

Uttlesford District Council
Uttlesford Green Belt Review
Report: Methodology and
Assessment of Land Parcels

246505-4-05-03

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This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client.

It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.

Job number 246505-00

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Arup has been appointed by Uttlesford District Council to undertake a Green Belt Review as part of the evidence base to support the forthcoming Uttlesford Local Plan. The Green Belt Review assesses the Uttlesford Green Belt against the purposes of Green Belt as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.2 Purpose of Reviews

The purpose of a Green Belt Review is to provide evidence of how different areas perform against the Green Belt purposes set out in national policy; planning authorities may then take this into account alongside other evidence in making decisions about possible changes to Green Belt boundaries. A boundary revision can take the form of an expansion or a contraction. However, equally a Green Belt Review may conclude that no changes are appropriate.

The Green Belt Review will provide an independent and objective appraisal of all existing Green Belt land in Uttlesford, as well as land outside the Green Belt boundaries which may be designated (if appropriate). This report has been undertaken in accordance with the Brief, which sets out the main aim of the study *'to prepare an assessment of the District's Green Belt against these five purposes [the NPPF purposes], in sufficient detail to enable the Council to make informed decisions, should it decide to amend the Green Belt through its new Local Plan. The study should clarify what is meant by each of the five purposes, and how they will be applied in practice'*.

1.3 Report Structure

The report is structured as followed:

- Chapter 2 sets out the context at the national and local level.
- Chapter 3 provides the policy context at the national and local level, together with a summary of Green Belt Assessments undertaken by neighbouring authorities;
- Chapter 4 sets out the methodology for the Study;
- Chapter 5 sets out the key findings of the Study;
- Chapter 6 provides recommendations from the assessments;
- Chapter 7 sets out the conclusions of the study
- Annex Report 1 contains the Green Belt General Area Review pro-formas.

2 Green Belt Context

2.1 History of the Green Belt

The concept of Green Belt dates back to the origins of the modern British planning system. Coined as a response to the impact of urban sprawl and the rapid change of rural areas around London, Green Belt policy is frequently cited as one of the planning system's most notable achievements.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the rapid expansion of the railways suddenly brought once remote settlements within commuting distance of central London. The coining of the phrase *Metro-Land* in 1915 by the Metropolitan Railway Company and the subsequent waves of publicity containing evocative imagery of the historic villages and countryside areas north-west of London transformed previously isolated, rural areas into desirable locations for commuters, significantly increasing demand for housing.

During the post-war period, the urban area of London doubled in size and other settlements in the commuter belt, both villages and towns, also witnessed rapid growth. The arrival of the Great Eastern Railway in 1842 to Bishop's Stortford assisted in boosting the corn exchange and malting industry, and between 1841 and 1901 the population has significantly increased from 4,681 to over 7,000 reaffirming its place as an agricultural town as well as a commute district.¹ By 1844 the railway had reached Stansted Mountfitchet, with significant effects of replacing the coach services, bringing coal for fuel and slate for roofing, and enabling farm produce and livestock to be dispatched to London quickly for trade.²

Initially, the Metropolitan Green Belt, first suggested by Raymond Unwin in 1933 as a '*green girdle*' and defined by Patrick Abercrombie in the Greater London Plan of 1944 (later established in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947), was designed to curtail the further unchecked growth of London's urban area, but was only 6 to 10 miles wide and was not able to restrict development in the wider commuter belt. Green Belt policy is frequently credited as one of the most notable achievements of the planning system, halting the outward '*urban sprawl*' of London into the countryside. Particularly after the Second World War, concerns were growing about the rapid change of rural areas around London.

2.2 Green Belt in Uttlesford

Between 1919 and 1939, thousands of acres of fertile inner-Essex market gardens were lost to development.³ As early as the mid-1930s, inspired by Raymond Unwin's '*green girdle*' concept and empowered by a Green Belts '*loan scheme*'

¹ A Brief History of Bishop's Stortford, Local Histories (<http://www.localhistories.org/bishops.html>)

² Stansted Mountfitchet Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals, Uttlesford District Council, 2007 (<http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=1930&p=0>)

³ Hamson, P. (1969) *The Green Belt Saga*

initiated by the London County Council in 1935⁴, Essex County Council was purchasing land at the edges of London to designate as Green Belt, thus protecting it from development.⁵ While the imperative of protecting open land around London was further cemented by the creation of the first Metropolitan Green Belt by Patrick Abercrombie in the Greater London Plan of 1944, the impracticalities of local authorities purchasing large swathes of land were realised.

The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 for the first time compelled County and Borough Councils to prepare twenty year development plans for their areas and enabled them to designate Green Belts to curtail the further unchecked growth of London's urban area. However, this original Green Belt's width of only 6 to 10 miles was not able to restrict development in the widening commuter belt.

Circular 42/55, released by government in 1955, encouraged local authorities to establish their own Green Belts. The Circular set out three main functions of the Green Belt: to check the growth of a large built-up area; to prevent neighbouring settlements from merging into one another; and to preserve the special character of a town. Following this, the draft Review of the Essex County Development, published in 1964 and approved by the Secretary of State in 1976, was the first plan to formally designate the boundaries of the Metropolitan Green Belt in Essex.⁶ This was later replaced by the Essex County Structure Plan.

Uttlesford lies at the outer edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Green Belt designation was extended further in the 1995 Uttlesford Local Plan in order to '*prevent the communities from merging into an urban sprawl from the south of Bishop's Stortford to the north of Stansted Mountfitchet*'.⁷ The current Local Plan (2005) carries forward the Green Belt designation which featured in the previous 1995 Local Plan. The Uttlesford Green Belt covers 3,810 hectares, representing approximately 6% of the total area of the District. The Green Belt runs along the south-western edge of the District and comprises the very extremity of the Metropolitan Green Belt being the most northerly area of Green Belt in Essex.⁸

Current national policy set out in the NPPF upholds the spirit of the original Green Belt purposes and reaffirms the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl and maintain the openness of land. The NPPF goes on to advise that Local Planning Authorities should also plan positively to enhance the beneficial uses of the Green Belt. Within Uttlesford, the Green Belt offers protection to an area of attractive countryside, including a gently undulating arable farmland landscape occasionally punctuated by small villages and farmsteads, which covers much of the District, as well as the relatively unspoilt pasture and wetlands of the Stort Valley at the District's western edge.⁹ However, it is important to recognise that Green Belt is not designated on the basis of environmental quality but on planning grounds; the Green Belt's core role in Uttlesford has been to maintain the historic settlement pattern and prevent the

⁴ London Borough of Redbridge (20XX), Green Belt Review – Stage 1: Background

⁵ Powell, W.R. (1978) *A History of the County of Essex*

⁶ Castle Point Borough Council (2013) *Green Belt Boundary Review*

⁷ Uttlesford District Council (2011) *Green Belt Boundary Review Scoping Report*

⁸ Uttlesford District Council (2011) *Green Belt Boundary Review Scoping Report*

⁹ Chris Blandford Associates (2002) *Essex Landscape Character Assessment*

encroachment of unsuitable development into open countryside, in particular around Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport.

Following the withdrawal of the Submission Local Plan in January 2015, Uttlesford District Council have commenced work on a new Local Plan. In developing the new Local Plan, the Council will '*[give] equal consideration to all the options for development*', focussing growth options on a number of Areas of Search which include Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, the villages, and new settlement options at locations with good access to the strategic transport network.¹⁰ It is likely that Uttlesford will come under pressure to accommodate increasing numbers of homes to cope with housing growth in the East of England and, potentially, the challenges facing neighbouring districts in meeting their objectively assessed needs. The Green Belt designation may be viewed by some as a constraint to meeting such housing need.

