

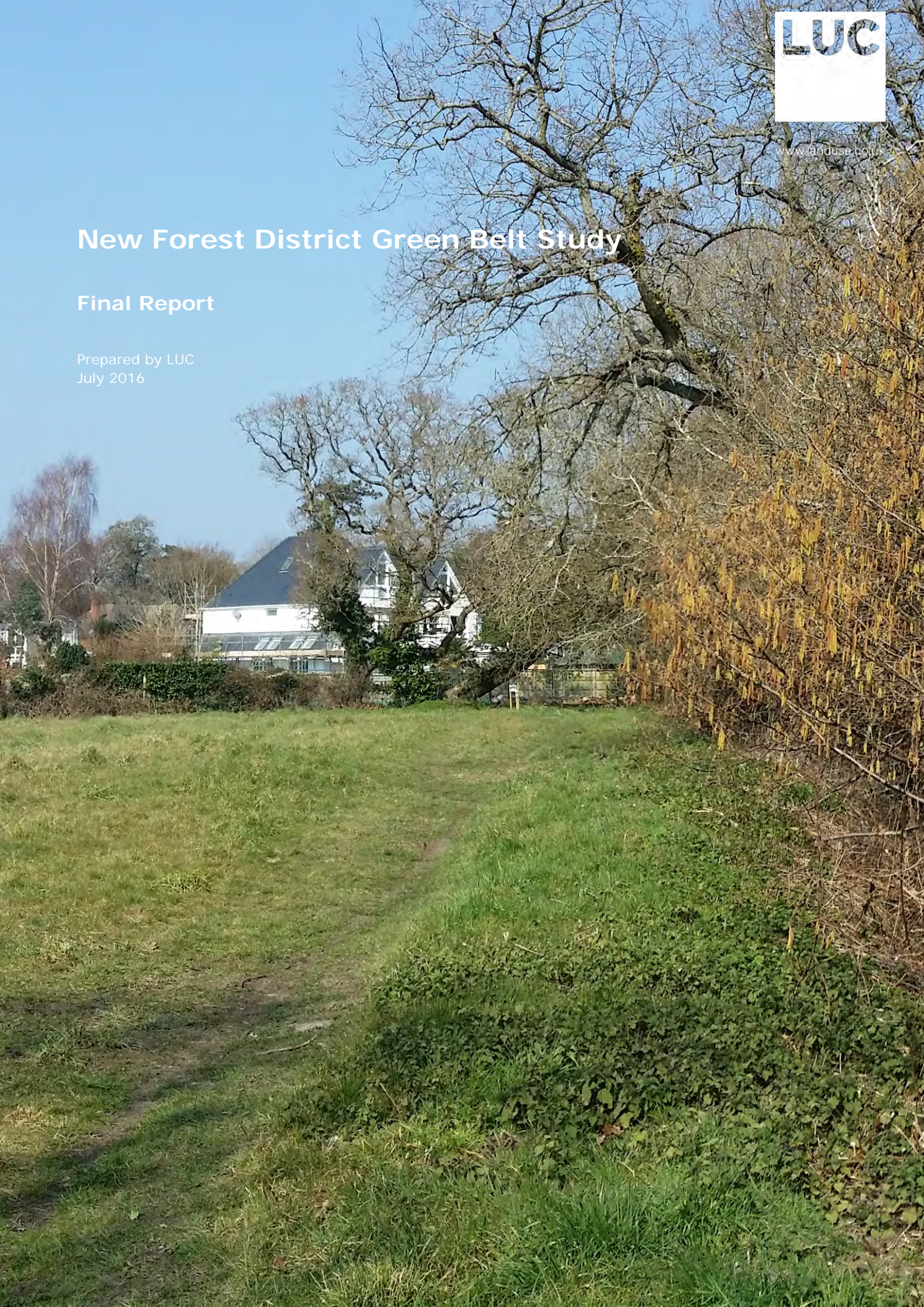


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# New Forest District Green Belt Study

## Final Report

Prepared by LUC  
July 2016



**Project Title:** New Forest District Green Belt Study

**Client:** New Forest District Council

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July 2016

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# 1 Purpose and Requirements of the Study

# 1 Purpose and Requirements of the Study

## Project Brief

- 1.1 New Forest District Council (NFDC) instructed LUC to carry out a study of the Green Belt within the District. The primary purpose of this study is to contribute to the evidence base to enable NFDC to recommend a robust, justified and defensible boundary for the South West Hampshire Green Belt for the long term, by providing a review of the extent to which land within the Green Belt contributes to the five purposes of Green Belt as set out in paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.2 NFDC also asked LUC to:
- Assess the clarity and permanence of existing or potential Green Belt boundaries;
  - Consider the potential for extension of the Green Belt;
  - Consider whether any area of Green Belt no longer meet the purposes of the designation, and if so whether they should be considered for removal from the designated area;
  - Identify, at a high level, Green Belt land that has potential for improvement – i.e. enhancement of beneficial use as outlined in NPPF paragraph 81;
  - Consider the role of Green Belt alongside and following the designation of the New Forest National Park; and
  - Give due regard to land use changes and development plan proposals in the South East Dorset Green Belt in adjoining areas of Christchurch and East Dorset districts, insofar as they are relevant to the openness and character of Green Belt land in NFDC.
- 1.3 In terms of assessment methodology, NFDC asked LUC to:
- Identify, in line with best practice, robust and transparent local criteria for the assessment against the five purposes of Green Belt;
  - Identify discrete land parcels to which the assessment criteria can be applied;
  - Disregard environmental, policy and land-use constraints other than where they are relevant in terms of the five purposes of Green Belt and the intended long-term permanence of Green Belt boundaries.
- 1.4 One of the points to emerge from planning inspectors' decisions regarding Green Belt reviews (see Section 2 below) is a need for such reviews to be comprehensive rather than selective. To this end the study covers all Green Belt in the District, but focuses in more detail on locations where there is more likely to be potential for sustainable development. These locations are identified as being areas that are both i) adjacent to settlements sufficiently high in the Core Strategy's settlement hierarchy to have a defined settlement boundary, and ii) not subject to 'primary constraints' (as identified by NFDC through the Local Plan review<sup>1</sup>).
- 1.5 The project brief, whilst identifying a requirement to consider potential Green Belt boundaries, also made it clear that the study should not go as far as to consider the potential of land for development.

