

# Development in the Green Belt

June 2007

This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) outlines the purpose, importance and characteristics of the Green Belt and explains the limited development that is permitted in the Green Belt. This SPD supplements the policies of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan and will be used when assessing development proposals in the Green Belt for:

- Infill development
- Additions to existing dwellings
- Replacement of existing dwellings
- Changes of use

## Purpose of the Green Belt

The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent the uncontrolled spread of urban areas into open countryside. This is achieved by keeping land in the countryside permanently open or largely undeveloped. Planning applications for development in the Green Belt are subjected to rigorous scrutiny to make sure the aims of the Green Belt are upheld. The 'openness' of the Green Belt is its most important attribute. Openness can be harmed by (among other things) new built form, external storage, extensive hardstanding, car parking and boundary walls or fencing. Every application for development in the Green Belt is assessed against a number of criteria, with the most important test being the harm the development would have on openness. This SPD deals primarily with residential development issues in the Green Belt as this is the most frequently asked about type of development.

### **Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: 'Green Belts' identifies five purposes of the Green Belt:**

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

The fundamental aim of Green Belt Policy is to keep land permanently open.

## THE GREEN BELT IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The countryside is a valuable asset to the people of South Gloucestershire for the visual amenity it provides as well as the opportunities for both formal and informal recreation. The Green Belt in South Gloucestershire covers approximately 23,000 hectares and helps to prevent the encroachment of the northern and eastern fringes of the urban area of Bristol into the open countryside. The Green Belt contains a variety of land uses, including agriculture, grazing, recreation, housing and some business. The map opposite shows the general extent of the Green Belt in South Gloucestershire. The boundaries of the Green Belt will be subject to review in the future and so are likely to change in some areas over the coming years.





