

Balancing Development and Conservation: A Critical Analysis of the High Vale Film Studio Project and Its Implications for Green Belt Policy

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Abstract. The Green Belt policy has played a key role in curbing the spread of cities and protecting open landscapes in the UK. However, in recent decades, the growing demand for housing and the pressure on economic development have made it face increasing challenges. This study takes the fictional High Vale Film Studio Project as an example to explore how to coordinate the relationship between urban expansion and environmental protection and social welfare. Based on literature review and multi-stakeholder analysis, this article points out that the realization of sustainable results depends on conditional and flexible strategies, such as establishing strong ecological safeguards, promoting meaningful public participation and policy innovation. These measures will make it possible to carefully adjust land use. The results of the study provide a practical framework for reforming Green Belt policies, balancing development needs and long-term sustainability, and also provide a reference for other urban and rural marginal areas facing similar growth pressure.

Keywords: green belt policy, urban planning, sustainable development, stakeholder analysis, high vale

1. Introduction

The global urbanization process has increased the pressure on urban and rural marginal green spaces. It makes the balance between development and protection more difficult. The Green Belt policy to curb the spread of cities after World War II has achieved remarkable results in history. However, it has now become the focus of debate due to the shortage of housing and the growth of infrastructure demand. For example, Bishop [1] found that policy discussions often reduced the green belt to "land reserve". The economic reasons for the development of the green belt are mixed. The supporters emphasize the housing shortage, but national data show that the link between land supply and housing affordability is weak. The housing crisis is particularly severe in London and the southeast. At the same time, green belts play an important role in carbon storage, biodiversity conservation and leisure opportunities. However, development risks are eroding these functions. Although it may lead to economic growth, development often affects vulnerable groups disproportionately and can damage the well-being of communities. The stakeholder theory further

points out that planning must take into account all affected groups [2] and recognizes the diversity of priorities from economic growth to environmental protection.

This study presents this dilemma concretely through the fictional High Vale Film Studio Project. In this region, 68% of the land is classified as a green belt. They are facing development constraints brought about by post-industrial recession and population growth. The proposal to build film studios on protected land highlights the tension between economic revitalization and environmental protection. This paper analyzes the case of High Vale Film Studio to explore the trade-offs and strategies of sustainable development, and answers the following four research questions: (1) What are the main factors that promote the development of High Vale Green Belt? (2) What are the positions and conflicts of key stakeholders? (3) What are the potential trade-offs and impacts? (4) What kind of strategy can balance development and protection?

2. Research methodology: a case study of high vale

This study adopts the case study method to examine the High Vale Film Studio Project. This method can effectively link theory and practice, which is suitable for exploring complex planning issues [3]. This scenario highlights the tension between economic development, environmental protection and social values. It reveals the dynamic relationship that cannot be presented by statistics alone. At the same time, it also shows the practical application of the stakeholder theory. Assessing the actors of all parties through power, legitimacy and urgency shows that despite the limited power of local communities, they can still affect decision-making results; while official institutions have power, their influence may be weak [4]. Building cases through academic module scenarios provides a coherent narrative framework and supports the use of stakeholders atlas, SWOT analysis and impact assessment and other methods [3,4].

The research is based on desktop research, referring to module scenarios and literature involving Green Belt policies, urban planning and stakeholder theory. The multi-method framework enhances the analysis. The stakeholder significance theory [4] is used to identify key actors, and SWOT analysis evaluates the advantages, disadvantages and opportunities and threats of the project. Comprehensive consideration of environmental, social and economic impacts reflects how planning and decision-making balance multi-party competitive needs. This overall framework helps to analyze the complex challenges facing High Vale.

3. Findings and analysis

3.1. Key drivers for the proposed development

The urgent need to promote the construction of High Vale Film Studio stems from solving the problem of post-industrial recession and reducing dependence on London. Local residents have limited employment opportunities. High-income people commute and go out. Most of the local jobs are concentrated in retail and service industries (BPLN0086 scenario, page 1). Supporters believe that studios will create high-quality creative industry jobs and urb economic outflow. It will also promote local economic diversification, echoing the general view that urban growth projects can stimulate regional regeneration [5]. However, development may also limit the supply of land and exacerbate the problem of housing affordability [6]. It becomes particularly urgent in poor areas. The governance level is also complicated. The decentralization at the national level is promoting the transformation of the governance structure from two levels to a single authority. It brings uncertainty and exerts pressure on growth (BPLN0086 scenario, page 2). National policies tend to develop, but