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<sup>1</sup> The following have been identified by NFDC as primary constraints in the Sustainability Appraisal Sites Assessment process: flood zones 2 and 3, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the MoD's Explosive Safeguarding Consultation Zone (inner), the HSE's inner consultation zone around major hazard installations and areas classified as being at risk from coastal erosion.

## Scope of Output

- 1.6 With reference to the purposes and considerations noted above, the study:
- Defines and assesses parcels of land (some of which are outside of the existing Green Belt) against the purposes of Green Belt, in accordance with assessment criteria developed through consideration of the NPPF, National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), the local context (including the New Forest National Park) and best practice;
  - Provides ratings to indicate the extent to which different assessment parcels are considered to contribute to the purposes of Green Belt;
  - Considers whether there are locations in which the Green Belt boundary does not meet the requirements of clarity and permanence;
  - Considers whether the Green Belt includes any potential 'anomalies' – i.e. locations defined as Green Belt which are not considered to meet the purposes of the designation;
  - Provides commentary on potential, at a strategic level, for enhanced use of Green Belt land.
- 1.7 The study does not specifically recommend a revised Green Belt boundary. Any demonstration of the 'exceptional circumstances' needed to justify alterations to Green Belt boundaries, and the extent of harm that might result from the release of particular areas of land, will require consideration by NFDC of the outputs of this assessment alongside assessments of housing need, consideration of the potential of land for development, the value of the land – e.g. in terms of landscape character, visual amenity, ecological and agricultural land value – and wider sustainability issues such as traffic and transport.

# 2

## National Policy and Guidance



## 2 National Policy and Guidance

### National Policy

- 2.1 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that ‘the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence’. This is elaborated in NPPF paragraph 80, which states that Green Belts should serve five purposes, as set out below.

#### The purposes of Green Belt

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

- 2.2 The NPPF emphasises in paragraph 83 that local planning authorities should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. It goes on to state that *‘once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period’*.
- 2.3 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF indicates that local planning authorities must have regard for the permanence of the designation by defining boundaries which endure beyond the Local Plan period. New boundaries should be defined clearly, using readily recognisable, permanent physical features.
- 2.4 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF indicates that, if proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:
- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
  - set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
  - show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
  - demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
  - show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.
- 2.5 Current guidance therefore makes it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning tool designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas. To this end, land should be designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use. However, the NPPF states *“local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land”* (Paragraph 81).

## Guidance

2.6 Neither the National Planning Policy Framework nor National Planning Practice Guidance provides guidance on how to undertake Green Belt reviews; however a recent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Advice Note<sup>2</sup> and one by the Planning Officers Society<sup>3</sup> provide useful discussion of some of the issues.

2.7 The PAS note places emphasis on the purposes of the Green Belt as opposed to the quality of the landscape when undertaking a Green Belt review. The quality of the landscape becomes a planning consideration when selecting appropriate sustainable locations for development. The PAS note elaborates on ways in which the five purposes of Green Belt may be used to assess the contribution of land to Green Belt when undertaking a Green Belt review, and then states:

*"On this basis the types of areas of land that might seem to make a relatively limited contribution to the overall Green Belt, or which might be considered for development through a review of the Green Belt according to the five Green Belt purposes, would be where:*

- *it would effectively be 'infill', with the land partially enclosed by development*
- *the development would be well contained by the landscape e.g. with rising land*
- *there would be little harm to the qualities that contributed to the distinct identity of separate settlements in reality*
- *a strong boundary could be created with a clear distinction between 'town' and 'country'.*

The purpose of a review is for the identification of the most appropriate land to be used for development, through the local plan, always being mindful of all of the other planning matters to be taken into account and most importantly, as part of an overall spatial strategy."

## Inspectors' Reports

2.8 Relevant EIP Inspectors' reports should be used to inform and update the approach used to approach a Green Belt Review or Assessment. For example, Inspectors have commented that:

- Green Belt studies should be *"fair, comprehensive and consistent with the Core Strategy's aim of directing development to the most sustainable locations"*. Green Belt reviews should be 'comprehensive' rather than 'selective'.<sup>4</sup>
- Green Belt studies should make clear *"how the assessment of 'importance to Green Belt' has been derived"* from assessments against the individual purposes of Green Belt.<sup>5</sup> Such assessments against the purpose should form the basis of any justification for releasing land from the Green Belt.<sup>6</sup>
- In reviewing land against the purposes, Green Belt studies should consider the reasons for a Green Belt's designation as they are related to the purposes.<sup>7</sup>
- Green Belt studies should *"take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, as required by paragraph 85 of the NPPF [even if] such an exercise would be carried out through the SEA/SA process."*<sup>8</sup>

2.9 Meanwhile, case law confirms that Green Belt alterations require 'exceptional circumstances' to be demonstrated by the local planning authority, although whether they have been is a matter of planning judgement. Case law also confirms that decision-makers should take into account the consequences for sustainable development of any review of green belt boundaries, including patterns of development and implications for additional travel.