2.3 Previous Green Belt Reviews

There have been no recent Green Belt Reviews within the Uttlesford area.

¹⁰ Uttlesford District Council (2015) *Local Plan Update – Issue 1*

3 Policy, Guidance and Experience

3.1 National Context

At the national level, the NPPF, National Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial letters provide the policy and guidance context for the role and function of the Green Belt. The following sections summarise the current position.

3.1.1 National Policy

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Central to the NPPF is the '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*' which for plan-making means that local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet development needs and should meet objectively assessed needs unless specific policies of the NPPF (such as Green Belt policy) indicate that development should be restricted.

Protection of Green Belt around urban areas is a core planning principle of the NPPF. Policy for protecting Green Belt land is set out in section 9 of the Framework which emphasises the great importance that the Government attaches to Green Belts.

Circular 42/55 released by Government in 1955 highlighted the importance of checking unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas and of safeguarding countryside from encroachment. It set out three main functions of the Green Belt which are now upheld in the NPPF:

- To check the growth of a large built-up area;
- To prevent neighbouring settlements from merging into one another; and
- To preserve the special character of a town.

The NPPF advocates openness and permanence as essential characteristics of the Green Belt stating that '*the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open*' (paragraph 79). The NPPF details five purposes of the Green Belt:

1. '*To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
2. '*To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
3. '*To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
4. '*To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
5. '*To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land*'. (paragraph 80)

For ease of reference in this Review, these purposes are referred to as NPPF Purposes 1 to 5, with the assigned number corresponding to the order in which the purposes appear in the NPPF, as above.

In addition to the purposes of the Green Belt, the NPPF advocates enhancement to existing Green Belts. Paragraph 81 states that *'local planning authorities are required to plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt'* once Green Belt boundaries have been defined including looking for opportunities to:

- *'Provide access;*
- *Provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation;*
- *Retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or*
- *Improve damaged and derelict land'.*

Paragraph 83 states that *'local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans'* and that *'once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan'*. Importantly, the NPPF acknowledges the permanence of Green Belt boundaries and the need for Green Belt boundaries to endure beyond the plan period (paragraph 83). The need to promote sustainable patterns of development when reviewing the Green Belt boundaries is also acknowledged (paragraph 84).

The NPPF seeks to align Green Belt boundary review with sustainable patterns of development (paragraph 84). Local planning authorities are encouraged to *'consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary'*.

Paragraph 85 states that *'when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:*

- *Ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- *Not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- *Where necessary, identify in their plans areas of "safeguarded land" between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- *Make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;*
- *Satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and*
- *Define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.'*

3.1.2 National Guidance

The national Planning Practice Guidance is intended to provide up-to-date, accessible and useful guidance on the requirements of the planning system. The Guidance was updated in October 2014, reiterating the importance of the Green Belt and acknowledging that Green Belt may restrain the ability to meet housing need. The following paragraphs are relevant to Green Belt Assessment:

- Paragraph 044 Do housing and economic needs override constraints on the use of land, such as Green Belt?** – *‘The NPPF should be read as a whole: need alone is not the only factor to be considered when drawing up a Local Plan. The Framework is clear that local planning authorities should, through their Local Plans, meet objectively assessed needs unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole, or specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted’ (as it is with land designated as Green Belt). ‘The Framework makes clear that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.’*
- Paragraph 045 Do local planning authorities have to meet in full housing needs identified in needs assessments?** – *‘Assessing need is just the first stage in developing a local plan. Once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period, and in so doing take account of any constraints such as Green Belt, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need.’*

The national Planning Practice Guidance does not provide any specific guidance on conducting a Green Belt Assessment *per se*.

3.1.3 Ministerial Statements

Letters from ministers of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) or local government officers or general statements by ministers have clarified or re-affirmed aspects of Green Belt policy. During his time as Planning Minister, Nick Boles issued a series of Ministerial Statements on the Green Belt which, in general, continued to emphasise the protection of the Green Belt.

Perhaps the most significant statement came in March 2014 when correspondence between Nick Boles and PINS reaffirmed the importance and permanence of the Green Belt and that Green Belt may only be altered in ‘exceptional circumstances’ through the preparation or review of local plans¹¹. The correspondence recognised the special role of the Green Belt in the framing of the presumption in favour of

¹¹ Nick Boles / DCLG (2014) *Inspectors’ Reports on Local Plans*, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/286882/140303_Letter_-_Sir_Michael_Pitt.pdf

sustainable development, which sets out that local authorities should meet objectively assessed needs unless specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted, with the Green Belt identified as one such policy.

This position was reaffirmed in October 2014 when the national Planning Practice Guidance was amended (see section 3.1.1).

3.1.4 Legal Cases – ‘Very Special Circumstances’ and ‘Exceptional Circumstances’

The NPPF sets out that ‘*very special circumstances*’ relates to the consideration of planning applications in the context of existing Green Belt. Paragraph 87 states that ‘*As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances*’. Paragraph 88 consequently states that ‘*When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations*’. Paragraph 89 identifies those type of development within the Green Belt which may be considered as acceptable in the context of ‘*very special circumstances*’:

- Buildings for agricultural and forestry;
- Provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- Limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

Paragraph 90 expands on the above list by identifying other forms of development that are also not inappropriate provided they ‘*preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt*’, namely:

- Mineral extraction;
- Engineering operations;

- Local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- The re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and
- Development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.

As set out in section 3.1.1 and 3.1.3, ‘exceptional circumstances’ relates to forward planning for Local Plans in the context of Green Belt boundaries. There is no definition of ‘exceptional circumstances’ provided in the NPPF. There is limited case history relating to decisions about the setting or change of Green Belt boundaries in local plans and the definition of ‘exceptional circumstances’. However, there are two recent relevant examples of note.

The first is the Solihull Local Plan (Solihull Metropolitan District Council). In this case, a developer’s sites in Tidbury Green were placed into the Green Belt by the Solihull Local Plan (SLP) adopted in December 2013. The developer challenged the SLP on three grounds: (i) that it was not supported by an objectively assessed figure for housing need; (ii) the Council has failed in its duty to cooperate; and (iii) the Council adopted a plan without regard to the proper test for revising Green Belt boundaries. The Claim succeeded at the High Court.

Solihull appealed against the decision, but the appeal was dismissed by the Court of Appeal. The Court held that the Inspector and Solihull had failed to identify a figure for the objective assessment of housing need as a separate and prior exercise, and that was an error of law. In addition, the Judge dismissed the Inspector’s reasons for returning the developer’s sites to the Green Belt, saying that:

‘The fact that a particular site within a council’s area happens not to be suitable for housing development cannot be said without more to constitute an exceptional circumstance, justifying an alteration of the Green Belt by the allocation to it of the site in question’.

More recently, in the case of Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council, Broxtowe Borough Council and Gedling Borough Council, this position was upheld. In this case, the Parish Council applied to the High Court to quash parts of the Aligned Core Strategies of the three authorities, arguing that: (i) it had failed to consider whether housing numbers should be reduced to prevent the release of green belt land; and (ii) it had failed to apply national policy in considering its release. However, the Claim was rejected.

In Paragraph 42 of the decision, referring to the earlier Solihull decision, the Judge stated:

‘In the case where the issue is the converse, i.e. subtraction, the fact that Green Belt reasons may continue to exist cannot preclude the existence of countervailing exceptional circumstance – otherwise, it would be close to impossible to revise the boundary. These circumstances, if found to exist, must be logically capable of trumping the purposes of the Green Belt; but whether they should not in any given case must depend on the correct

identification of the circumstances said to be exceptional, and the strength of the Green Belt purposes’.

