



A GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Gravesham Borough Council's consultation is asking for your views on their proposed updates to the Local Plan. As part of the plan, they want to increase the number of new dwellings planned for the period 2011-2028 from 6,170 to 7,905, which would mean removing 80 hectares of land from the Green Belt to allow developers to build up to 2,000 new properties. This equates to an area roughly the size of Istead Rise, and would set a precedent for future building on the Green Belt.

The National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out how the government's planning policies should be applied, provides strong protection to the Green Belt land, stating that "as with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances". However, Gravesham's Site Allocations document says "The Green Belt is not an environmental constraint. Land removed from the Green Belt will no longer be protected by Green Belt policy". It is clear that they do not consider that the Green Belt is a barrier to further development and urban sprawl.

Be under no illusion - they are not asking you *whether* you would want to see 2,000 homes built on the Green Belt; they are asking you *where* you would want to see 2,000 homes built on the Green Belt.

If you appreciate and would like to maintain the Green Belt around Gravesham, and would like to protect it against inappropriate development, this guide may help you in responding to the consultation.

There are 15 questions in the questionnaire, although you don't have to answer them all.

Questions 1 to 4 are to establish your views on development in general.

Questions 5 to 7 are about your views on development on the Green Belt. These are very important, and you should consider your responses carefully.

Questions 8 to 14 are all about you and your personal circumstances. You do not have to answer all or any of these questions if you don't want to, except your postcode.

Question 15 is the only place where you are allowed to give your own comments and opinions – and they have provided a tiny box in the paper questionnaire to have your say! Don't be constrained by this box. If you want to say more, then please provide a separate sheet – just put "see separate sheet" in the box.

At the end of this guide, we have provided some comments that you may wish to consider. You need to respond by 20th June for your views to be taken into consideration. Good luck!

IMPORTANT NOTE: The paper version of the questionnaire delivered to your home contains a **SERIOUS MISTAKE** in Question 6. Gravesham Council has refused to withdraw the incorrect form. You are **STRONGLY ADVISED** to respond using the on-line questionnaire which does not contain the mistake. If you must use the paper version, please **CROSS OUT** "Not at all Important" and insert "STRONGLY DISAGREE".

Question 1 asks for your views on the need for more housing and work floor space.

Don't be fooled into believing that the extra housing is needed to meet 'local' need. 60% of our population growth is from international migration (source: Office of National Statistics). We do not need nearly 8,000 new homes to accommodate Gravesham's local needs.

Do not be fooled into thinking that the extra dwellings will help lower prices or clear our local waiting lists. Like Ebbsfleet, many of the new houses will not be affordable (especially on the Green Belt), and they will not go to local people.

And remember – the creation of more floor space for jobs would give the Council the green light to build industrial parks and distribution centres on the Green Belt.

Whatever you decide to do here, think carefully.

1. Please give your response to the following statements related to development					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
All local authorities should proactively meet their housing needs and not contribute towards the national housing crisis					X
It is important to provide housing that meets the needs of the local area and maximises the delivery of affordable housing					X
More housing should be delivered to lower house prices					X
More housing needed to provide homes for workers employed in the local economy					X
More housing should only be delivered if everyone has access to key services and job opportunities					X
More jobs should be delivered in the Borough to improve the performance of the local economy					X

Question 2 seems to be worded on the assumption that you support development in your local area. It is probably not a good idea to agree to development in general, which could be seen as giving the green light to their plans. But it does give you the opportunity to let Gravesham Council know what you *might* be prepared to consider *in your own local area*, such as sheltered housing, etc.

Incredibly, Gravesham’s Retail Study in the updated local plan considers that we need 22,500 square metres of additional shopping floor space. That’s over five and a half acres of floor space. Instead of building more shops, shouldn’t we be releasing some of the less-salubrious ones for high quality, high-density housing close to the town centre, transport links, and other facilities?

You need to consider carefully what you would like to see built in your local area. If in doubt, it is probably best not to respond to this question or parts of it.

2. What forms of development would you like to see encouraged in your local area?					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Market housing (buy or rent)					X
Affordable housing					X
Specialist housing, eg sheltered housing for the elderly	?	?	?	?	?
Employment floor space, eg offices, warehouses, industrial units					X
Retail floor space, eg supermarkets					X
Leisure facilities	?	?	?	?	?
Schools	?	?	?	?	?
Health facilities, eg GP Surgery	?	?	?	?	?
Energy infrastructure, eg solar farms					X
Transport infrastructure, eg roads or railways					X
Against any new development (in your own local area)	<i>This is an extremely badly worded question! Are you being asked to agree that you are against any new development, or disagree to any new development?</i>				NONE

- Market Housing gives the green light to Barratts, Taylor Wimpey, Esquire, Redrow, etc.
- For affordable housing, read local authority housing and flats.
- For employment floor space, think warehouses and distribution centres.
- Do we really need more supermarkets?
- Do you want a solar farm in your area?
- Gravesham Council cannot approve (or prevent) new roads or railway infrastructure.