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<sup>2</sup> Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues –Green Belt (Peter Brett for Planning Advisory Service, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Approach to Review of the Green Belt (Planning Officers Society)

<sup>4</sup> Inspector's report (A Thickett) to Leeds City Council (September 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Inspector's interim findings (H Stephens) to Durham City Council (November 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Inspector's interim findings (H Stephens) to Durham City Council (November 2014)

<sup>8</sup> Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015)

# 3

## Local Context

## 3 Local Context

### History of the South West Hampshire Green Belt

- 3.1 The South West Hampshire Green Belt was first proposed in the Hampshire Development Plan 1958. The Statement in support of the Plan explained the reasons for the Green Belt as follows:
- “It is considered that unless steps are taken to check further substantial expansion of the built up areas of Southern Hampshire there will be a continuous belt of development from the Dorset boundary to the West Sussex boundary. To prevent communities from merging into one another and to preserve its special character, much of the land along the Hampshire Coast adjoining the urban areas has therefore been defined in the Development Plan as a Green Belt in which new development will be severely restricted.”*
- 3.2 From this it can be inferred that, as well as preventing the coastal settlements from merging, the preservation of the special character of the land between the settlements was also important.
- 3.3 ‘White areas’, between the inner boundary of the Green Belt and development proposals in the current plan, were defined. These would allow for development needs to be met at a later date.
- 3.4 The purpose of the Green Belt was expressed slightly differently in the Minister's letter of November 1960 which modified the Green Belt. This stated that the main objects of the Green Belt in this area should be:
- *to prevent the coastal towns from spreading too far inland;*
  - *to keep the main built-up areas (Greater Portsmouth, Southampton, Eastleigh and Bournemouth-Christchurch) separate from each other.*
- 3.5 During the 1960s and 1970s the South Hampshire Structure Plan was prepared and finally approved in 1977. This included a comprehensive ‘Coast and Countryside Conservation Policy’ for controlling development in countryside areas, but did not propose Green Belt for them. This operated until the 1990s.
- 3.6 In 1980, Hampshire County Council submitted the South West Hampshire Structure Plan to the Secretary of State, including a proposal for a Green Belt for the whole of south west Hampshire (apart from the proposed Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB). The current extent of the Green Belt in New Forest District was approved in the South West Hampshire Structure Plan (1982).
- 3.7 The adopted New Forest District Local Plan (1999) also included the majority of the New Forest Heritage Area (NFHA) in the Green Belt, as well as the areas around Lymington, New Milton and Ringwood to the west and south of the NFHA; however the Hampshire Structure Plan Review (adopted in 2000) removed the Green Belt designation from the New Forest Heritage Area. This was on the basis that the NFHA had already been given ‘equivalent status’ to a National Park for planning purposes, pending formal designation as a National Park, with Structure Plan policy NF1 providing stronger protection to the New Forest than the previous Green Belt policies.
- 3.8 The adopted Structure Plan Review did not propose any change to the Green Belt outside the NFHA. Paragraph 104 stated that the purpose of the South West Hampshire Green Belt is to check the sprawl of existing built-up areas; prevent neighbouring settlements from merging; assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and to preserve the setting of towns and villages, in particular the special character of the historic towns of Lymington and Ringwood.

## New Forest District Core Strategy 2009

3.9 The South East Plan, published in May 2009, included a policy to keep the Green Belt south and west of the National Park, but with possible small scale boundary revisions to ensure that enough land is safeguarded for development needs up to at least 2031.

3.10 This was reflected in the New Forest District Core Strategy (also adopted in 2009), in policy CS10 'The Spatial Strategy':

*The spatial strategy is to provide for sustainable development to help meet the needs of local communities and the local economy by:*

...

*(o) retaining and supporting the Green Belt in order to:*

- check the sprawl of the built-up areas of Lymington, Hordle, Everton, Milford, New Milton, Bransgore and Ringwood and prevent these settlements from merging;
- safeguard the countryside and coast from encroachment by built development;
- preserve the setting of towns and villages, in particular the historic towns of Ringwood and Lymington.

*Limited, small scale changes to the boundary of the Green Belt adjoining defined settlements will be considered in a review of the Green Belt inner boundary in the Sites and Development Management Development Plan Document. Boundary changes will be considered where they are necessary to meet the local housing need or employment land needs which could not otherwise be met, as set out in Policies CS12 and CS18. This review will adopt a longer time horizon than the Plan period (2006-2026) and will look ahead to 2031 as required by the South East Plan.*

3.11 The Inspector who examined the Core Strategy<sup>9</sup> acknowledged that the allocation of sites (in line with Policy CS12 of the Strategy regarding housing requirements) is likely to require the removal of some land from the Green Belt. The Inspector expressed the view that the requirement for affordable and local needs housing is sufficient in principle to amount to an exceptional circumstance for removing land from the Green Belt to provide housing land.

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<sup>9</sup> Report to New Forest district Council by Michael Hetherington , 10 September 2009

# 4 Assessment Considerations

## 4 Assessment Considerations

### Assessment Approach

4.1 Most Green Belt studies have the following common elements:

- Land is divided into parcels for assessment purposes;
- The definition of assessment criteria is structured around the five Green Belt purposes set out in the NPPF;
- 'Large built-up areas', 'towns' and 'historic towns' are defined;
- Ratings and supporting text are provided for each of the five purposes, with no weighting applied to any of the five (in accordance with the NPPF's lack of inference in this respect).

4.2 Variations in approach come in :

- The size of assessment parcels and the type of features used to define them, and the way in which assessments are phased;
- The application of settlement type definitions;
- The specific criteria used to make the assessment against each of the five purposes;
- The way in which ratings are given, and translated into an overall assessment.

4.3 The paragraphs under the headings below address the key considerations in approach; LUC's proposed method for the review of Green Belt in New Forest District is then set out in Section 5.

### Definition of Assessment Parcels

4.4 Green Belt assessments are sometimes carried out as a two-stage process, in which large parcels are defined and assessed in the first stage and the results of that assessment used to inform the definition of smaller second stage parcels, covering more limited geographical areas. Such an approach can be effective, but there are risks that the 'stage two' assessment will omit smaller areas which might not have been judged to make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes but which were excluded because they formed part of a larger parcel assessed at 'stage one' as making a strong contribution.

