

Green Belt update

Max Booth, local Conservative Candidate for Moreton & Saughall Massie.
Working with Councillors Steve Williams and Bruce Berry.



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Dear resident

As many residents will know, local Councillor Chris Blakeley sadly died last year, after a long battle with cancer. Having worked with Chris, I was really pleased to be asked by Councillors Steve Williams and Bruce Berry to stand for election to succeed Chris. The elections that were postponed from 2020 will now be held on Thursday 6 May 2021.

One of the biggest issues during Chris's 20 years as local councillor was fighting to protect our precious Green Belt land around Moreton and Saughall Massie.

Like Chris, and Steve and Bruce, I do not support building on our Green Belt. Once it's gone, it's gone, and can never be replaced.

Ever since 2004, when councils were legally required to produce 'Local Plans', Wirral Council has dithered and delayed. In 2019 Wirral was one of just 11 councils (out of 338) that were in breach of the Act.

The result of this delay has meant that applications to build on areas of Wirral's Green Belt have been approved by the Planning Committee while developers and house builders register their interest to build on other sites as well.

Since Labour lost their majority in the Town Hall in May 2019, the Council has been working to have a Local Plan drafted, consult with residents and approved by the Ministry of Housing. The sooner that is achieved, the more of our Green Belt will be saved.

While Steve, Bruce and I are keen to see affordable homes built on our brownfield sites, in Birkenhead and Wallasey, we are strongly opposed to building on Green Belt land around Moreton and Saughall Massie.

The fields under threat are those on either side of Saughall Road, immediately north of Diamond Farm and adjoining Garden Hey Road and Acton Lane. Also, the fields from the fire station up to Pump Lane and across to Greasby.

Thank you to everyone who has been in touch with me, Steve and Bruce on this issue. On the other side of this letter are some further points that have been raised by residents.

Yours sincerely

Max Booth
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Q&A: our Green Belt

Where can I find out more?

View the reports that will help form the council's Local Plan and take part in consultations via <https://wirral-consult.objective.co.uk/kse/>

What about Wirral Waters?

Peel Holdings, the developer at Wirral Waters in Birkenhead and Wallasey, have offered 6,000 dwellings over 15 years, from plans to regenerate that area and work is now underway.

Since Labour lost control of the Council in May 2019, your councillors have worked closely with Peel to accelerate their plans and to get building. Much of Wirral's housing need could be provided there without destroying local Green Belt elsewhere.

What will the draft Local Plan say?

Your local Conservative Councillors have worked hard to push for the Local Plan to not include our Green Belt. Elsewhere in the country, some local authorities facing exceptional population growth are intending to reduce Greenbelt boundaries to allow housing development. We do not believe Wirral is in that position.

Wirral's population is fairly stable, although there were more than 10,000 people left on the Housing Waiting List by Labour.

From what we have heard, the Wirral Draft Local Plan will accept a 'brownfield first' policy, but may, as a contingency, include some selective Green Belt sites for development.

There seems little evidence of the need to do so, but Saughall Massie is being considered.

What are the risks to our area?

If the Council accepts a Local Plan that infills the Saughall Massie Green Belt, the rural aspect we all enjoy, will disappear.

If housing density increases, natural habitat will decrease, and the reduced capacity of agricultural land to absorb surface water might increase flooding risk to those properties adjacent to the Arroe Brook, including through Saughall Massie to Hoylake Road.

The brook has flooded in the past and the nearby land is all categorised as 'flood plain and susceptible to flooding'.

What is happening at Reeds Farm, Saughall Road?

This long-established farming business farms the majority of fields adjacent to Saughall Road, and Garden Hey Road, comprising about 50 acres. The Reed family rent the buildings and land from Vyner Estates. Vyner have already tried and failed to gain planning permission to convert the buildings from farming to housing use.

Your local Conservative Action Team campaigned jointly with the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society to successfully stop that development. The plan was only refused because it was incompatible with Green Belt policy and guidelines.

Vyner Estates have not given up. They have indicated a willingness to develop more of their Saughall Massie land and buildings. Such a development can only be done if the Council exclude this land from Green Belt protection.

What is the next stage?

The Council, having worked since May 2019 to produce a Local Plan, must now legally consult with you. We expect this to take place shortly after the elections in May. That's why who you choose as your local councillor matters.

Once residents (but also developers!) have been consulted, the Draft Local Plan will then go to Public Inquiry, again giving people the opportunity to comment, but also for the Council's arguments and evidence to be challenged.

Once that has happened, the draft Local Plan then goes to the Ministry of Housing for final approval.



P.S. Remember, actions speak louder than words: we know from bitter experience in Saughall Massie that you can't trust Labour with our Green Belt.