local council leader Caroline Forrest must fulfill her campaign promise to protect the green belt (BPLN0086 scenario, page 3). This reflects the tension between growth goals and local accountability. It also highlights the need for flexible and local urban strategies [7]. Population growth has further exacerbated the demand for housing and infrastructure. There are 130,000 local residents, showing the characteristics of ethnic diversity and poverty (BPLN0086 scenario, page 1). Supporters believe that studios can fund infrastructure and expand opportunities, but development may still disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and deepen social differentiation. Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance between responding to urgent economic, social and policy pressures and long-term protection of the green belt. It emphasizes the need to adopt a conditional, fair and adaptive planning approach.

3.2. Stakeholder analysis and conflicting perspectives

The proposal of the film studio activates a network of stakeholders with different interests and influences, whose positions are shaped by their power, legitimacy and urgency [4]. Figure 1 shows these key actors and their positions, revealing the core conflict. The analysis shows that there is a key governance stalemate. High-powerful and highly legitimate stakeholders are directly attros. The protection commitment of parliamentary leaders conflicts with the planning cabinet members and the development agenda of the national government. This forms a "shear zone", where economic, environmental and social priorities converge and collide, making it almost impossible to make decisions that satisfy all parties [8].

Stakeholder Group	Position on Development	Primary Interests & Concerns	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency
Council Leader (Cllr Caroline Forrest)	Oppose	Uphold election manifesto, promise to protect Green Belt, maintain public trust, ensure political stability.	High	High	High
Local Residents & Community Groups	Strongly Oppose	Protect Green Belt, quality of life, and property values; prevent increased traffic and pollution.	Medium	High	High
Local Businesses (Pro-Development)	Support	Gain from increased economic activity, new customers, and improved local infrastructure.	Medium	Medium	Medium
National Government / Planners	Implicit Support	Achieve national housing and economic growth targets, promote regional development through devolution agenda.	High	High	Low
Environmental Groups	Strongly Oppose	Safeguard biodiversity, protect ecosystems, mitigate climate change, uphold Green Belt policy principles.	Medium	High	High
Project Developer	Strongly Support	Secure planning permission, achieve return on investment, complete project construction.	High	Medium	High

Figure 1. Stakeholder analysis matrix

3.3. Analysis of key conflicts

High Vale Film Studio Project reveals two major governance tensions. One is the conflict between short-term economic interests and long-term environmental protection. Supporters, such as developers, emphasize job creation and investment, while opponents, including community groups and Forrest MPs, believe that the project sacrifices the green belt and violates the principle of sustainability. The other one is the local democratic accountability which conflicts with the pressure of regional development. Although local representatives are given the responsibility of protecting the green belt, national policies push parliaments to prioritize economic growth and housing supply.

It forces a reassessment of protected land. These tensions highlight the fundamental challenge of balancing local interests, the national agenda and environmental sustainability.

3.4. SWOT analysis of the high vale film studio project

The SWOT analysis shown in Fig. 2 below summarizes the internal and external factors affecting the feasibility of the project. The framework helps to systematically sort out the strategic situation and transcend the binary debate between this and that. SWOT analysis confirms that the project promotion path is full of major risks that must be actively controlled. Its feasibility depends on whether opportunities such as the net gain of biodiversity (BNG) can be used to offset profound disadvantages and threats, especially ecological and social costs.



Figure 2. SWOT analysis of the high vale film studio proposal

3.5. Assessment of potential impacts

3.5.1. Environmental impacts

Since the project is located on the green belt land for the planned construction of national parks, the development has brought serious and possibly irreversible environmental risks. Converting this green space into construction land will lead to direct habitat loss and landscape fragmentation. As confirmed by Andrén [9], once the critical threshold is exceeded, habitat fragmentation may lead to nonlinear collapse of biodiversity. In addition, replacing permeable green space with impermeable infrastructure will weaken the carbon sequestration capacity of the region, a key ecosystem service for climate change mitigation [10]. Figure 3 intuitively emphasizes that the project site is close to ecologically sensitive areas and the threat of habitat invasion.