4.5 In order to provide assessment output that usefully identifies different levels of contribution to Green Belt purposes it is desirable, particular in a constrained area such as New Forest District, to define relatively small assessment parcels adjacent to the interface between Green Belt and defined settlements.

### Settlement Type Definitions

4.6 Three of the purposes of Green Belt as set out in the NPPF reference particular types of settlement: purpose 1 relates to *large built-up areas*, purpose 2 refers to neighbouring *towns* and purpose 4 considers *historic towns*. The latitude with which these settlement types are defined can have a significant influence on the outcome of a Green Belt assessment, but typically a local planning authority will have precedents relating to the definition and evolution of the Green Belt in the district which, together with a settlement hierarchy usually set out in the Local Development Framework, inform these definitions.

4.7 *Countryside*, as referenced in purpose 3, may also be defined, but this is typically by default the area that does not fall within defined settlements outside of, or inset into, the Green Belt. The degree to which an area can be considered countryside forms part of the assessment itself rather than requiring prior definition.

- 4.8 The black and white distinction between what is or isn't deemed to be a large built-up area, a town or an historic town can be seen as having a significant influence on the outcome of an assessment, but this does to an extent depend on how the assessment criteria are applied.
- 4.9 Following a meeting between NFDC and LUC<sup>10</sup> it was agreed that:
- The Bournemouth-Poole-Christchurch conurbation constitutes a large built-up area;
  - Towns – 'level 1' settlements as identified in Core Strategy Policy CS9 Settlement hierarchy – are Ringwood, New Milton (with Barton on Sea) and Lymington (with Pennington);
  - Historic towns, as identified in the Hampshire Structure Plan Review in 2000 (see 3.10 above), are Ringwood and Lymington;
- 4.10 The remaining inset settlements within the District are all 'level 3' defined villages in the Core Strategy: Bransgore, Everton, Hordle and Milford. Whilst these settlements cannot be considered 'towns' in the context of the Green Belt purposes it is nonetheless recognised that the often relatively narrow gaps between villages make an important contribution to the perception of countryside between those larger settlements. This is reflected in the references to specific villages in Core Strategy Policy CS10 (see 3.10 above).
- 4.11 Washed-over settlements do not have built-up area boundaries defined in the Core Strategy, and are classified as 'level 4' settlements of a "dispersed, rural nature" which form part of the countryside.

## Assessment Purposes

- 4.12 The NPPF refers to five purposes of Green Belt and to two 'essential characteristics': openness and permanence. Comments on each of these are made in the paragraphs below.

### Openness

- 4.13 Openness in a Green Belt sense relates to lack of built development more than visual openness, although the two often go hand in hand. The key distinction is that where vegetation provides visual enclosure this does not reduce Green Belt openness, even though it might in practice mean that development would have less visual impact<sup>11</sup>.
- 4.14 Openness as a characteristic can be considered in terms of the scale and density of development. The extent and form of existing development affects the degree to which a parcel can be considered to be part of the countryside rather than an extension of the urban/settled area, or a built-up area in its own right.

### Permanence

- 4.15 The concept of permanence is a planning consideration rather than a physical one, but it is recognised that there are benefits in using features which are clearly defined and which also play a physical and/or visual role in separating town and countryside to act as Green Belt boundaries.

### Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 4.16 In assessing the contribution a land parcel makes to preventing sprawl no assumptions about the form of possible future development can be made, so the role a parcel plays will be dependent on its relationship with a large built-up area.
- 4.17 Where a large assessment parcel is defined adjacent to a large built-up area it is likely to rate highly in terms of checking sprawl, unless it is separated from that area by a landscape feature significant enough to mean that any subsequent development would not be considered to relate to the large built-up area.
- 4.18 Where smaller parcels are defined (see 4.5 above), there is potential for them to have a stronger relationship with the large built-up area than with the wider countryside, whether due to the

<sup>10</sup> As stated in the minutes of a meeting on 19/1/16 to discuss the Scoping Study

<sup>11</sup> This point is made in paragraph 22 of the judgement in *Heath & Hampsted Society v London Borough of Camden* [2007] EWHC 977 (Admin) (3rd April 2007)



extent of existing urban influence within the parcel or to the presence of landscape elements which separate it from the wider countryside.

### **Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another**

- 4.19 A parcel that represents all or most of the physical gap between towns will clearly play an important role in preventing coalescence, so parcel location and size are significant factors with regard to this purpose. However, the nature of the land between two towns - the role of landform and land cover in connecting or separating them visually or in terms of the character of their settings – and also the character of the settlements themselves will affect the extent to which the closing of a physical gap between them is perceived as reducing settlement separation.
- 4.20 The NPPF specifically refers to preventing the merger of towns, not the merger of towns with smaller settlements, or the merger of small settlements with each other. However, it is recognised that the perceived gaps between towns will in turn be affected by the size of gaps associated with smaller, intervening settlements.

### **Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

- 4.21 The contribution a parcel makes to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment can be considered in terms of the extent to which it displays the characteristics of countryside – i.e. lack of development and land uses which are associated with countryside rather than settlement – and the extent to which it relates to the adjacent settlement and to the wider countryside.
- 4.22 PAS guidance (see 2.6 above) states that:
- “The most useful approach is to look at the difference between urban fringe – land under the influence of the urban area - and open countryside, and to favour the latter in determining which land to try and keep open, taking into account the types of edges and boundaries that can be achieved.”*
- 4.23 It is important to recognise that Green Belt does not function as a series of isolated parcels: the assessment of a defined parcel will reflect the nature of landscape elements or characteristics within that parcel but must also reflect its relationship with the wider Green Belt. In this respect the size of a parcel will often influence the extent to which it can be considered to perform a safeguarding role.
- 4.24 ‘Countryside’ in the context of this study means countryside within the Green Belt, not other open land which receives no protection from the designation, but it is considered necessary to treat the National Park area as Green Belt in terms of the contiguity of protection it affords against built development. As described in paragraph 3.7, the area now occupied by the National Park did form part of the Green Belt until National Park status rendered Green Belt protection superfluous.
- 4.25 The requirement (noted in paragraph 1.3) to “disregard environmental, policy and land-use constraints other than where they are relevant in terms of the five purposes of Green Belt...” means that whilst in practice the National Park could be considered a barrier to encroachment on the countryside, it is not treated as such in terms of this study. This means that areas of land adjacent to the National Park but isolated from other countryside are not considered to make a lesser contribution solely on the grounds that the potential for countryside encroachment is limited to the area of the parcel itself.