While supporting the earlier Solihull case, the judgement also confirms that ‘exceptional circumstances’ may override the purposes set out in the NPPF, depending on the strength of these purposes. In determining what is exceptional, an authority should balance:

- The ‘*acuteness/intensity of the housing need*’;
- The ‘*constraints on the supply/availability of land...suitable for development*’;
- The ‘*difficulties in achieving sustainability without impinging on the green belt*’;
- The ‘*nature and extent of the harm to this green belt*’; and
- How far the impacts on green belt purposes could be reduced.¹²

In his decision, the Judge believed the Inspector had taken a ‘*sensible and appropriate*’ approach to adjudging the weight of exceptional circumstances versus the strength of the Green Belt purposes by weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of different alternative options for meeting housing need, including those which would not have involved Green Belt adjustments.

The need for a robust Green Belt Review is thus crucial in order to identify weak Green Belt, with this work feeding into the broader task of identifying what might constitute ‘exceptional circumstances’ within Uttlesford.

3.2 Local Context

At the local level, the adopted Uttlesford Local Plan (2005) provides the relevant context for Green Belt.

The Draft Local Plan (2014) was submitted for independent examination to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government via the Planning Inspectorate on 4th July 2014. Uttlesford District Council formally withdrew the Local Plan on 21st January 2015 over concerns of the soundness of the Plan. The Local Development Scheme (2016) sets out that the revised Local Plan will be submitted in March 2017 and adopted in December 2017.

Planning Policy for Uttlesford is currently made up of the NPPF, the 2005 Uttlesford Local Plan and saved policies, and the Minerals Plan and Waste Plan prepared by Essex County Council. The Uttlesford Local Plan was adopted on 20th January 2005 and the policies in it were saved for three years. In July 2007 the Council applied to the Secretary of State to extend the time period for the saved policies. All the policies in the Uttlesford Local Plan, except Takeley Local

¹² Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council & Ors (2015) EWHC 1078 (Admin) (21 April 2015).

Policies 1 and 2 (Land west of Hawthorn Close and Land off St Valery) have been saved.¹³

The purpose and requirements of the Metropolitan Green Belt are stated in the Uttlesford Local Plan as following that:

‘A belt of countryside of countryside needs to be retained between Harlow, Bishop’s Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport as part of the regional concept of containing the urban sprawl of London. Within the Green Belt development will only be permitted if it accords with national planning policy on green belts (PPG2) and Structure Plan Policy C2. Development permitted should preserve the openness of the Green Belt and its scale, design and siting should be such that the character of the countryside is not harmed.’

Policy S6 (Metropolitan Green Belt) states that infilling, limited development, or redevelopment compatible with the character of the settlement and its setting will be permitted within the villages of Hatfield Heath, Leaden Roding, Little Hallingbury and White Roding. Development uses permitted included for educational or community uses, redevelopment for business uses, and operational development such as sewage treatment, but must be compatible with the countryside setting and purposes of the Green Belt.

Policy E5 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings) states that the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings for business uses, small scale retail uses or for tourist accommodation will be permitted within the Metropolitan Green Belt, subject to compliance with some criteria listed in the Local Plan (page 21).

Policy H9 (Affordable Housing) states that due to the scale of the affordable housing needs, the Council will exceptionally release suitable land to meet local housing needs. In Green Belt villages the need will have to represent special circumstances to justify an exception to Policy S6.

3.3 Other Context

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) published guidance for Green Belt Assessment in 2015 in the context of the need to accommodate strategic housing (and employment) requirements. The guidance highlights that *‘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’*.

Emphasis is placed on the need for assessment against the five purposes of the Green Belt in the first instance. The guidance acknowledges that there are planning considerations, such as landscape quality, which cannot be a reason to designate an area as Green Belt, but that could be a planning consideration when seeking suitable locations for development.

¹³ Local Development Scheme, Uttlesford District Council, February 2015
<http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=3012&p=0>

The guidance outlines considerations to be made in relation to the five purposes as set out below:

- Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas – consider the meaning of sprawl compared to 1930s definition, and whether positively planned development through a local plan with good masterplanning would be defined as sprawl.
- Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another – the purpose does not strictly suggest maintaining the separation of small settlements near to towns. The approach will be different for each case. The identity of a settlement would not be determined solely by the distance to another settlement; the character of the place and of the land in between must be taken into account. A ‘scale rule’ approach should be avoided. Landscape character assessment is a useful analytical tool for this type of assessment.
- Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment – seemingly, all Green Belt does this so distinguishing between the contributions of different areas to this purpose is difficult. The recommended approach is to look at the difference between land under the influence of the urban area and open countryside, and to favour open countryside when determining the land that should be attempted to be kept open, accounting for edges and boundaries.
- Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns – it is accepted that in practice this purpose relates to very few settlements as a result of the envelopment of historic town centres by development.
- Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land – the amount of potentially developable land within urban areas must have already been factored in before Green Belt land is identified. All Green Belt would achieve this purpose to the same extent, if it does achieve the purpose, and the value of land parcels is unlikely to be distinguishable on the basis of this purpose.

The PAS guidance additionally recognises the relevance of the Duty to Cooperate, as set out in the Localism Act 2011, and soundness tests of the NPPF to Green Belt consideration. The NPPF requires local planning authorities to ‘*work collaboratively with other bodies to ensure strategic priorities across local boundaries are properly coordinated and clearly reflected in individual Local Plans*’ (paragraph 179). Additionally the level of housing that a local authority is required to plan for is also determined by whether there is an ‘unmet requirement’ from a neighbouring authority (paragraph 182).

The guidance recognises that Green Belt is a strategic policy and hence a strategic issue in terms of the Duty to Cooperate. Areas of Green Belt should therefore be assessed collectively by local authorities. This is important particularly for areas of Green Belt land that fall into different administrative areas, and the significance attached to that land.

3.4 Green Belt Review Experience

3.4.1 Neighbouring Authorities' Experience

Local planning authorities now hold the responsibility for strategic planning following the revocation of regional strategies as created in the Localism Act 2011. The national Planning Practice Guidance outlines the duty to cooperate as:

'...a legal duty on local planning authorities, county councils in England and public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an on-going basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local and Marine Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.'

This Review covers the areas of the Green Belt falling within the administrative boundary of Uttlesford District Council, as well as areas in neighbouring authorities where there is no defensible boundary feature which aligns with the District boundary. However, the methodology and proposed Green Belt parcels were shared with the neighbouring authorities and discussed at a workshop held on 4th December 2015. Comments received have been taken into account as the Review progresses (see section 4.2).