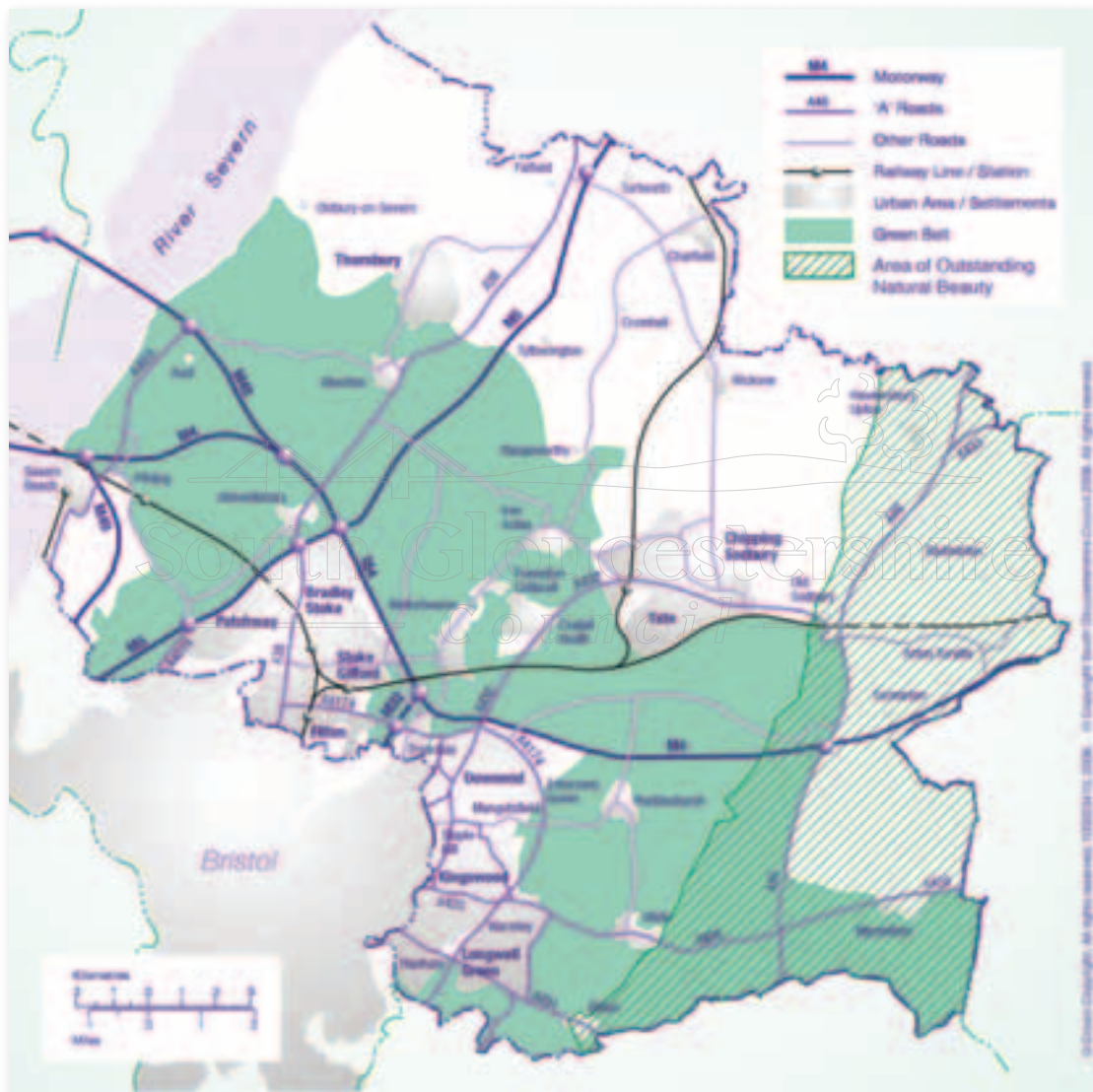
# Green Belt Policy

There are two key documents that control development in the South Gloucestershire Green Belt:

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 - Green Belts (PPG 2) - produced by the Government.
- The South Gloucestershire Local Plan (adopted January 2006) - produced by South Gloucestershire Council.

Development Control staff use both of these policy documents (among others) when assessing planning applications that fall within the Green Belt.

## The extent of the Green Belt in South Gloucestershire (subject to future review)



# South Gloucestershire Local Plan Policy

The Local Plan provides the specific policies that apply to development in South Gloucestershire. This document can be viewed online at the South Gloucestershire Council website - [www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy). Chapter Five of the Local Plan focuses on the Green Belt and describes the specific types of development that can be allowed.

**GB1 Within the Green Belt, as defined on the proposals map, permission will only be given for:**

**A. The construction of new buildings for:**

1. Agriculture and forestry;
2. Essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation and for other uses which preserve the openness of the green belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it;
3. Cemeteries;
4. Limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
5. Limited infilling within the boundaries of settlements as defined on the proposals map;

**B. The change of use of land or existing buildings where:**

1. It would not have a materially greater impact than the present authorised use on the openness of the Green belt and would not conflict with the purpose of including land in it;
2. The buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction; and
3. The form, bulk and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.

Any proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which would have an adverse impact on the visual amenity of the Green Belt will not be permitted.



# Development in the Green Belt

There is a general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Government guidance introduced the term 'inappropriate development' in PPG 2 to describe development that would harm the openness of the Green Belt. With the many pressures for development that exist today, it is important that Green Belt policies are restrictive in order to maintain the open character of the countryside and prevent unrestricted sprawl of urban areas.

Circular 11/05 (2005) on Green Belts states that apart from a few exceptions, the construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate development. Mitigating options such as landscaping are not considered to be enough to offset the harm caused by a development on the openness and character of the Green Belt. For example, if a row of trees is planted in front of a building to act as a screen, the visual impact of the building will be decreased but this does not offset the harm to the openness.

## DEVELOPMENT REQUIRING PLANNING PERMISSION

Government guidance and Local Plan Policy GB1 do however allow for certain limited development to take place in the Green Belt. These are mostly either developments considered to be essential, or that help to achieve the aims of the Green Belt. Circular 11/05 on Green Belts states that the Secretary of State 'expects all applications for development in the Green Belt to be subject to the most rigorous scrutiny'. The following section explains the types of acceptable developments in more detail and outlines how Policy GB1 is applied.

## LANDSCAPE AND DESIGN

Landscapes are very important to the openness and amenity of the Green Belt. All applications for development in the Green Belt will be required to demonstrate how they protect the openness and amenity of the Green Belt, through careful siting and the design of buildings and all external areas, landscape works and planting.

Further information can be found in the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment SPD, and paragraphs 3.8 and 3.15 of PPG 2 on the reuse of buildings and the protection of the visual amenities of the Green Belt.