### **Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

- 4.26 Whilst many settlements have historic elements, this Green Belt purpose is only relevant to settlements of a certain size – i.e. towns – which have retained an historic character to which surrounding landscape elements make a key contribution, and which it is impractical to protect through conservation area designations. More recent development typically isolates core historic areas from surrounding countryside, but it should also be recognised that historic townscape elements and landscape surroundings can combine visually to contribute to setting or special character even when physically separated from each other.
- 4.27 Judgement of contribution to purpose 4 requires an understanding of the landscape elements and relationships which contribute to the setting or special character of the two settlements within

New Forest District that fall under the heading of 'historic towns': Ringwood and Lymington. These judgements have been informed by NFDC's Local Distinctiveness SPD's<sup>12</sup>.

- 4.28 The Local Distinctiveness SPD sums up the contribution of surrounding landscape to Ringwood's distinctive character as follows:

*"A distinctive landscape setting, with easy access to the countryside, particularly to the New Forest and Avon Valley. Many areas of the town have open views or glimpsed views between buildings connecting the observer to this landscape. The landform to the east offers a backdrop of forest edge where the land rises markedly from the flat river plain. To the west and throughout the town the river terraces and flood plain itself offer wide open views, influenced by the unique habitat and special characteristics of the valley of the River Avon, including its flood plain meadows and tributaries."*<sup>13</sup>

- 4.29 The retained rural character of some of the principal routes through the town is also noted. This could have a bearing on the relationship between the settlement and its surrounding countryside.

- 4.30 The Local Distinctiveness SPD sums up the contribution of surrounding landscape to Lymington's distinctive character as follows:

*"Lymington & Pennington retains a strong relationship with the surrounding landscape (the forest, river and proximity of the sea), permeating the fringes of the settlement and influencing much of the character further into the built-up area. This influence may be by virtue of being visually linked in longer views, being part of the atmosphere, microclimate or history, or being physically linked through green networks, habitats, paths or lanes. Through this relationship to its surroundings and through clear social links the town is intrinsically part of the wider New Forest and Solent environment."*<sup>14</sup>

- 4.31 The key characteristics of Lymington's landscape setting are identified in the Local Distinctiveness SPD as:

- Gently undulating coastal plain which dips down to the mouth of the river;
- Coastal grazing marshes, saline lagoons and intertidal/coastal wildlife habitats of international importance;
- Enclosed agricultural landscape of medium-sized fields divided by ditch and bank hedgerows, hedgerow oaks and gaps reinforced by post and wire fence;
- Large arable fields close to the coast offering views over the Solent towards the Isle of Wight;
- Clusters of attractive red brick farm buildings with ornate red brick barns;
- Large estates with country houses and estate cottages and gate houses;
- Lymington as a central focus to marinas and boatyards along the estuary.

- 4.32 Land areas contribute to the setting and/or special character of a historic town if development there would impact on the relationship between the historic town and the key characteristics of its landscape setting, whether in terms of movement through the area or views into or out of the settlement.

#### **Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**

- 4.33 Most Green Belt reviews do not assess individual parcels against purpose 5, and either do not rate them or rate them all equally, on the grounds that it is difficult to support arguments that one parcel of land makes a higher contribution to encouraging re-use or urban land than another. Where local authorities have detailed information on the extent of such sites an argument could be made that Green Belt parcels around a settlement with a smaller area of unused urban land contribute more than parcels around a settlement with less 'pressure' on surrounding Green Belt, but it is very debatable as to whether development pressures operate at such a localised level.

- 4.34 The view of the PAS guidance (see 2.6 above) is that:

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<sup>12</sup> Ringwood Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document (NFDC, 2013) and Lymington Local Distinctiveness Supplementary Planning Document (NFDC, 2011)

<sup>13</sup> In a summary on p21 of the Ringwood Local Distinctiveness SPD

<sup>14</sup> At paragraph 2.18 in the Lymington Local Distinctiveness SPD

*"...it must be the case that the amount of land within urban areas that could be developed will already have been factored in before identifying Green Belt land. If Green Belt achieves this purpose, all Green Belt does to the same extent and hence the value of various land parcels is unlikely to be distinguished by the application of this purpose."*

### Common factors

- 4.35 Green Belt has different purposes, but the factors that affect the contribution made by land to each purpose are not distinct to each purpose. With the exception of assistance in urban regeneration, all the Green Belt purposes can be seen to require consideration of the relationship between the assessment parcel, settlements and the countryside as influenced by the following common factors:
- Development and land use – the extent and form of existing development, and land use characteristics, affect the degree to which a parcel can be considered to be part of the countryside rather than an extension of the urban/settled area;
  - Location – the position of the assessment parcel in relation to settlements clearly affects its role in relation to potential expansion of those settlements;
  - Separating features – landscape elements such as woodland blocks, rivers, ridges or areas of primary constraint (e.g. floodplains) have a physical and visual impact on settlement-countryside relationships;
  - Connecting features – landscape elements such as roads or rail links can reduce the impact of separating features, and landform (e.g. valleys) can also draw areas together.
- 4.36 These factors can be addressed without allowing landscape *quality* to influence the assessment.