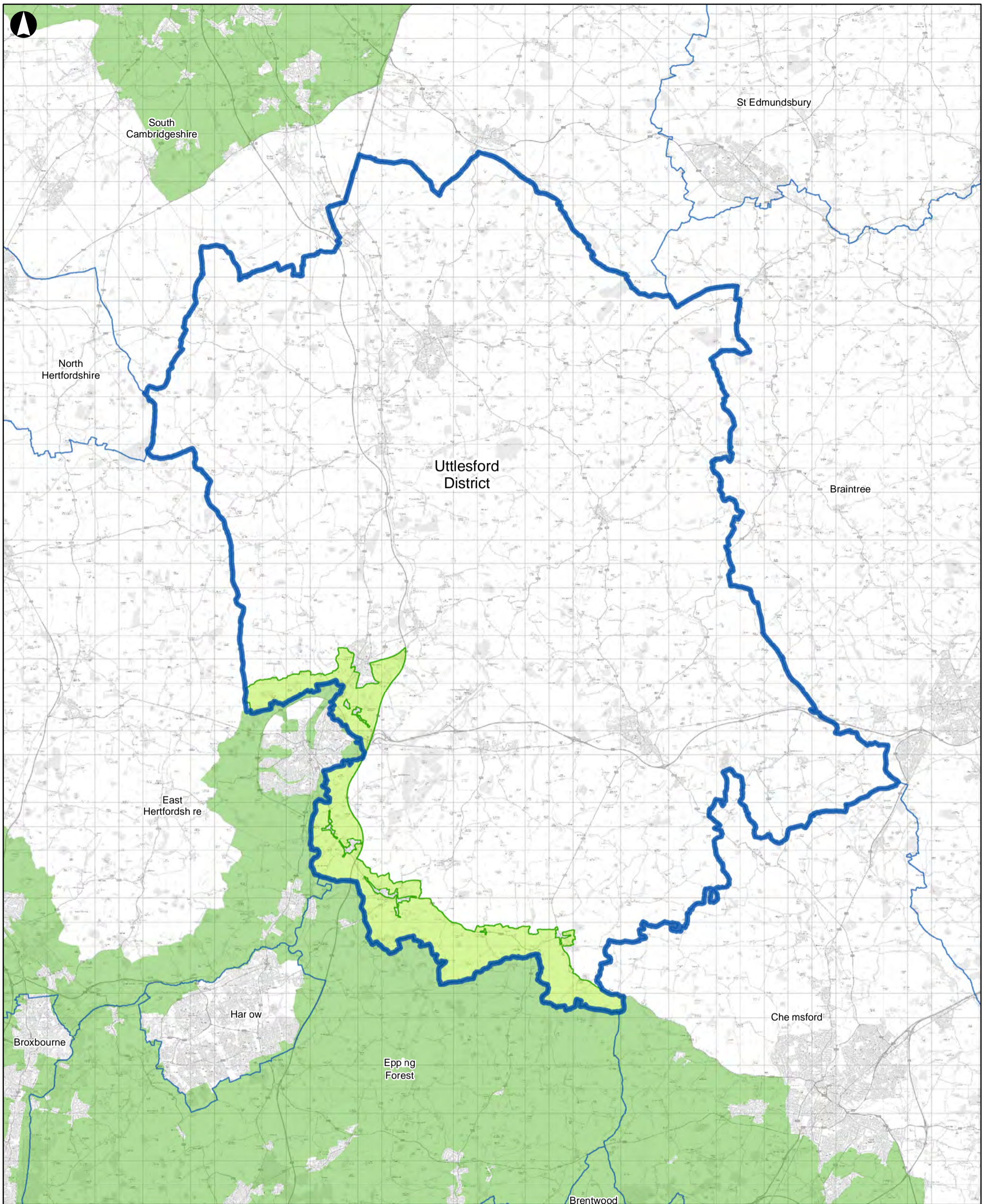
It is important to understand how each of the neighbouring local authorities are approaching Green Belt issues and the methodology employed in any reviews of the Green Belt they have undertaken. Green Belt in adjoining districts (Map 3.1) may achieve the purpose of checking unrestricted sprawl from the urban areas both within and outside Uttlesford. It may also play a role in protecting strategic gaps between urban areas and settlements both within and outside Uttlesford. The potential release of any Green Belt land within or outside Uttlesford may impact on settlement patterns and the role of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt.

The approaches to Green Belt Boundary Reviews taken in neighbouring authorities have been summarised in Table 3. 1. This table was shared with the authorities concerned for validation, verification of accuracy and to check the degree to which it matched current thinking within said authorities.

In summary:

- Over one third of Chelmsford is in Green Belt, and has checked the unrestricted growth of London and urban Chelmsford. However, there is no existing or planned Green Belt Assessment.
- Epping Forest have completed a Stage 1 Review, and have commissioned Stage 2 currently. The Stage 1 Review identified parcels along durable boundaries and the District boundary. Each land parcel was then assessed against purposes 1-4 against a set criteria, and was given a score from weak to strong. Purpose 5 was considered a strategic purpose so not assessed. This Review aligns very closely to the methodology set out in section 4 of this report, with the exception that the Epping Forest Stage 1 Review used an aggregated score. High level conclusions were reached about which parcels scored more or less highly against the purposes, for further consideration at a Stage 2 Review.

- East Hertfordshire has also completed a Green Belt Review, having already undertaken a Stage 1 and 2 Review in 2013. Original land parcels from the first Review were reassessed and amended, especially where parcels were large enough to make them smaller. Identifiable physical and visual features were used to define boundaries. Each parcel was then assessed from being '*fundamental*' to the purpose, to having limited or negligible importance to the purpose. An analysis of the land parcels was undertaken to indicate which parcels met the purposes the strongest and weakest. This would be considered further at Stage 2, also using objectively assessed housing needs.
- Harlow has undertaken a Stage 1 Review but the document has not been made publicly available.



Legend

- Uttlesford Green Belt
- Neighbouring Green Belt
- Neighbouring District Boundary
- Uttlesford District Boundary

Contains Ordnance Survey data ©
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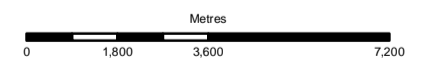
P1	18-11-15	CG	ML	AB
Issue	Date	By	Chkd	Appd

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Client
Uttlesford District Council

Job Title
Uttlesford Green Belt Boundary Review



Map 3.1 Uttlesford and Neighbouring Authorities' Green Belt

Scale at A3

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Table 3. 1 Green Belt Approaches in Neighbouring Authorities

Authority	Local Plan Status	Green Belt Context	Green Belt Assessment	Methodology/Conclusions from Green Belt Assessment
Chelmsford City Council	Chelmsford Council’s Core Strategy spans across two different documents: The Core Strategy and Development Control Policies 2008; and The Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Focused Review 2013.	Over one third of the City Council’s area falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt which has checked the unrestricted growth of London. It has also protected the expansion of urban Chelmsford towards the south-west and protected the countryside to the south and west of the A130 and A1060 roads. Core Strategy DC1 states that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt. When considering any planning application, substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.	No existing or planned Green Belt Assessment.	N/A
Epping Forest District Council	Epping Forest current policies are from the Adopted 1998 Local Plan and the Adopted 2006 Local Plan Alterations.	The Epping Forest Green Belt makes up over 92% of the District. There are 18 Green Belt policies which set out the	Stage 1 Green Belt Review was completed in September 2015. Stage 2 Green Belt Review is currently underway.	The District’s Green Belt, as designated in the Local Plan was divided into parcels of land, generally following well-

Authority	Local Plan Status	Green Belt Context	Green Belt Assessment	Methodology/Conclusions from Green Belt Assessment
		<p>conditions under which development will or will not be permitted. The development of land or the construction of new buildings will not be granted planning permission, unless it meets strict criteria including that is it only for the purpose of agriculture, horticulture or forestry; is for the purpose of outdoor participatory sport and recreation; is for other uses which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt; or is in accordance with another Green Belt policy.</p>		<p>defined physical features and the outer boundary of the district. Each land parcel was given an appraisal on how they performed against each of the purposes, followed by an analysis of the aggregated score. Purpose 5 was excluded from the assessment as considered strategic in nature. In summary the criteria used for each purpose were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Contribution of the parcel as an effective barrier against sprawl or as part of a wider network against sprawl. Are there any defensible boundaries? (2) Distance between settlements and whether the parcel provides a gap, and whether the reduction in the gap would visually and physically compromise the town separation. (3) Does the parcel protect the countryside and prevent encroachment by built development or urbanising influences.