## New Buildings

New buildings may only be constructed in the Green Belt if they are for the following purposes:

- Agriculture and forestry
- Essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation or cemeteries
- Limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings
- Limited residential infilling
- Limited affordable housing for identified local community needs (subject to thorough and comprehensive testing of alternatives sites and their impact in accord with PPS3, PPG13 and Local Plan policies).
- Park and Ride (subject to thorough and comprehensive testing of alternatives sites and their impact in accord with PPS3, PPG13 and Local Plan policies).

Developments that fall within the above list will also be required to comply with other related policies in the Local Plan before planning permission will be granted. The following sections explain what sort of development can or cannot normally be undertaken in the Green Belt.

### INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Infill development is development that is small in scale and which fits into an existing built up area in a defined settlement boundary, normally in-between existing buildings, in a linear formation. Buildings outside settlement boundaries are treated as being part of the open countryside and the relevant countryside policies apply. Settlement boundaries can be viewed on the Local Plan maps which are available on the Council's website at [www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy) or at all South Gloucestershire Libraries.

PPG 2 states that acceptable infilling is unlikely to be more than the filling of small gaps within built development, where it does not significantly impinge upon the openness of the Green Belt.

- Local Plan Policy GB1 allows for limited infilling within the boundaries of a settlement 'washed over' by the Green Belt (see table opposite).
- The criteria outlined in Policy H2 of the Housing chapter of the Local Plan must also be satisfied for limited infilling to be acceptable. This policy outlines the requirements for residential proposals in established settlements that are washed over by the Green Belt, such as site density, transportation effects and the impact of the proposal on the character of the settlement.
- Proposals will need to comply with Policy L5 of the Local Plan, which protects the character of open areas.



## Settlements 'Washed Over' By The Green Belt

- Almondsbury
- Alveston
- Aust
- Doynton
- Dyrham
- Easter Compton
- Hallen
- Hambrook
- Hinton
- Iron Acton
- Redwick
- Rudgeway
- Tockington
- Tytherington
- Westerleigh
- Wick
- Parts Of The Village Of Old Sodbury
- Parts Of The Village Of Oldbury-on-Severn

## Additions to Existing Dwellings

PPG 2 and Local Plan Policy GB1 allow additions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt provided they do not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. However it is important to note that the size of the addition will not be the only consideration when an application is being assessed - other tests relating to the appearance and impact of the proposal are also important considerations.

Additions may only be considered acceptable if the proposal:

- is not disproportionate;
- is of a size and design that complements the existing character of the property and the original building;
- does not harm the openness of the Green Belt.

### DISPROPORTIONATE TEST

Whether an addition is considered 'disproportionate' or not depends on the individual circumstances of the site, and what type of addition is proposed. The Council will assess this on a case-by-case basis.

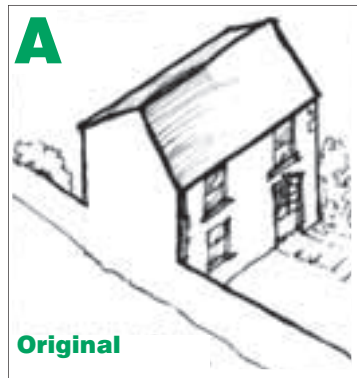
In assessing whether a proposal is disproportionate or not, account will be taken of the following:

1. The increase in volume of the original dwelling (i.e. excluding any extensions or alterations that have already taken place);
2. The appearance of the proposal - it should not be out of proportion with the scale and character of the original dwelling;
3. Existing extensions and outbuildings within the curtilage.

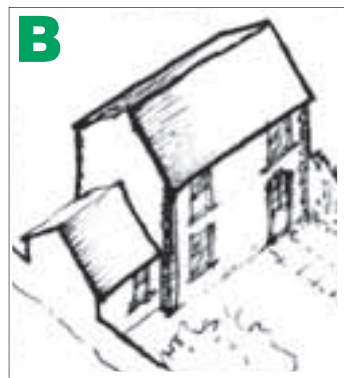
- As a general guide, an addition resulting in a volume increase less than 30% of the original dwelling would be likely to be acceptable.
- House extension additions that exceed 30% will be carefully assessed with particular regard to the second test in the box above - i.e. whether the proposal would appear out of scale and

*Continues on page 8*

The illustration shows how the disproportionate policy is applied to applications for house extensions in the South Gloucestershire Green Belt. It is important to note that the following diagrams are only advisory examples. All applications will be judged on an individual basis and on their own merits.