### Approaches to Rating

- 4.37 The terminology used by assessments to reflect ratings varies; it may be numeric or descriptive and may use a differing number of points – e.g. 1-5, low to high or weak to strong. There is no accepted standard, other than that, in order to express sufficient variation without too much complexity, the scale will normally have between 3 and 5 points.
- 4.38 No reference is made in the NPPF to any weighting of these purposes, so Green Belt studies invariably avoid applying any.
- 4.39 In practice, purpose 3 may in effect be considered the underlying one, because it is relevant to parcels defined around all settlements being assessed and only parcels that lack the 'essential characteristic' of openness will make no contribution. Purposes 1, 2 and 4, on the other hand, will only be relevant to parcels in the vicinity of large built-up areas, juxtaposed between neighbouring towns (or intervening villages), or within the settings of historic towns.
- 4.40 The significance of this in terms of the results of assessments is that many parcels which might be considered 'core' Green Belt rate highly against purpose 3 but make no contribution to other purposes. Assessments which aggregate ratings to provide an overall assessment may as a result rate parcels that make a low or moderate contribution to a number of purposes higher than those which make a strong contribution to purpose 3 only.
- 4.41 Variations in contribution within a parcel can be an additional source of complication when providing assessment ratings – e.g. should a rating reflect the strongest level contribution, or should it represent an average within the parcel? Of key importance is the need to support assessment ratings by text which identifies which factors combine to warrant the ratings given. This text can also point out any variations in contribution, should these exist.

# 5 Assessment Methodology

## 5 Assessment Methodology

### Development Assumptions

- 5.1 This assessment does not consider the potential of land for development, but it is necessary to make some very general assumptions about the form of any potential future development. It is clear from consideration of the local environmental and spatial context that the Green Belt in New Forest District is a very constrained space; a relatively narrow strip of land framed by areas in which environmental designations place a severe restriction on the nature and scale of any development that could take place.
- 5.2 Within this contained area many of the settlements lie in relatively close proximity to each other and/or to the Christchurch-Bournemouth-Poole conurbation and, whilst it is recognised that a review of the Green Belt needs to be comprehensive, the fact that a significant proportion of the Green Belt within the District has constraints that would make built development unfeasible cannot be disregarded (see 1.4 above). Without pre-judging assessment outcomes it is therefore considered reasonable to assume that only relatively small areas are likely to be judged to not make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes.
- 5.3 The Core Strategy (policy CS10) indicates that any areas to be considered for release from the Green Belt should relate to existing settlements, as defined in the District settlement hierarchy. The NFDC local plan review will revisit the adopted spatial strategy, but the South West Hampshire Green Belt is not an extensive land area. It is therefore considered reasonable to make the assumption that in principle any future release of Green Belt land – with the possible exception of anomalies – would be more appropriate where the land is contiguous with a defined settlement edge, rather than in isolation.
- 5.4 Where settlement-edge sites have been allocated for development in the Local Plan Part 2, the assumption is made in relevant adjacent parcel assessments that development will extend to the revised built-up area edge.

### Definition and Assessment of Parcels

- 5.5 The assumption of development out from, and contiguous with, existing defined settlements allows us to adopt a targeted approach to parcelling and assessment which identifies smaller parcels where appropriate.
- 5.6 The parcelling process involves the identification and assessment of parcels in two phases. In the first instance, parcels are defined around the edges of the defined settlements. Taking the built-up area boundary (as defined in the Core Strategy) as the 'inner' edge and working outwards, the first landscape feature which meets the Green Belt boundary requirements of clarity and permanence (NPPF paragraph 85), and which is considered to mark a degree of change in the relationship between settlement and countryside, is defined as the 'outer edge'. Dependent on the settlement edge form and extent of the study area there may then be similar judgements to be made in order to define radial boundaries which subdivide the zone between inner and outer edges into assessment parcels. Thus a belt of 'inner' assessment parcels is created.
- 5.7 To simplify the process of parcel definition we have taken the parcels created for NFDC's Sustainability Appraisal Sites Assessment as a start point and combined, subdivided or extended<sup>15</sup> these as appropriate in order to create parcels which reflect variations in contribution to Green Belt purposes.

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<sup>15</sup> It is noted that the Sustainability Appraisal Sites Assessment parcels in some cases exclude areas of washed-over residential development; in order to be comprehensive this assessment will incorporate all such areas within parcels.

- 5.8 The inner parcels have then been assessed in terms of contribution to Green Belt purposes, and the results of this assessment have informed the second phase, in which the remaining Green Belt land is assessed. In cases where an inner parcel is *not* judged to make a strong contribution to one or more Green Belt purpose (see subheading below), an 'outer' parcel has been defined beyond it (again using the NFDC Sustainability Appraisal Sites Assessment parcels as a start point). However, where an inner parcel *is* judged to make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes, it follows that the cumulative contribution of the inner parcel and land beyond it would be at least as strong. In such circumstances there is deemed to be no requirement to define further small assessment parcels.
- 5.9 Applying the assumption that any potential Green Belt release would be contiguous with an existing settlement, the assessment of a parcel that does not adjoin the settlement – an outer parcel - is in effect be a combined assessment of the contribution of both that outer parcel and the inner parcel(s) that lie between it and the current settlement edge. The size of the parcel is the combined size of both the outer parcel and its adjacent inner parcel(s) and inner boundary features are those along the settlement edge. This means that contribution to Green Belt purposes will typically increase with the addition of outer parcel layers.
- 5.10 Having carried out this process for all defined settlements, the remaining un-parcelled Green Belt - i.e. land beyond the defined inner and outer parcels - is subdivided into 'broad areas' of Green Belt, which are typically be much larger than Green Belt parcels. Broad areas are assessed against the same five purposes as the inner and outer parcels, but the application of assessment criteria is more generalised, as they are considered in isolation rather in relation to potential expansion associated with any particular settlement.
- 5.11 It can therefore be seen that the process of parcel definition and assessment is a phased one, in which the results of the assessment of inner parcels inform the resolution at which areas of Green Belt further out from settlement edges are assessed.