Authority	Local Plan Status	Green Belt Context	Green Belt Assessment	Methodology/Conclusions from Green Belt Assessment
				<p>(4) The extent to which the Green Belt contributes to the historic setting.</p> <p>The review concluded that a ‘relatively strong’ or ‘strong’ contribution was made to at least one of the Green Belt purposes in each parcel. It identified the parcels that made the highest score, but also indicated some areas of the district that did not perform as strongly in Green Belt terms as others. The information gathered will be taken forward for further assessment in Stage 2.</p>
<p>East Herts District Council</p>	<p>Current planning policies are set out in the Local Plan 2007 and ‘saved’ policies.</p>	<p>The District has identified the rural area as a key resource that needs to be conserved and where possible enhanced. It has secured the containment of settlements including Bishop’s Stortford, Hertford, Ware and Sawbridgeworth. There are 15 Green Belt and Countryside policies which detail in what circumstances development may or may not be accepted. These include if the land will be developed for agriculture or</p>	<p>The Council undertook a draft Green Belt Review in 2013 (parts 1 and 2) and identified a number of areas which could be removed from the Green Belt as development sites. Having initially commissioned a Critical Friend to appraise the Draft Review, the Council then decided to commission another full Green Belt Review, published in August 2015.</p>	<p>The review does not undertake an assessment of Purposes 5. The Green Belt Review identified the study area, then identified land parcels for development using physical and visual features. The land parcels were then assessed against the purposes for including land in the Green Belt, before finally identifying the sensitivity of these areas to development according to Green Belt Policy. The land</p>

Authority	Local Plan Status	Green Belt Context	Green Belt Assessment	Methodology/Conclusions from Green Belt Assessment
		<p>outdoor sports, replacement dwellings, and small scale affordable housing for local needs.</p>		<p>parcels score from having 'none' contribution to the purpose, to having 'paramount' importance. In summary the criteria used for each purpose were:</p> <p>(1) Land where strategic level of development would conflict fundamentally with Green Belt purpose/ would have no impact on this purpose of Green Belt.</p> <p>(2) Land that is fundamental to physical separation of neighbouring towns/land does not lie between two towns or has limited contribution to separation.</p> <p>(3) Countryside that is fundamental to the purpose of retaining land within Green Belt from encroachment/countryside is not important on this purpose.</p> <p>(4) Land makes a fundamental contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town; or land makes no contribution to the setting and/or special character of a</p>

Authority	Local Plan Status	Green Belt Context	Green Belt Assessment	Methodology/Conclusions from Green Belt Assessment
				<p>historic character of a historic town.</p> <p>The Review identifies those areas of the Green Belt which meet the purposes least well which should be further assessed against the Strategic Land Availability Assessment, noting that the requirement to meet the objectively assessed housing need can provide the exceptional circumstances for the release of land.</p>
Harlow Council	The Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan (July 2006) and Saved Policies for the current planning policies.	There is a general presumption against inappropriate in the Green Belt development except in exceptional circumstances. Any permitted development should preserve the openness of the Green Belt and should not conflict with any of the main purposes of including land within it. Development that is permitted must be of a scale, design and siting such as the character and appearance of the countryside is not harmed.	Harlow have undertaken a Stage 1 review but the document has not been made publically available yet.	N/A

3.4.2 Wider Experience

A brief examination of a selection of Green Belt Boundary Reviews carried out elsewhere in the country revealed the following key lessons in terms of methodology:

- A variety of approaches have been taken in assessing the functionality of Green Belt against the NPPF purposes. This partially reflects that each study has been undertaken in response to a specific brief and is tailored to the special local characteristics of the area in question.
- A two stage process has typically been used to firstly identify those Green Belt areas least sensitive to change and where development would be least damaging in principle, before moving onto a second stage to consider technical site constraints.
- For the purposes of assessment, authorities have primarily divided the Green Belt into land parcels for assessment using durable, significant and strong physical boundaries which are clearly defined in the methodology, though some have used grid squares of a defined size to identify the land parcels for assessment.
- Only those purposes deemed relevant to the local context have been used in reviews rather than necessarily using all five, while in some instances authorities have combined multiple purposes within their assessments.
- In terms of interpreting the national purposes, definition of terms (both within the purposes themselves and criteria applied) is of key importance to a successful and transparent assessment.
- Assessment criteria used to assess individual purposes have been tailored to local circumstances.
- Qualitative approaches are primarily used in assessments, although some authorities have used more quantitative measures. The approach to scoring in assessments varies from simplistic traffic light systems to more complex approaches to scoring.

3.5 Implications for the Study

National policy, as set out in the NPPF, emphasises the importance and permanence of Green Belt. The NPPF sets out clearly the five purposes that the Green Belt is intended to serve, highlights that the Local Plan process offers the only opportunity for the Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed and stresses that boundaries should be defined using permanent and recognisable physical features. Neither the NPPF, nor the supporting national PPG, provide guidance on how to conduct a Green Belt Assessment *per se*. The implied emphasis is thus on each authority to develop a methodology which is appropriate to the local context.

Crucial to the development of such a methodology is the establishment of satisfactory definitions for the key terms used in the NPPF purposes (yet not explicitly defined) – different interpretations of such terms would significantly

alter how the Review is carried out. While a number of Green Belt Boundary Reviews do not articulate clearly how terms have been defined, the Green Belt Boundary Review for Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield provided definitions based on a combination of legitimate sources (for example, the Oxford English Dictionary) as well as the known aspirations sought through national and local policy.

Some key definitions which were considered for this methodology include:

- *Large built-up areas* (Purpose 1): This originally referred to London for the Metropolitan Green Belt, but the scope of how this is interpreted has shifted over time to include other large settlements within the wider Green Belt area. The Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield review applied the term to London, Luton/Dunstable and Stevenage, though it is not immediately clear how this choice was reached. The Central Bedfordshire Green Belt Assessment applied the definition more broadly, considering any area deemed ‘urban’. When defining this term, the methodology for Uttlesford should consider the settlement structure across the District.
- *Sprawl* (Purpose 1): The definition of this term varies significantly. The PAS Guidance queries whether development that is masterplanned and promoted positively through a development plan would constitute sprawl, but this does not provide a specific and measurable definition which could be applied in a Green Belt Review, nor does it feel like an entirely satisfactory explanation of sprawl alone. Other Green Belt Reviews, for example the Guildford Green Belt and Countryside Study, have edged towards a more spatial definition, considering sprawl as the ‘*creeping advancement of development beyond a clear physical boundary of a settlement*’. Given sprawl is a multi-faceted concept, it would seem prudent to consider both of these spheres in the definition adopted in this methodology.
- *Neighbouring towns* (Purpose 2): The interpretation of ‘towns’ varies across previous Green Belt Boundary Reviews. While it tends to be aligned to the defined settlement hierarchy, as set out in the relevant development plan, some authorities have chosen to apply a more local purpose. For example, in Runnymede, the threat of coalescence between many smaller settlements led to the Green Belt Boundary Review considering all settlements equally, including those ‘*washed over*’ in the Green Belt. Given that in Uttlesford the Green Belt boundaries are for the most part closely abutting the edge of settlements, it might be most appropriate to consider all non-Green Belt areas as the ‘towns’ to be considered in the assessment.
- *Countryside* (Purpose 3): The Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield Review adopted a ‘*functional*’ as opposed to ‘*political economy*’ definition of this term, centred on pastoral and primary land uses, while others adopted broader definitions which took countryside to mean any open land. Evidently, this interpretation is not appropriate in areas which are entirely semi-urban, where Green Belt may have been applied to areas which are open but not genuinely of a ‘*countryside*’ character. Given the significant contrast between urban and rural areas in and around Essex, in a similar fashion to areas of Buckinghamshire or Hertfordshire, a similar ‘*functional*’ definition may be the most appropriate.