**July 1st 1948 or when built**  
**Original Dwelling size = 400m<sup>3</sup>**



**1st addition = 80m<sup>3</sup>**  
 20% increase in volume

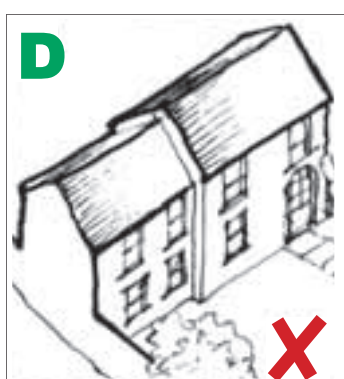
ACCEPTABLE ADDITION SIZE LIKELY TO BE APPROVED



**40m<sup>3</sup> additional volume is second floor extension**

**2nd addition = 40m<sup>3</sup>**  
 Total additions over original = 120m<sup>3</sup> 30% total increase in volume

ACCEPTABLE ADDITION SIZE LIKELY TO BE APPROVED SUBJECT TO DETAILED ASSESSMENT



**extra 120m<sup>3</sup>**

**Proposed 3rd addition = 120m<sup>3</sup>**

Total additions over original = 240m<sup>3</sup>  
 60% increase in volume

DISPRORTIONATE ADDITION LIKELY TO BE REFUSED



Continues from page 6

proportion. The larger a house becomes in excess of 30% of its original size, the less likely it is that new extension(s) will be considered acceptable.

- An addition resulting in a volume increase of 50% or more of the original dwelling would most likely be considered in excess of any reasonable definition of 'limited extension.' Such a proposal would normally therefore be viewed as a disproportionate addition, contrary to Policies GB1 and H4 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan.

## ORIGINAL DWELLING

The term 'original dwelling' refers to the volume that a dwelling was when the original planning permission for its construction was given, or for older homes the volume that the dwelling was on July 1st 1948 (when the Town Planning Act was introduced). Any additions that have occurred since the original dwelling date will be considered cumulatively and will count against the overall increase in volume of the dwelling when new additions are being assessed. This is because small reductions in openness, repeated many times, can have a cumulatively detrimental effect.

### How Character and Design is assessed

In considering the acceptability of a proposal the following criteria will be used to assess the impact:

#### Location and siting

- Impact on views, apparent height and visibility in the landscape.

#### Design and scale of the extension in relation to the existing buildings and size of plot

- Does the form, scale and mass integrate well with the style and character of the original dwelling?
- Is the extension subordinate to the main dwelling and appropriately proportioned?
- Does it use appropriate details and materials?

#### Are curtilages and boundaries well defined?

- What percentage of the plot is taken up by development (i.e. the buildings and hardstanding)? It is important to avoid a build-up of 'urban character' through ensuring the details and 'clutter' (washing lines, play equipment, refuse containers, parking areas, etc) are managed and contained. A detailed landscape scheme can help to ensure this.
- Does the scheme avoid harm to historic features and existing mature planting? New planting can help to integrate extensions.
- Is the boundary treatment appropriate to the rural setting? (eg natural stone walls, native hedges, mature trees). Does it clearly delineate and distinguish the residential curtilage from other adjoining uses (agriculture; horsiculture)

## Replacement of Existing Dwellings

The replacement of existing dwellings in the Green Belt is strictly controlled to safeguard openness. Replacement buildings will only be allowed if there is no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than that of the original building. Any replacement must be of a similar size and scale to the original dwelling. The form, bulk, and general design must also be in keeping with the surroundings.

Before permission will be given to replace a dwelling, the Council will need to be satisfied that the dwelling is beyond repair and that it has not been abandoned as a dwelling.

If a dwelling is considered to be abandoned by the Council, then any proposal to replace it will be treated as a new building under Policy GB1 of the Local Plan, the criteria for new buildings in the Green Belt will be applied, and the proposal may be rejected unless very special circumstances can be shown (see page 11). The requirements of Policy H11 of the Local Plan must also be complied with before an application will be approved. A similar approach will be applied to instances where dwellings are demolished.