Remember, they are asking you what you want to see built *in your local area*. Later in Question 7 you will be asked to agree to these going on Green Belt land. **Be careful what you wish for!**

Question 3 asks you to rate how important are the following local services to you?

Hospitals? Schools? Doctors? Police? Ambulances? Fire Brigade? It seems to be a bit of an obvious question really – of course essential services are important!

Only you can answer how important services such as nurseries, pubs, places of worship, etc, are to you personally - they will all be important to some people. But there is nothing wrong with ignoring parts of the question that don't refer to your own needs.

3. Please indicate how important the following services are to you.					
	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not that important</i>	<i>Not at all important</i>
Local hospitals – Darent Valley, Gravesham Community Hospital	X				
Doctor's surgery	X				
Ambulance service	X				
Fire service	X				
Police service	X				
Nursery	?	?	?	?	?
Primary and secondary school	?	?	?	?	?
Local shops	?	?	?	?	?
Gravesend Town Centre	?	?	?	?	?
Post office	?	?	?	?	?
Pubs, restaurants and cafes	?	?	?	?	?
Places of worship	?	?	?	?	?
Bus service	?	?	?	?	?
Rail service	?	?	?	?	?
Broadband	?	?	?	?	?
Mobile telephone network	?	?	?	?	?
Indoor leisure facilities	?	?	?	?	?
Parks and open spaces	?	?	?	?	?
On street parking/ local car parks	?	?	?	?	?
Town centre car parks	?	?	?	?	?

Question 4 asks you to say what influences your views on development. It's quite a poorly worded question really, but with one possible exception, all of the statements are good reasons why continued unconstrained development is just not sustainable. Unless you want to see further congestion, further strain on services and resources, loss of open spaces and Green Belt land, you should strongly agree with all these statements.

4. Do you agree or disagree that your views on development are influenced by?					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Capacity of existing infrastructure and services at present	X				
Delivery of additional infrastructure and services for new households	X				
Congestion on roads at present	X				
Increased congestion on roads as a result of new households	X				
Availability of jobs at present	X				
Availability of jobs for new households	X				
Availability of open spaces, parks and leisure facilities	X				
Loss of Greenfield land	X				
Loss of Green Belt land	X				
Capacity of water, sewage, gas, and / or electricity networks	X				
Availability and accessibility of public transport	X				
Air quality and pollution	X				
Impact of development on the historic environment	X				
Impact of development on the local landscape / townscape	X				
Impact of development on local natural environment	X				
Impact of development on local wildlife / biodiversity	X				

Question 5 gets to the crux of the matter, but in a particularly convoluted and badly-worded question. *Be careful* – it’s easy to make a mistake on this. They are not asking whether you agree with building on the Green Belt, they are asking whether you agree that the Green Belt should NOT be built on.

To make it clearer, we have split the paragraph into 3 sections. If you don't want them to build on the Green Belt, you should **Strongly Agree**.

<p>5. In England, the Green Belt is largely undeveloped land around or between large urban areas on which building is not allowed. The purposes of this, according to the National Planning Policy Framework, are to prevent large urban areas from spreading out or merging together, and in some cases to preserve the character of historic towns and cities.</p> <p>However, it can be argued that it is necessary to build on parts of the Green Belt to meet housing and other needs.</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree, in principle, that existing Green Belt land in the Borough should be retained in its current form and not be built on?</p>				
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
X				

Question 6 asks what type of development you would like to see built on the Green Belt. This is exactly the same list they asked whether you would like to see in your own local area in Question 2, with one major exception - they don’t give you the opportunity to say that you strongly disagree with any development on the Green Belt. *If you are using the paper version of the questionnaire, remember to change “Not at all Important” to “Strongly Disagree”.*

<p>6. If there is a shortfall of brownfield land on which to build, which, if any, of the following forms of development would you agree or disagree to, for consideration on land that is currently designated as Green Belt?</p>					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Tend to Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i>	<i>Tend to Disagree</i>	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Market housing (buy or rent)					X
Affordable housing					X
Specialist housing, eg sheltered housing for the elderly	?	?	?	?	?
Employment floor space, eg offices, warehouses, industrial units					X
Retail floor space, eg supermarkets					X
Leisure facilities	?	?	?	?	?
Schools	?	?	?	?	?
Health facilities, eg GP Surgery	?	?	?	?	?
Energy infrastructure, eg solar farms					X
Transport infrastructure, eg roads or railways					X

Here is Question 7. They are asking you which option for development you support.

Be under no illusion – support for Options 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 will be taken as support for building on the Green Belt. **You should strongly oppose all of these.**

Option 1 focusses on increasing the housing density in the urban area and existing villages but without expanding the boundaries or intruding on the Green Belt. However, there is no guarantee that this would meet Gravesham’s target of 7,905 new dwellings. Nevertheless, it is probably the best option.