In addition to other Green Belt Boundary Reviews, the PAS guidance on Green Belt Assessments is particularly helpful in setting out key parameters to consider when developing a Green Belt Assessment methodology. The key points to note are:

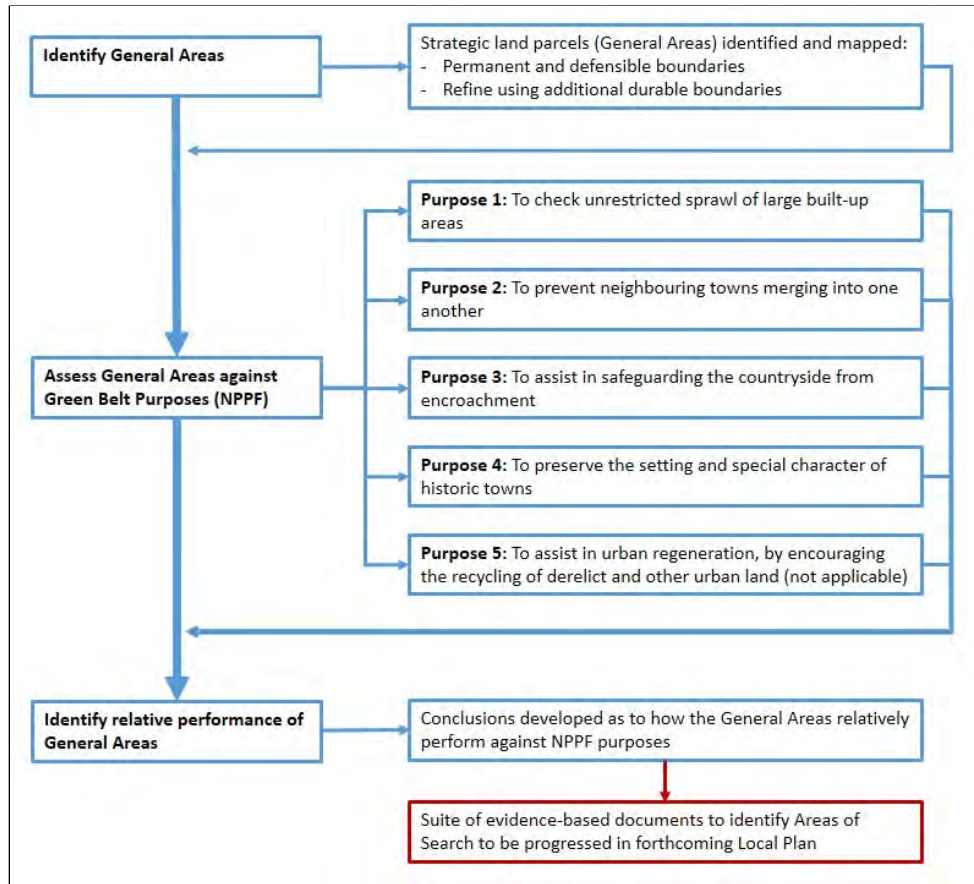
- A Green Belt Assessment is not an assessment of landscape quality, though elements of landscape assessment assist in assessing the Green Belt (for example, in identifying potential new boundaries or differentiating between areas of unspoilt countryside or semi-rural areas).
- The label '*historic towns*' applies to a select number of settlements and it is therefore accepted that the Purpose 4 assessment will only be relevant in very few instances. As set out in section 4, it is considered that Purpose 4 is only relevant to the Uttlesford Green Belt Review in very limited locations.
- Purpose 5 is not helpful in terms of assessing relative value of land parcels and is therefore not relevant to the Uttlesford Green Belt Review.
- Green Belt is a strategic issue and should be considered collaboratively with neighbouring authorities under Duty to Cooperate, thus emphasising the importance of ongoing consultation with neighbouring stakeholders.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The following sections sets out the proposed methodology to be used for undertaking the Uttlesford Green Belt Review. An overview of the methodology is set out in Figure 4.1.

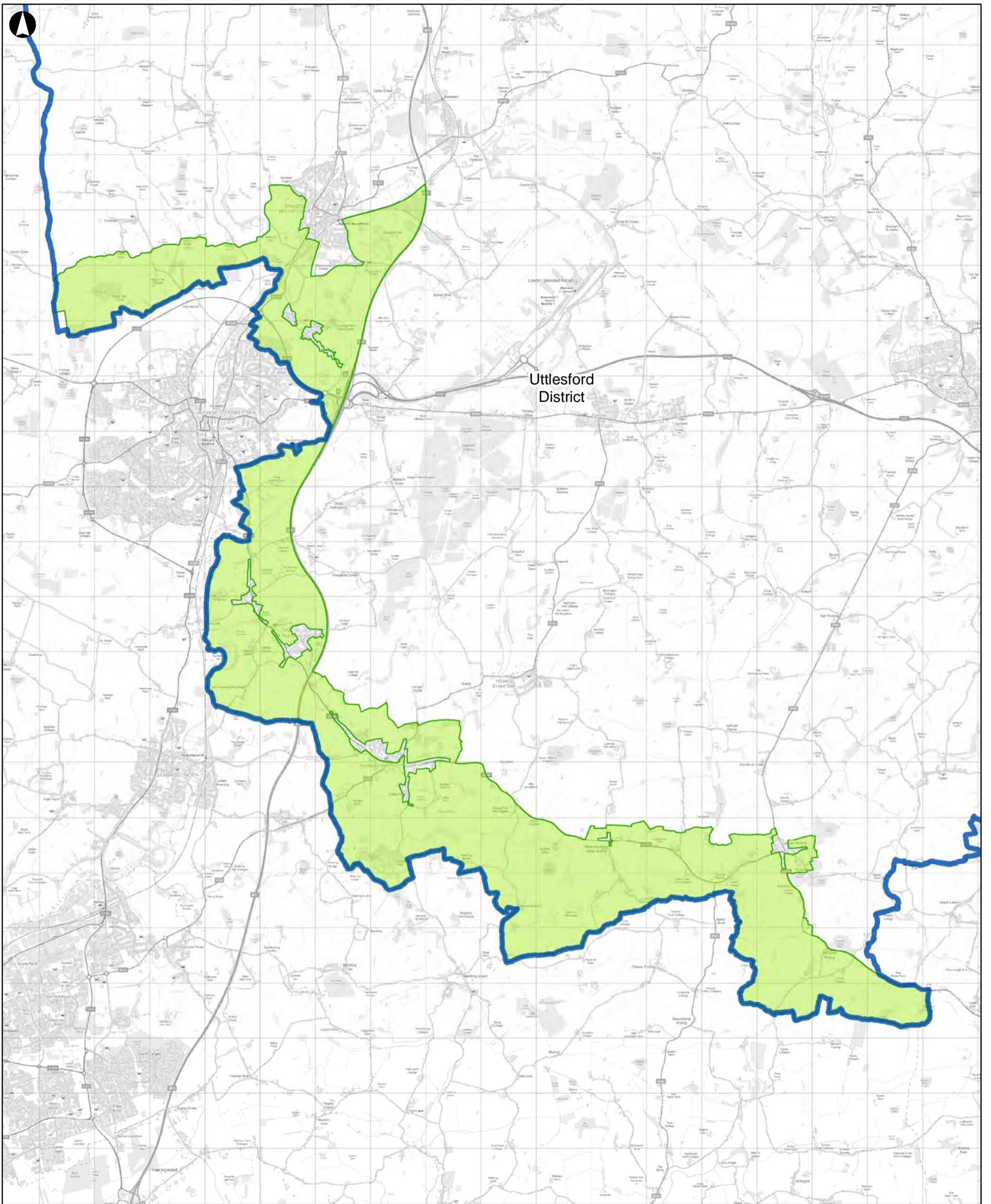
Figure 4.1 Methodology Overview



While there is a focus in the Tender Brief on the Areas of Search, the Review will assess the whole of the Green Belt within Uttlesford and will seek to ascertain:

- Whether all the land designated fulfils clear Green Belt purposes;
- The degree of significance attached to various parts of the Green Belt in strategic terms; and
- The extent to which some development in the Green Belt could promote sustainable patterns of development without compromising its overall purpose.