## Change of Use

Permission is often required if a proposal would result in the change of use of land or buildings. A common change of use in the Green Belt is from an agricultural use to a recreational use such as horse riding. The following section explains how change of use applications will be handled.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 explains that strict control should be exercised over the extension of re-used buildings, and over any associated uses of land surrounding the building which might conflict with the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it (e.g. because they involve extensive external storage, or extensive hardstanding, car parking, boundary walling or fencing).

### GARDEN / CURTILAGE EXTENSIONS

Owners of homes in the Green Belt sometimes want to extend their garden, or 'curtilage', into the surrounding countryside. These types of extensions are considered to be a change of use and can detrimentally impact on the openness of the Green Belt. This process can be cumulative and over time can lead to suburbanisation and urban sprawl. For these reasons, garden and curtilage extensions in the Green Belt are considered to be inappropriate and will not be permitted.

### RE-USE AND CONVERSION OF FARM BUILDINGS

There is pressure in rural areas to convert existing farm buildings to a residential or commercial use. The re-use of buildings in the Green Belt

may be appropriate, providing that there is no additional impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

- The reuse of existing buildings for a commercial use that would make a positive contribution to rural economy is strongly preferred to residential conversion(s), subject to there being no detrimental impact to the openness of the Green Belt as well as compliance with all other relevant policies.
- Residential uses and conversions can often have a detrimental effect on the character of historic farm buildings, so it is important to ensure that the new use is sympathetic to the rural character.

## Recreation

Use of land in the Green Belt can provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and outdoor sporting activities near urban areas. Provision may be made for structures related to outdoor recreation as long as they are considered essential (see definition below).

Where outdoor recreation activities are acceptable in principle, they may still result in unacceptable adverse impacts. The landscape setting and the visual amenity of the countryside may be affected as well as other possible impacts from noise, traffic generation, car parking, lighting, and disruption to residential amenity.

- New buildings should be limited to facilities that are the minimum essential for the operation of the associated activity, for example small changing rooms.
- 'Essential Facilities' means that they are genuinely required for uses of land that preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt.
- Proposals for buildings for recreation will also be tested against the criteria set out in Local Plan Policy L5 that aims to protect landscape character.
- The erection of horse related structures such as stables, fences, and jumps can fall within the definition of appropriate Green Belt development provided that they are small in scale. Such developments may not require the benefit of planning permission subject to certain criteria being met, providing the use of the land is authorised for the keeping of horses. To find out whether you need planning permission please contact the Council – contact details are set out at the back of this document. Proposals for horse-related development will also be assessed against all relevant policies including Policy E10 on horse related development of the Local Plan.



## Very Special Circumstances

There are some situations that may allow certain developments to take place in the Green Belt, that under any other circumstances would not be allowed. These are known as ‘very special circumstances’ and if proven, are treated as a departure from the Local Plan.

- When attempting to prove very special circumstances the onus is on the applicant to prove that the exceptional nature of the proposal outweighs the harm that it would cause to the Green Belt.
- Circumstances that are accepted as being “very special” are very rare, but will usually involve a specific judgement being made that no other option is available in light of the unique circumstances and individual case. These circumstances are not common and are unique ‘one-offs’.

If a proposal is against Green Belt policy it would therefore be inappropriate development (see page 4). In such circumstances an application may still be submitted, however the Council would have to judge there to be very special circumstances for it to be permitted. All other relevant policies would need to be complied with.

### ‘DEPARTURES’ FROM THE LOCAL PLAN

If the Council receives an application considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, yet consider approving it, the decision is considered to be a departure from the Local Plan. The Council may need to send the planning application to the Secretary of State giving them the opportunity to ‘call it in’ to make their own determination.



This process ensures that the Secretary of State has the opportunity to consider whether to call-in the more significant and potentially most harmful proposals for inappropriate development, thereby helping to strengthen planning controls in the Green Belt.

Applications will be referred to the Secretary of State if:

- the Local Authority does not plan to refuse the application; AND
- the application is considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and involves either:
  - a) the construction of a building or buildings with a floor space of more than 1,000 square metres; or
  - b) any other development that, by reason of its scale or nature or location, would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt.



# GLOSSARY

Explanation of some planning terms commonly used:

## **Amenity**

A positive element that contributes to the overall character or enjoyment of an area.

## **Conservation Area**

An area with special character and interest (Policy L12 of the Local Plan).