Figure 3. Schematic map of the proposed development area

3.5.2. Socio-economic impacts

The project presents double socio-economic consequences. On the one hand, it promises to bring short-term economic benefits through job creation and local investment, which is consistent with the theory of linking urban growth with economic stimulus [5]. On the other hand, it may also have a long-term negative impact. The influx of workers may increase the demand for housing and exacerbate the housing affordability crisis in areas where poverty already exists (BPLN0086 scenario, page 1) [6]. In addition, as shown by the analysis of stakeholders, the project is highly controversial and may cause community confrontation, erode public trust in parliament, and undermine social cohesion. The decision-making process itself, if seen as a pre-decision or ignoring local voices, may also cause lasting damage to the legitimacy of democracy.

4. Discussion: navigating the trade-offs and strategic pathways

4.1. The inevitability of trade-offs in Green Belt governance

The analysis of the High Vale Film Studio Project confirms a core principle of planning theory. Sustainable development involves fundamental trade-offs, especially in the field of controversial Green Belt policies [1]. Research shows that no program can maximize economic, environmental and social benefits at the same time, which echoes the criticism of the "triple bottom line" theory [8]. The core tension of High Vale, the opposition between the economic regeneration agenda supported by developers and Congressman Davidson. The environmental protection responsibilities advocated by parliamentary leaders and community groups is the embodiment of these "cutting belts". The case illustrates how the trade-offs appear in a specific political and administrative context, such as district councils facing the upcoming two-level governance (BPLN0086 scenario, 2024), and confirms that decision-making is a process full of value judgment and clear priorities.

4.2. Reconciling theory and practice in collaborative planning

Stakeholder analysis reveals a significant gap between collaborative planning theory and local governance reality. Although the theory emphasizes inclusive participation to build trust and legitimacy [2], the High Vale scenario exposes the challenges of power imbalance. Both the supporters and the opponents have high significance [4], which eventually leads to an impasse, which cannot be resolved by negotiation alone. This study contributes to critical participation in

discussions by showing that community influence (high legitimacy, high urgency) may be offset by strong supporters. In addition, unless an intentional mechanism rebalances influence, a higher-level policy agenda tends to dominate. This emphasizes that the quality of dialogue, even with the use of advanced tools, also depends on effective coordination and guidance, which is often ignored in procedural planning [11].

4.3. Towards conditional and adaptive strategies

In addition to identifying conflicts, this study also proposes a conditional and adaptive strategy framework for the High Vale Film Studio Project. Although the net gain of biodiversity (BNG) is advocated for coordinated development and conservation [12], its application is often examined in terms of enforcement and long-term effectiveness. This analysis points out that BNG or similar mechanisms, such as land replacement [13] must be embedded in a broader governance framework. This includes differentiated land management based on reliable ecological assessment and institutional guarantees with strong supervisory capabilities [12]. Its contribution is to emphasize the combination of technical solutions with governance prerequisites, such as independent supervision and regional collaboration, to prevent environmental compensation from becoming a formalized "tick-box" exercise.

4.4. Theoretical and practical implications for reform

High Vale case studies show that reforming the green belt policy needs to go beyond the simple binary opposition of "protection and development". The research results challenge the view that the green belt is simply a "land reserve" [1], highlighting its multiple roles in local identity, political mission and ecological networks. Theoretical revelation shows that the realization of sustainable results depends on many factors, such as adaptive governance, ecological protection integration, real public joint design and strategic policy innovation. In practice, planners should institutionalize early and meaningful public participation through mechanisms such as citizen jury. It is necessary to enforce and strictly implement the principle of "net gain" and advocate for the establishment of a cross-border collaborative framework.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the complex tension involved in the development of the UK's Green Belt policy. By analyzing the High Vale case, the research questions were answered. It was clarified that the development pressure stems from the economic necessity, the policy shift to support growth, and the social needs associated with population growth. The analysis reveals the fundamental conflict between the priority of short-term economic growth and the stakeholders who emphasize long-term environmental protection. The potential consequences highlight various trade-offs, such as job creation and financial gains vs. Ecological loss, increased housing pressure and community division. The conclusion is that although there is no perfect balance between development and protection, the trade-offs can be managed through transparent, responsible and adaptable governance. The realization of sustainable results needs to go beyond the simple "protection vs. development" option has shifted to adaptive governance that combines conditional policies, real public collaboration and strong supervision. Controlling the green belt development needs requires transparency, responsibility and strategic vision in the decision-making process, and giving priority to long-term

sustainability. Future research should further expand these findings through empirical research and cross-regional comparison.

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