The extent of the Uttlesford Green Belt is shown in Map 4.1.



Legend

- Uttlesford Green Belt
- Uttlesford District Boundary

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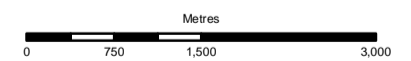
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Map 4.1 Uttlesford Green Belt

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4.2 Consultation

4.2.1 Duty to Cooperate

Since the introduction of the Localism Act (2011), Local Authorities hold the responsibility for strategic planning and a clear duty to cooperate on strategic issues, such as Green Belt. The potential release of any Green Belt land within Uttlesford may also impact on the role of the Green Belt in adjoining authority areas as part of the wider London Green Belt (however, recommendations will only apply to Uttlesford and not to neighbouring authorities). As a result it will be important to engage with neighbouring authorities on the proposed methodology and Green Belt parcels for assessment.

A roundtable workshop was held with the following authorities on 4th December 2015 to discuss the methodology and proposed parcels for assessment:

- East Herts District Council;
- Epping Forest District Council;
- Harlow District Council; and
- Essex County Council.

Chelmsford City Council and Hertfordshire County Council were unable to attend the workshop, but were provided with the draft methodology separately for comment.

A summary of the comments and any alterations to the methodology and parcels is provided below:

- Discussion around certain parcel boundaries adjacent to Bishop's Stortford, including suggestion that certain parcels could be merged/split based on appropriate boundary features and differences in character. [NB: These were subsequently reviewed during site visits and boundaries adjusted as appropriate].
- Sawbridgeworth and Lower Sheering to be considered as a single Large Build-Up Area for Purpose 1 given their functional relationship, but identified separately when assessing for Purpose 2.
- Additional clarity required in relation to methodology for Purposes 1 and 3.

4.2.2 Planning Policy Working Group

The proposed methodology and Green Belt parcels for assessment were presented to the Council's Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG) on 16th December 2015. The primary comments on the methodology raised during the presentation related to: the relationship of Uttlesford's historic settlements to the existing Green Belt; and the possibility of establishing new Green Belt around existing historic settlements (for example, Newport, Saffron Walden and Thaxted) in order to protect their historic setting.

With regard to the relationship between Uttlesford's historic settlements (and neighbouring historic settlements) and the existing Green Belt, and following the site visits, it was determined that there was insufficient functional relationship to require NPPF Purpose 4 to be considered as part of the Study (see section 4.4.4).

With regard to the issue of establishing new Green Belt around existing historic towns (Newport, Saffron Walden and Thaxted), paragraph 82 of the NPPF states that:

'New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. 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.'*

Having considered the identified locations, and in consideration of the above NPPF criteria, it was deemed that there was insufficient justification for land around Newport, Saffron Walden and Thaxted to be considered for the establishment of new Green Belt, in particular given the distance of such new Green Belt from the outer edges of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

4.3 Parcel Identification

4.3.1 Green Belt Parcels (General Areas)

Any potential alterations to the Green Belt must be based on a new permanent and defensible boundary; thus, permanent man-made and natural features have been selected as the basis of criteria for the identification of the General Areas. In particular, the boundaries of the General Areas are based on the following features (Map 4.2):

- Motorways;
- A and B Roads;
- Railway lines;
- Rivers (e.g. Stort, Roding)
- Brooks (e.g. Bourne, Stansted, Pincey, Parsonage).

Given the range of urban and rural conditions found in Uttlesford, from the semi-urban fringes of Bishop's Stortford in the north of the District's Green Belt area to the relatively unspoilt countryside in the south, a flexible approach to the identification of General Areas for assessment was deemed necessary. This was achieved through consideration of further sub-division of General Areas during the site visits in and around the non-Green Belt settlements using additional durable boundary features if required, such as

- Unclassified public roads and private roads;
- Smaller water features, including streams, canals and other watercourses;
- Prominent physical features (e.g. ridgelines);
- Existing development with strongly established, regular or consistent boundaries;
- Protected woodland or hedgerows.

This process of sub-division took account of the local context and involved an element of professional judgement. Such additional boundary features were also utilised in identifying General Areas in the south/south-east of the District where there is a largely rural character and flat topography.

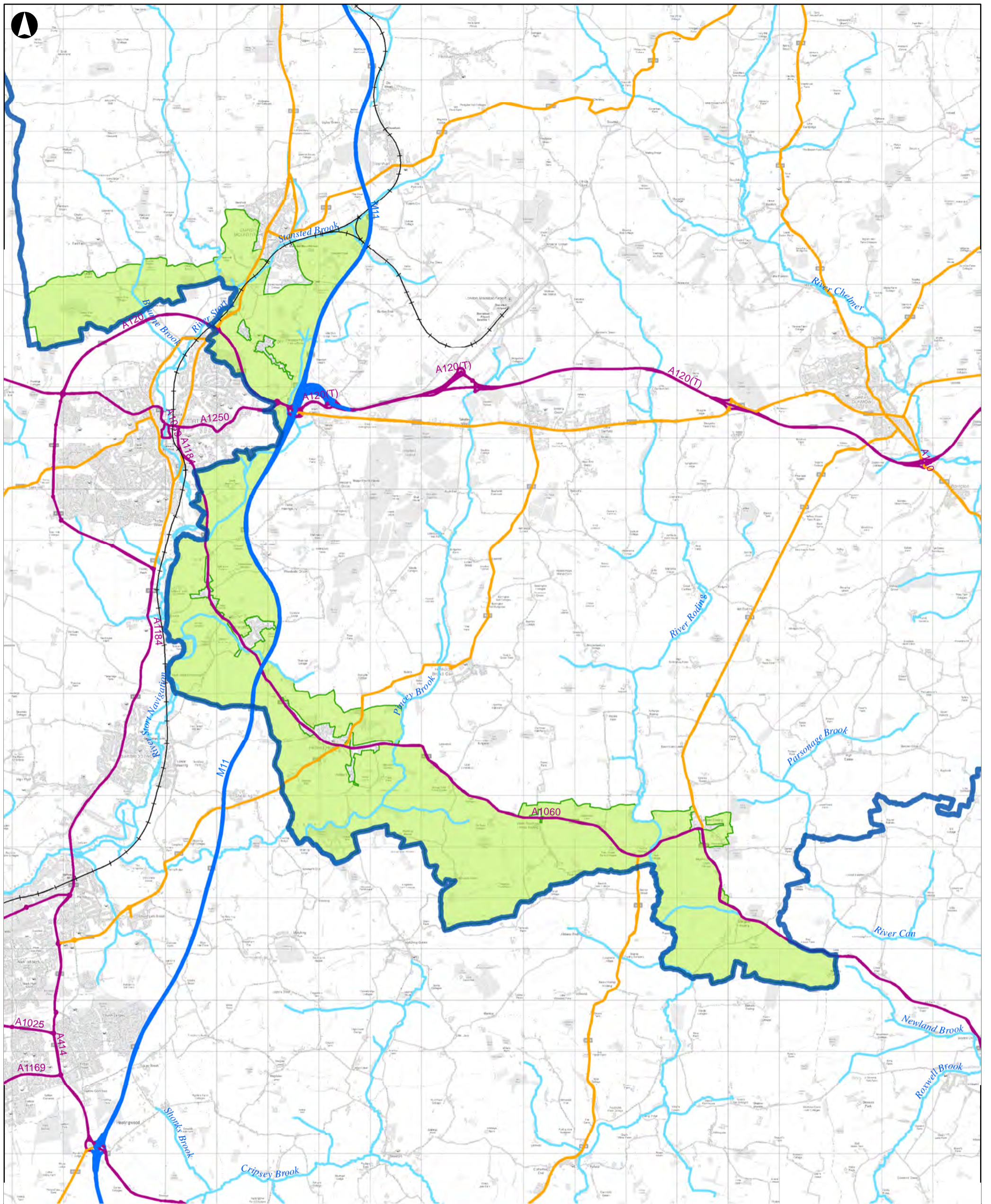
In some cases, boundary features were located close together, for example where roads, rivers, and/or railway lines running closely parallel to each other. Where appropriate, these features were taken together to form one boundary rather than separately which would lead to small slithers of Green Belt land which would not form logical parcels for assessment.

