *own words* please!) when responding to Buckinghamshire Council about proposals affecting Chesham



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### 1. Brownfield Land Should Be Prioritised First

National planning policy requires previously developed (brownfield) land and urban capacity to be fully assessed **before** Green Belt release is considered.

Residents could ask:

- Has Buckinghamshire Council demonstrated that all viable brownfield land within Chesham town centre has been robustly assessed? - Why have some of the car parks and other brownfield sites promoted by groups such as Chesham Renaissance, not been included?
- Has development potential within existing urban areas been optimised?
- Why are Green Belt and agricultural sites being considered while town centre capacity appears under-utilised?

If this hasn’t been done properly, Green Belt release may not meet the required “**exceptional circumstances**” test.

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## 2. Loss of Agricultural Land & Food Security

Many of the sites around:

- Lye Green (NE Chesham)
- Land south of Lye Green Road (“Chesham East”)

are currently productive agricultural land of high grade or which are categorised as Best & Most Versatile (BMV) land. Surely this should be the last option if Green Belt has to be released for development.

Residents may wish to question:

- Whether the long-term loss of food-producing land has been properly considered
- Whether lower-value land or previously developed sites elsewhere in the county could be used instead
- Farmland is also vital for biodiversity. – It is unwise to forfeit this biodiversity on productive farmland where any development is unrealistic or problematic to be able to create biodiversity net gain on site as is now required.
- Agricultural land provides a habitat for wildlife and some of the proposed site support wildlife protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act.

Once farmland is built on, it cannot be reinstated. It is a scarce resource and national food security is therefore a material consideration.

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## 3. “Grey Belt” Classification Should Be Scrutinised

Some Chesham sites are now described as **provisional Grey Belt**. To be “Grey Belt” the land should either be “Previously Developed” (which hardly seems to apply to any of the proposed Green Belt sites)

or

it should demonstrably not be strongly contributing to any of three purposes identified by National Government Guidance in relation to Green Belt designation.

Namely;

- a) The land should be failing to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- b) The land should be failing to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another or with other settlements (such as Lye Green, Botley, Orchard Leigh etc)
- d) The land should be failing to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Residents could ask:

- What evidence supports this classification in respect of these three criteria?
- How consistently have Green Belt purposes been assessed across sites?

BNG commissioned an independent professional Landscape Survey in 2019 which identified several viewpoints that illustrated the extent of visibility of potential development within each of the parcels of the site at Lye Green, from adjoining area, including land within AONB (now National Landscape) as well as across other open countryside. – This illustrates that Lye Green in particular is meeting the requirement of Green Belt designation.

In addition, any Grey Belt sites need to be suitably located in sustainable locations (ie close to or a short walk to public transport) – Chesham topography involves steep hills which are hardly conducive to cycling or walking to these proposed areas of development.

If land is incorrectly categorised as Grey Belt, this may create an unjustified presumption in favour of development.

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## 4. Infrastructure Constraints

Development must be supported by infrastructure.

Residents may question whether the evidence base adequately addresses:

- Road congestion
- GP and NHS capacity
- School places
- Drainage / flood risk – Not the Councils Reg 18 Consultation in 2025 asserted that “*High Wycombe and Chesham are identified nationally as areas of significant surface water flood risk*” – Spatial Strategy Evidence
- Public transport capacity beyond the station itself – Chesham station is severely constrained to two trains per hour. Hardly “*well connected*”!

Is infrastructure planned **before** development — or assumed to follow it?

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## 5. Proximity to Chesham Station

Draft national policy places a presumption in favour of development near “well-connected” rail stations.

Residents may wish to ask:

- Whether this policy is being applied too broadly

- Whether walking distance assumptions (e.g. 1500m / 15–20 mins) reflect real-world accessibility given topography, road safety or route quality

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## **6. Five-Year Housing Land Supply**

It is acknowledged that Bucks (& Chesham) has difficulty meeting a 5 year housing supply. This is as much an indication of an unrealistic and flawed methodology (created by Central Government) of calculating housing needs as it is of the physical constraints (topography & infrastructure) prevailing locally.

The area is also subject to various development restraint policies such as Green Belt, National and Landscape (formerly AONB) and these policies should not be sacrificed for expediency to address an arbitrary and unrealistic assessment of housing need.

Residents could question:

- Whether this creates pressure to allocate Green Belt sites prematurely
- Whether alternative sites elsewhere in the county have been sufficiently explored before identifying land around Chesham
- Is the Council co-operating with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities over best use of strategic neighbouring sites (such as Bovingdon Airfield)?

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## **7. Impact on Town Character & Community Facilities**

Residents may comment on:

- Potential coalescence with surrounding settlements (Lye Green, Ashley Green, Botley)
- Loss of landscape setting and impact on the neighbouring National Landscape. (BNG commissioned an independent professional Landscape Survey in 2019 which identified several viewpoints that illustrated the extent of visibility of potential development within each of the parcels of the site at Lye Green, from adjoining area, including land within AONB (now National Landscape). – This also supports Point 3 and illustrates that Lye Green in particular is meeting the requirement of Green Belt designation.)
- Pressure on existing community facilities
- Lack of town-centre-led regeneration compared with edge-of-town expansion