Summary notes from WNF meeting with SMBC planning officers 30th September 2026

Attendees

SMBC: Emma Curle, Suzanne Broomhead, Steve Johnson

WNF: Evelyn Frearson, Jude Craig, Brian Bagnall, Terry Barnes, David Berry

Discussion

The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the need to update WNP to refer to the concept of Grey Belt and become consistent with NPPF 2026, and whether there was potential to do this simply via a paragraph to clarify the position, which would not require a full-blown consultation exercise.

WNF had circulated documents prior to the meeting which set out:

- Issues arising from officers' reports on applications for development of small sites in Woodford.
- Minimal changes we believe would be needed to WNP so that it is consistent with NPPF 2026 and future changes that would be needed to be consistent with the new Stockport Local Plan once it is adopted.
- Comparison of WNP policies with new Stockport Local Plan policies.

WNP

The WNF team explained that we understand the Council's position in being obliged to follow Government guidance on interpretation of Grey Belt when determining planning applications and pointed out that this effectively removed Green Belt protection from many sites in Woodford.

The WNF team explained that we believed that all WNP policies apply to sites in Green Belt, Grey Belt and Previously Developed Land in Woodford, apart from DEV1 on infilling, which only applies to Green Belt sites that do not meet the criteria for Grey Belt. The WNP policies would be consistent with NPPF 2026 if that was explained in the text.

We expressed our wish to keep WNF going and to retain weight to WNP, in order to retain the detailed local knowledge input into planning applications in Woodford, provided that it did not involve WNF or SMBC in inordinate amounts of work.

The WNF team were pleased to note that the majority of WNP policies are embodied in the policies in the new Stockport Local Plan, but WNP provides details of specific local features for protection. There was discussion about how this might be handled once the Local Plan is adopted.

The SMBC team pointed out that the WNP may be relevant in planning decisions, even if not consistent with NPPF 2026. When Permission in Principle is granted, development requires a reserved matters application in which the detail of the proposal is considered.

They agreed to consider the potential for minor changes to WNP to clarify the policy position in relation to Grey Belt and achieve consistency with NPPF 2026.

Stockport Local Plan

As well as the role of WNP in development management decisions, there was also discussion about the status of the Stockport Local Plan, the Regulation 19 consultation and the issues which may arise during the Examination.

We explained that we understand the Council's obligation to prepare a Local Plan that meets the Government's housing targets and the amount of work and difficult choices this has entailed. We support the Local Plan in principle, the policies within it, and the security gained from a five year housing supply, but we cannot support the allocations in Green Belt in Woodford. It can appear to residents in Woodford that we are absorbing a disproportionate amount of the new housing supply.

The SMBC team noted their challenging position as one of the councils under extra scrutiny by the Government's department of Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government (MHCLG) and the potential timing of the next steps in the process. After submission of the Local Plan in December, it is hoped that an Examination in Public will be arranged early in 2027. MHCLG are aware that the plan achieves 75% of the housing target and have not advised against submission because of this. The potential scenarios arising from the Examination were discussed. It is likely that, where planning applications have been submitted for sites that are allocations, these will have been determined before the Examination. If a site has been granted planning permission prior to the Examination, then that will constitute evidence that the site is developable.

Actions

It was agreed that the WNF team would submit suggested minor amendments to WNP for consideration by SMBC and for their advice on the steps that would be needed to achieve approval.

Evelyn Frearson, 1 October 2026