## **Cumulative Impact**

A number of developments in a locality or a continuous activity over time that together may have an increased impact on the environment, local community or economy.

## **Curtilage**

The enclosed area immediately surrounding a house or dwelling.

## **Departure**

A proposed development that is not in accordance with the Local Plan, but for which the local planning authority proposes to grant planning permission.

## **Development Control**

The process whereby a local planning authority receives and considers the merits of a planning application and whether it should be given permission.

## **Dwelling**

A self-contained building or part of a building used as a residential accommodation, usually housing a single household.

## **Green Belt**

A designation for land around certain cities and large built-up areas, which aims to keep this land permanently open or largely undeveloped.

## **Infill Development**

Development that is small in scale and which fits into an existing built up area.



### **Listed Building**

A protected historic building where the character and appearance needs to be protected (Policy L13 of the Local Plan. The Council has also identified 'Locally Listed' Buildings through Policy L14 of the Local Plan)

### **Local Plan**

A development plan prepared by district and other local planning authorities. Usually consists of 2 documents, a written statement and the associated planning maps, called the Proposals Map.

### **Local Planning Authority**

The authority entitled to make a particular planning decision. Unitary authorities, such as the South Gloucestershire Council, determine all planning applications in their administrative area.

### **Planning Permission**

Permission to carry out development issued by a local planning authority.

### **Planning Policy Guidance Notes/Policy Statements (PPGs/PPS)**

Produced by the Government to guide Local Authorities when they are producing their Local Plans and Local Development Frameworks. These are now being replaced by Planning Policy Statements.

### **Prior Approval**

A procedure where permission is deemed granted if the local planning authority does not respond to the developer's application within a certain time. Often related to agricultural developments.

### **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**

A Local Development Document that may cover a range of issues and provides further detail of policies and proposals in a 'parent' Development Plan Document (previously called SPG's).

### **Urban Sprawl**

The uncontrolled or unplanned extension of urban areas into the countryside.

### **Washed Over**

If a village is 'washed over', it is treated as being part of the Green Belt and the Green Belt policies apply to any development in the village



## Contacting the Council

If you have a query regarding whether or not you need planning permission, or any other planning permission/application related questions, a Planning Officer will be able to help you. If you have any questions you can contact the Council by phone on **01454 868004**. Alternatively you can write to one of the Council's two Development Control Teams:

### Development Control West Team

South Gloucestershire Council  
Thornbury Council Offices  
Castle Street  
Thornbury  
South Gloucestershire. BS35 1HF

#### West Team covers:

*Thornbury, Patchway, Filton, Stoke Gifford, Almondsbury, Olveston, Pilning & Severn Beach, Alveston, Oldbury-on-Severn, Rockhampton, Falfield, Cromhall, Tytherington, Rangeworthy, Tortworth, Charfield, Hill, Winterbourne, Frampton Cotterell, Westerleigh, Aust*

### Development Control East Team

South Gloucestershire Council  
Kingswood Civic Centre  
High Street  
Kingswood. BS15 9TR

**East Team covers:** *Yate, Chipping Sodbury, Kingswood, Hanham, Oldland, Siston, Bitton, Wick & Abson, Wickwar, Horton, Hawkesbury, Marshfield, Tormarton, Dodington, Acton Turville, Dyrham & Hinton, Cold Ashton, Badminton*

You can also call into these addresses in person although it is likely that you will need to an appointment to speak a Planning Officer. Planning applications can be viewed on the Council's website or at local libraries.

## Further Information

These documents also contain information on the Green Belt and other related Planning Policy issues:

- South Gloucestershire Local Plan, 2006
- South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document 2005
- Planning Policy Guidance note 2: Green Belts
- Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- Circular 11/05: The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005

The Council's website provides information on a wide range of planning matters - [www.southglos.gov.uk/planning](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/planning) and [www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/planningpolicy)

This information can be made available in other languages, in large print, Braille or on audio tape. Please phone 01454 868009. If you need any of these or any other help to access Council services.

For more information about this publication contact Tel: 868009

Designed by South Gloucestershire Council,  
Graphics & Mapping Services ref 2418/07/07

Printed by South Gloucestershire print on recycled paper 75%  
Post Consumer Waste

Date of Publication 07/07

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**[www.southglos.gov.uk](http://www.southglos.gov.uk)**