

## Green belt: 74% of applications approved

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Almost three quarters of planning applications in the borough's green belt have been approved in the past four years, according to the latest figures.

Council leader Roy Taylor told a meeting of the full council last week that the authority had received 563 such applications.

**A total of 413 (74%) were approved – either by the authority itself or by a planning inspector on appeal – with 150 being rejected.**

Cllr Taylor told the meeting that the statistics were a little bit misleading, with the bulk of them being minor approval matters and not large scale developments.

In fact, he could only recall six “big items” that had been handed planning permission in the green belt.

These included plans for a motorway service station at Cobham – which were initially rejected by the council but approved on appeal – and those for a housing development off the A309 in Hinchley Wood.

“We do everything we can – have done and will do – to protect the green belt,” said Cllr Taylor.

“There are always occasional exceptions where the normal rules do not apply, otherwise we should protect the green belt.”

The news comes just a week after the borough council rejected a planning application for

Wheatley's Eyot – an island in the Thames at Walton, which stands in the green belt. The environment agency had wanted to build a new workshop and storage area at its site on the island.

However, the council's planning sub-committee voted to refuse the application on two grounds.

Firstly, they said the building's scale, siting and “inappropriateness” would harm the green belt.

Secondly, the scale and visibility of the development, they said, was harmful to the character and appearance of the River Thames.