## Assessment Ratings

- 5.12 Assessment of parcels and broad areas against each of the purposes 1-4 considers the four factors of development/land-use, location, separating features and connecting features, and arrives at a judgement as to the strength of contribution made by the parcel or broad area to each purpose. This judgement does not apply any predetermined weighting to any of the four factors, but reflects LUC's view as to the relative relevance of each, with supporting text to provide justification.
- 5.13 The supporting text notes any significant variations in rating for a particular purpose within a parcel, however the consideration of settlement-countryside relationships in the definition of parcels and the cumulative approach to the assessment of those parcels proposed for this study minimises the extent to which this occurs. In smaller, settlement-edge parcels variations are rarer, and in the larger areas being considered further from settlements the effect of any variations is diluted.
- 5.14 **Table 5.1** below sets out the range of ratings given in the assessment of contribution to each Green Belt purpose. For each purpose a 5-point scale is used, assessing land as making either a *strong*, *relatively strong*, *moderate*, *relatively weak* or *weak/no* contribution. The table also gives an indication as to how each of the four factors affects the rating against each purpose.
- 5.15 Given that there is no guidance on what constitutes a 'strong' contribution to Green Belt, and indeed no formal link between level of contribution to Green Belt purposes and actual release of Green Belt land, LUC consider that there can be no presumptions as to how multiple lower ratings equate to single high ratings. Individual parcel assessments do not therefore include totalling of ratings.
- 5.16 However, it is not unreasonable to assume that a parcel that rates highly against a number of different purposes potentially has more value in Green Belt terms than one which rates highly against only one purpose – e.g. a parcel in which development would be considered encroachment on countryside *and* would also potentially represent sprawl from a large built-up

area. Assessment output therefore includes mapping which illustrates this (see Assessment Findings section below).

**Table 5.1:** Assessment Rating Definitions

**Purpose 1: Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

Development/land-use: less development = stronger contribution

Location: closer to settlement = stronger contribution

Separating features: stronger relationship with countryside than settlement = stronger contribution

Connecting features: weaker relationship between settlement and countryside = stronger contribution

**Strong** Contribution      The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area but has some separation from it and relates strongly to the wider countryside – development would represent significant expansion of the large built-up area into countryside

**Relatively Strong** Contribution      The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area but relates more strongly to the wider countryside

**Moderate** Contribution      The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area and either relates to both the settlement and the wider countryside or has a degree of separation from both

**Relatively Weak** Contribution      The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area and relates more strongly to this than to the wider countryside; or  
The parcel is not adjacent to the large built-up area, but has sufficient connection for development here to have some association with it

**Weak/No** Contribution      The parcel is not adjacent to the large built-up area and development here would be associated with a different settlement

**Purpose 2: Prevent neighbouring towns from merging**

Development/land-use: less development = stronger contribution

Location: juxtaposed between towns = stronger contribution

Separating features: lack of features to increased perceived separation between towns = stronger contribution

Connecting features: stronger relationship between towns = stronger contribution

**Strong** Contribution      Development of this parcel would result in physical or visual coalescence of towns, or a significant narrowing of the physical gap with no landscape elements to preserve separation

**Relatively Strong** Contribution      Development of this parcel would result in physical or visual coalescence of settlements which form a significant proportion of the land between towns

**Moderate** Contribution      Development of this parcel would result in significant narrowing of the physical gap, but landscape feature(s) would preserve a sense of separation; or  
Development of this parcel would result in a moderate narrowing of the physical gap, but with no landscape feature(s) to preserve separation

**Relatively Weak**      Development of this parcel would result in a moderate narrowing of the

Contribution physical or perceived gap, but with landscape feature(s) to preserve separation

**Weak/No** Contribution Development of this parcel would result in little or no perception of the narrowing of the gap between towns

### Purpose 3: Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Development/land-use: less urbanising land use and more openness = stronger contribution

Location: further from settlement = stronger contribution

Size: larger parcel = stronger contribution

Separating features: stronger relationship with countryside than settlement = stronger contribution

Connecting features: weaker relationship between settlement and countryside = stronger contribution

**Strong** Contribution The parcel relates strongly to the wider countryside, has a sense of separation from the settlement and lacks urbanising development – development would represent encroachment into the countryside

**Relatively Strong** Contribution The parcel relates more strongly to the wider countryside than the settlement and lacks urbanising development

**Moderate** Contribution The parcel relates to both the settlement and the wider countryside or has a degree of separation from both; or  
The parcel relates more strongly to the wider countryside than to the settlement, but openness is compromised by urbanising development within it

**Relatively Weak** Contribution The parcel relates more strongly to the settlement than to the wider countryside; or  
The parcel relates to both the settlement and the wider countryside, or has a degree of separation from both, but openness is compromised by urbanising development within it

**Weak/No** Contribution The parcel is too lacking in openness to be considered countryside, or has little countryside within it and lacks relationship with the wider Green Belt countryside

### Purpose 4: Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Development/land-use: less development = stronger contribution

Location: contains key characteristics, or important in views to or from them = stronger contribution

Separating features: lack of features to increased perceived separation from historic town = stronger contribution

Connecting features: stronger relationship between historic town and countryside = stronger contribution

**Strong** Contribution The parcel's openness is a key element in the relationship between the settlement and key characteristics identified as contributing to special character or historic setting – development would detract significantly from the town's historic character

**Relatively Strong** Contribution The parcel's openness contributes to the relationship between the settlement and characteristics identified as contributing to special character or historic setting – development would detract from the town's historic character

**Moderate** Contribution The parcel's openness contributes to the relationship between the settlement



and characteristics identified as contributing to special character or historic setting, but development would have only a moderate impact on historic character

**Relatively Weak**  
Contribution

The parcel forms a minor element in the setting of an historic town; or forms a more major element but has limited openness

**Weak/No** Contribution

The parcel does not form part of the setting of an historic town

# 6

## Assessment Output

## 6 Assessment Output

### Output Structure





- 6.1 The assessment output is presented on a settlement by settlement basis, with broad area assessments presented separately, in **Appendix 1**.
- 6.2 For each settlement or broad area a map (on a 1:25,000 OS base) is provided to show the defined parcels. Parcels are each assigned an alpha-numeric code reflecting the settlement to which they relate.
- 6.3 **Figure 6.1** shows the assessment parcels defined on the basis of the methodology set out in **Section 5** above.

