

ST.ANDREWS PRESERVATION TRUST

NEWSLETTER NO 8 - JULY 1997

Our Green Belt Report is complete at last and is now being sent to Fife Council. Copies are also being sent to our Member of Parliament, all local Councillors, the Community Council and several other organisations and individuals. A Press Release is also being issued since the subject is such an important one. We want to tell you, our members, about it at the same time. So this is a special edition of our Newsletter dealing only with Green Belt. Don't expect a Newsletter every month, we simply can't afford it! Our Chairman, Bob Murray, has been more involved in the detailed work of our Green Belt strategy than anyone. So I am handing over the rest of this newsletter to him so that he can explain it all to you.

Dorothea Morrison, Editor.

I would like to start by trying to define a Green Belt for you, because this is the principle on which our Report has been prepared. Green Belt has statutory force, but the detailed proposals differ slightly between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In Scotland there is a Scottish Development Department circular which states that Green Belts may be established 1) to maintain the identity of towns by establishing a clear definition of their physical boundaries and preventing coalescence, 2) to provide countryside for recreation or institutional purposes of various kinds, and 3) to maintain the landscape setting of towns.

St. Andrews certainly qualifies under these guidelines. Note however that only a local authority is permitted to apply for Green Belt status, and the status can only be granted by the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Trust's role is to recommend and persuade. So the Trustees decided that it was important to get the best possible advice right at the outset, and we commissioned a respected firm of landscape architects, David Tyldesley & Associates, to report to the Trust on the subject. It is that firm's Report that the Trustees have now received and approved. The firm has already prepared a Landscape Assessment Study of St.Andrews for the local authority, so they know St.Andrews well, and their

work is already well known. The Trust commissioned the firm to prepare an impartial, independent Report that built upon the foundation of the Landscape Assessment Study, and to propose Green Belt boundaries which would be fully defensible. That is what they have done.

Attached to this Newsletter are two maps, one showing the whole proposed Green Belt area, and the other showing the inner ring round the town on a larger scale. If accepted, development would be permitted within the inner ring and severely restricted between the inner and outer rings. Building development would in general not be permitted in the Green Belt area. However some categories of use are exempted from this restriction. These categories are agriculture, horticulture, woodland management and recreation. Perhaps we should warn you that nothing is ever completely sacrosanct. There is normally however a strong presumption against building for non-authorised purposes within a Green Belt.

You may well wonder what criteria were used to decide on the position of the outer and inner rings round the town. Landscape architects work extensively with contour levels and lines of sight. An added complication is that contour lines seldom follow natural boundaries, but Green Belt boundaries need to follow physical or distinctive features so that they can be clearly defined. The full report goes into this in considerable detail. Briefly, however, the outer ring is intended to protect the setting of the town in its wider environment, and covers the area that, in landscape and visual terms, is related to the town and its surrounding landscape. The inner ring defines a boundary beyond which any development would seriously detract from the identity, distinctiveness and landscape setting of the town.

If you look carefully at the map of the wider area, you will see three further rings, one round Boarhills, one round Strathkinness, and the last round Strathtyrum Estate. These delineate areas where further development may be permitted, just

as the inner ring round St.Andrews shows the proposed limits for development within the town. An independent study such as this must take a balanced view between containment and growth of urban development. A Green Belt must be designed to last for many years, and, in the case of St.Andrews, must take into account the historic heritage, the environmental implications of tourism, future expansion of the University and many other factors.

The Trustees accepted the Green Belt boundaries proposed in the Report with one exception. This exception is the triangle or 'green wedge' between Grange Road and the main Crail / Anstruther road. The Trustees consider that development in this area would be highly undesirable. We had discussions with Mr Tyldesley on the subject, and he explained that he was unable to amend his plan as it was based on contours and lines of sight. He however recommended that the land should be treated as 'Open Space'. The Trust's concerns have been made clear to Fife Council in the letter submitting the Report, and the Trust has stated that it considers development in this triangle to be highly undesirable. We hope to have discussions on this point with officials at a later stage.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I explain what happens now that our Report has been submitted. I mentioned above that the Trust can only suggest and encourage a move to Green Belt status. Fife Council - in fact every local authority - has a statutory process which it must follow. Currently St. Andrews is the subject of a Strategic Study by Fife Council. Reference to a possible Green Belt has to be made in this document to permit it to be considered further at a later stage of the planning process. We have a letter from Fife Council Planning Service confirming that such a reference will be made. Green Belt will not however be considered in any detail in the Strategic Study.

It is in the Structure Plan covering the period from 2001 to 2011 that decisions have to be made. Currently this Structure Plan is at an early stage. There will be a Structure Plan for the whole of Fife and additional detailed plans for various other parts of the region, including one for St. Andrews. Work on this has already commenced to a limited extent we are told, and the Planning Service hope to publish a draft consultative document in early 1999. The Trust will be seeking discussions with

Fife Council officials and representatives about Green Belt status in the intervening period.

It is impossible to tell at this stage whether our proposals for a Green Belt will be accepted by Fife Council. Certainly the subject has already been raised at Council level, as it is included in the Issues Report which was prepared for the Strategic Study. We have no doubt that objections to the proposal will be raised in some quarters. Some developers will be very unhappy with it indeed We hope however that the professional planners will see it as both a logical and a sensible move to enhance and control the landscape setting of St.Andrews. We hope too that our St.Andrews Councillors will view it in the same way, and will actively support us. But at the end of the day it will be a major policy decision by the whole of Fife Council whether to recommend a Green Belt for St.Andrews. They will have to listen to both the arguments for Green Belt and the strident voices shouting against it. Mr Tyldesley has made it clear to us that a considerable amount of development has already taken place which is unsuited to the landscape setting of St. Andrews. It is our duty as a preservation trust to see that the best protection possible is put in place for this historic city which is known and admired not only at home but the world over. The best protection currently available is without doubt Green Belt status.

The Trust will undoubtedly be called on at some point to demonstrate that the Green Belt campaign has the backing of the people of St.Andrews. It may be that we will be asking you to show your support actively, perhaps by writing letters. We will let you know in future Newsletters what action we would like you to take, and we will keep you up to date on the progress of the campaign.

Bob Murray, Chairman

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