Alternatively, you could select “another option” and comment on it at the end in Question 15.

7. The consultation includes a number of options as to how future development needs could potentially be accommodated within the Borough and we would like to understand your views on these.					
	Strongly Support	Support	Neither Support nor Oppose	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Option 1: Settlement Intensification	X	This means increasing housing density in the urban area and existing villages, without extending the boundaries, but may not meet the full requirement.			
Option 2: Urban Expansion	This means expansion south of Astra Drive, east of Thong Lane, east of Chalk, and north of Three Crutches.				X
Option 3: Expansion of 2 nd tier settlements	This means the expansion of Istead Rise, Hook Green Meopham, and Higham, or any one or two of them.				X
Option 4: Expansion of 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th tier settlements	This is the same as above, but adding Shorne, Cobham, Sole Street, Meopham Green, Culverstone, and Vigo.				X
Option 5: Creation of a single new settlement through the merger of existing settlements	This means the merger of Higham with Lower Higham, or merging Sole Street with Hook Green, or Hook Green with Meopham Green (or all three), or the merger of Culverstone Green with Vigo.				X
Option 6: Creation of a freestanding new settlement	This means the creation of a new settlement of 5,000 to 7,000 new homes somewhere in the Green Belt. This will be a mini-town of up to 18,000 people, with its own shops, schools, and services.				X
Continue with existing development strategy (which would not meet full development needs)	?	The first tier of search is the Gravesend/Northfleet urban area, followed by Istead Rise, Higham, and Hook Green, then Culverstone, Vigo, and Meopham Green, then Shorne, Cobham, and Sole Street. Gravesham claims this will result in a shortfall of up to 2,000 dwellings.			
Another option (write in Q15)	?	No other options are suggested, but you could propose another option in Question 15.			

Don't be selfish on this question; here's what could happen if we are not careful. 100 people from Chalk and Riverview Park don't want development on their doorstep, so they choose Option 6. 100 residents of Istead Rise, Higham, and Hook Green don't want development in their back yard, so they choose Option 5. 100 villagers from Cobham and Shorne don't want to see their villages damned, so they choose Option 3. 100 people from Luddesdown and Vigo don't want the threat of a new town in the Green Belt, so they choose Option 4. 100 people from Sole Street, Meopham, and Culverstone don't want to see their villages merged into large conurbations, so they opt for Option 2. The result is that Gravesham Borough Council announces that the all 500 responses were in favour of some form of development on the Green Belt. We will now decide which Option(s) to take forward.

To avoid setting a precedent, we must oppose **any** development on the Green Belt.

Questions 8 to 14 are questions about you. If you feel that any of them are intrusive, just ignore them. But don't stop now – carry on to the end of the questionnaire where you will have the opportunity to make your own comments.

Q8 How old are you?

Q9 Do you own or rent the accommodation you live in?

Q10 What is your full postcode? – It is important you complete your postcode.

Q11 How long have you lived in Gravesham?

Q12 If you moved to Gravesham from another area, where did you previously live?

Q13 What is your current economic status?

Q14 How do you usually travel to work?

The final question is Question 15, your opportunity to put your views across.

15. Thank you for your time. If you have any other comments, please write these below.

Do not feel constrained by the lack of space in the box provided in the hard copy questionnaire. If you want to say more, then please provide a separate sheet – just put “see separate sheet” in the box. Use your own words, but some things you might want to consider are:

The population projections appear to be over-estimated and need to be challenged and justified. We do not need 7,905 new dwellings to meet our local need.

Our roads are already at capacity. We are already experiencing gridlock and excessive pollution. Our health services are already overstretched. GBC cannot cope with providing the current meagre level of services. We already suffer water shortages. 7,905 extra homes is just not sustainable.

Why do we need an extra 22,500 square metres of shopping floor space? Gravesend town centre cannot compete with Bluewater and out-of-town supermarkets, and does not need the same amount of shopping floor space as it historically had. Some of the existing shops on the periphery could be given over to attractive high-density housing, close to transport links and other facilities.

The housing target has little to do with meeting local need. The population of Gravesham increased by 11,000 between 2001 and 2016. 6,900 of this (or 63%) came from inward international migration. Why should we be asked to give up our Green Belt to accommodate people who have no connection with Gravesham? This is unfair to local people, and is unsustainable.

How will allowing Developers to build houses on the Green Belt help people on Gravesham's housing waiting list? How many of the new homes on the Green Belt be truly affordable to local residents? The new targets will be exploited by Developers and do nothing to help local residents.

GBC cannot make Developers build on brownfield land first. The strategy is flawed and unenforceable. Any land released from the Green Belt will be built on first, brownfield land will still be standing empty, and GBC will need to release yet more Green Belt land to meet their housing targets. A precedent will have been established.

Green Belt land has strong protection under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). If GBC removes land from the Green Belt, they will remove that protection and have no grounds for refusing Developers' planning applications. The door will be unlocked and wide open.