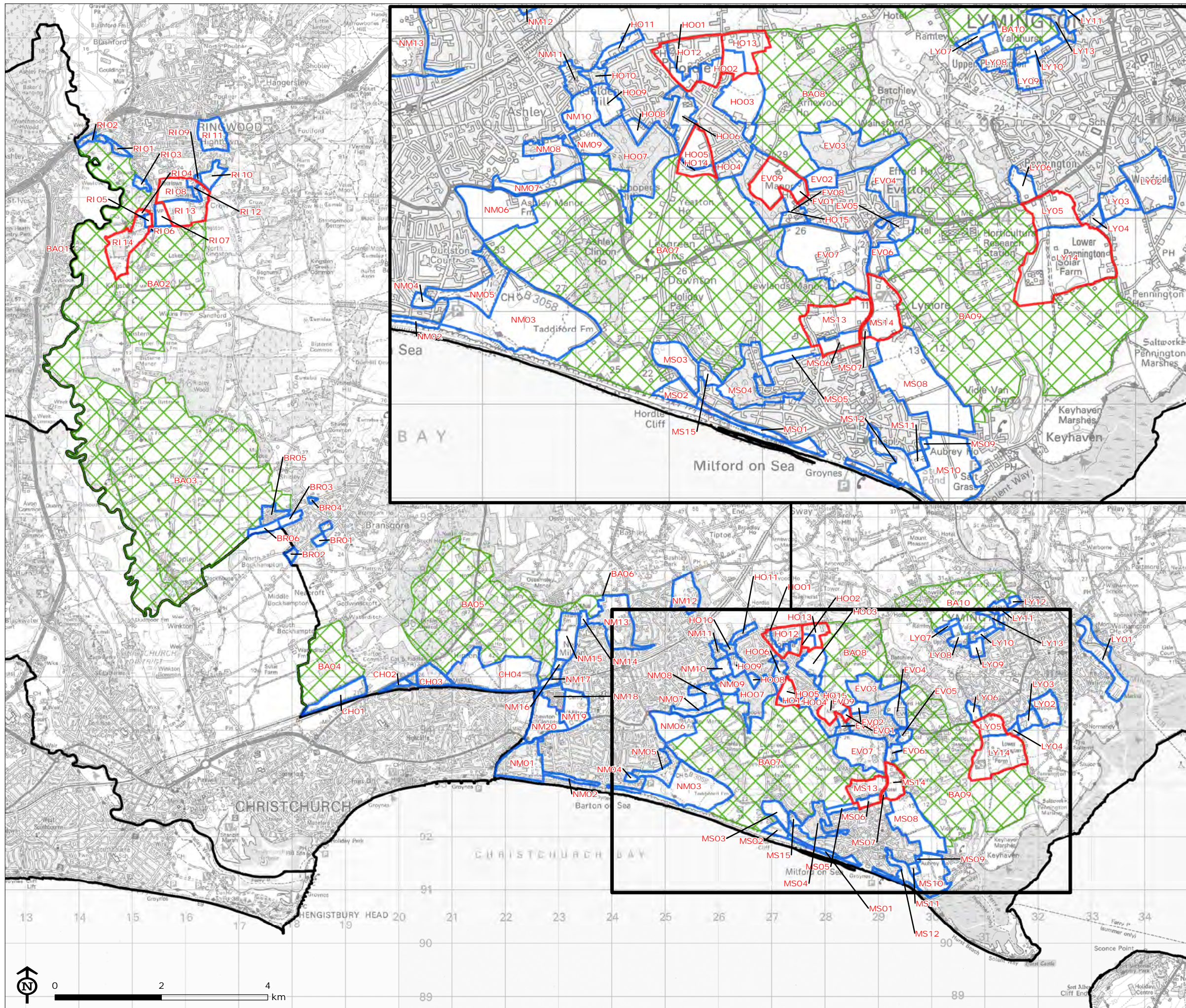
### Parcel Assessment Layout

- 6.4 Each parcel/broad area assessment consists of:
  - A heading with, settlement name, settlement type (with reference to the NFDC settlement hierarchy) and parcel reference;
  - A map (on a 1:10,000 Vector Map Local base) showing the parcel in relation to the settlement edge, together with any areas of primary or secondary constraint. For outer parcels both the outer and relevant inner parcels are displayed. For broad areas 1:25,000 scale mapping is used;
  - The size of the parcel/broad area (in hectares); for outer parcels this is the sum of the areas of both the outer and relevant inner parcels;
  - The parcel type: this is either *inner*, *outer* or *broad area*;
  - Text under the heading Development/land-use to describe the extent and nature of development and principal land uses;
  - A description of the area boundaries, with reference to the nature of land beyond those boundaries;
  - Text to describe the relationship between settlement and countryside, making reference to features which create separation (includes areas of primary constraint where these are considered to perform this role) or which create a connection;
  - Ratings for contribution to each of the Green Belt purposes, followed by brief comments making reference to the role of development/land use, parcel location, separating and connecting features in the judgement, as appropriate. The ratings are colour-coded to aid in easy identification of different levels of rating. Purpose 5 is included for completeness, but with comments to indicate that all parcels are considered to make an equal contribution;
  - Text to indicate whether the existing Green Belt boundary is weak and if so whether there is potential to create a stronger boundary within the parcel (this will not be relevant for broad areas).

# New Forest District Green Belt Study

Figure 6.1  
Parcel Overview

-  District boundary
- Parcel Type
  -  Inner
  -  Outer
  -  Broad Area



Map Scale @ A3: 1:70,000