It was decided that, in cases where the Uttlesford District boundaries do not coincide with permanent and durable boundary features, General Areas would overlap with Green Belt in neighbouring authority areas to align with the nearest durable feature. This approach ensured a consistent approach to the assessment of Green Belt throughout Uttlesford and took into account the strategic, cross-boundary nature of the Metropolitan Green Belt. In cases where Green Belt at the edge of the District is not deemed to meet Green Belt purposes, this may have implications for its designation, not just within Uttlesford but also outside the District. However, it is important to note that this assessment will not directly influence the approaches to Green Belt in neighbouring authorities and no recommendations are ultimately made beyond the boundaries of Uttlesford.

4.3.2 General Areas

A total of 31 General Areas were identified for assessment (see Map 4.3¹⁴).

¹⁴ These were confirmed with officers from the respective neighbouring authorities at a workshop held on 4th December 2015.



Legend

-  Motorway
-  Railway Line
-  A Road
-  B Road
-  River
-  Lake / Reservoir
-  Uttlesford Green Belt
-  Uttlesford District Boundary

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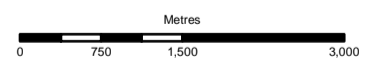
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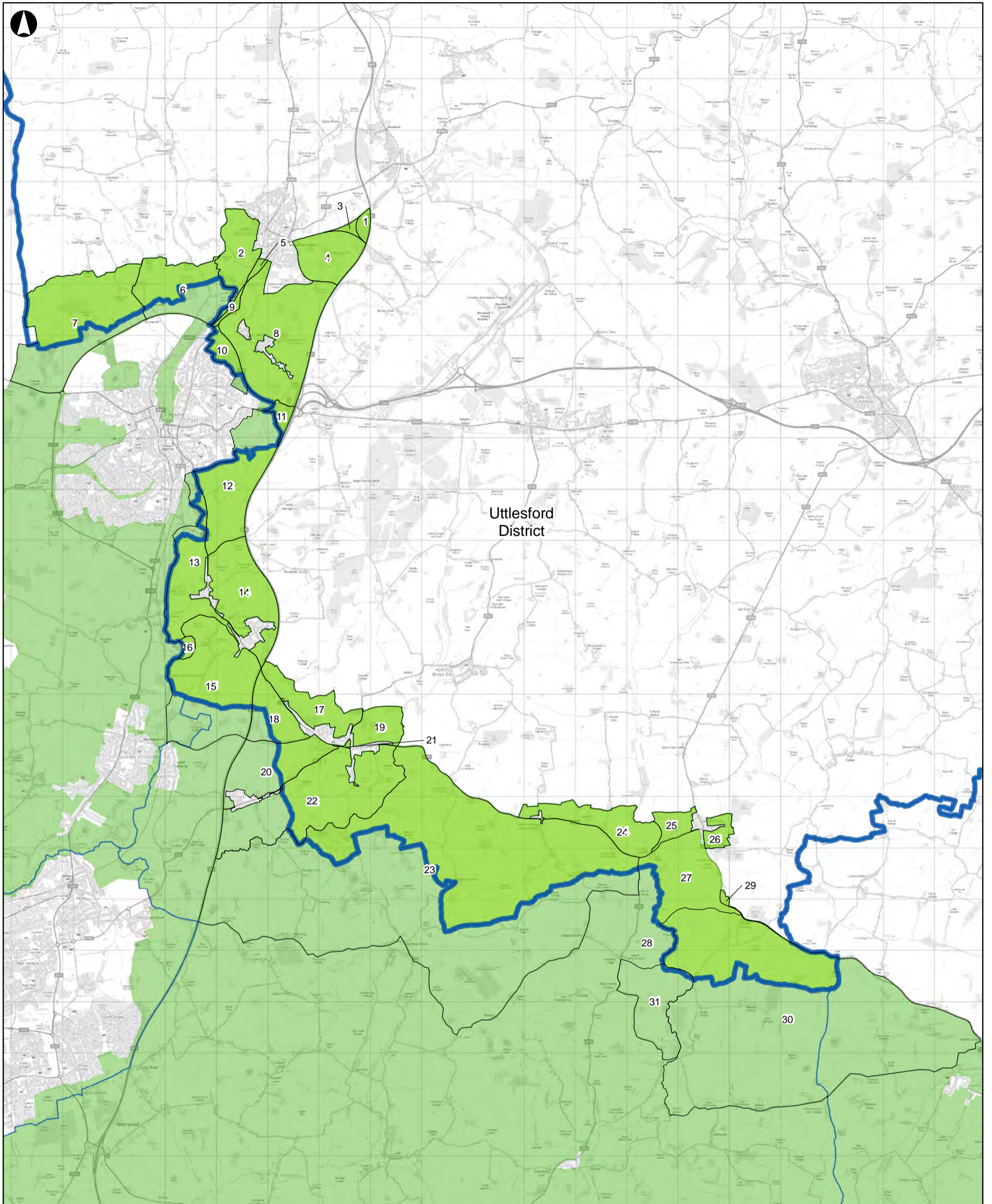
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**Map 4.2 Defining Features
for General Areas**

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Legend

- General Areas
- Uttlesford Green Belt
- Neighbouring Green Belt
- Uttlesford District Boundary
- Neighbouring District Boundary

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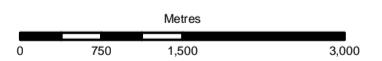
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Map 4.3 General Areas

Scale at A3

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4.4 General Area Assessment

Each of the General Areas identified in Map 4.3 was assessed against the NPPF purposes for Green Belt. There is no national guidance, which establishes exactly how such an assessment should be undertaken. The PAS guidance, recent examples and previous experience reiterates the need to respect local circumstances and the unique characteristics that affect the way that the NPPF purposes of the Green Belt are appraised.

The purpose of the assessment was to establish any differentiation in terms of how the General Areas in the existing Green Belt function and fulfil the purposes of the Green Belt.

For each purpose, one or more criteria were developed using both qualitative and quantitative measures. A score out of five was attributed for each criterion (Figure 4. 2). If a General Area was considered to have no contribution to a specific purpose, in addition to the detailed analysis undertaken, a statement was added to the pro-forma to this effect and a score of zero was attributed.

It is important to note that each of the NPPF purposes is considered equally significant, thus no weighting or aggregation of scores across the purposes was undertaken. As such, a composite judgement was necessary to determine whether, overall, General Areas are meeting Green Belt purposes strongly or weakly.

Figure 4. 2 Criterion Scores

Overall Strength of General Area against criterion	Score	Equivalent Wording
	1	Meets Criterion Weakly or Very Weakly
	2	Meets Criterion Relatively Weakly
	3	Meets Criterion
	4	Meets Criterion Relatively Strongly
	5	Meets Criterion Strongly or Very Strongly

Following the individual purpose assessments, an overall score was developed for each General Area. A rule of thumb was applied whereby:

- Any General Area scoring relatively strong, strongly or very strongly (4 or 5) against the criteria for one or more NPPF purpose was judged to be **strong** Green Belt overall;
- A General Area scoring moderately (3) against at least one purpose and failing to score strongly against any purpose (4 or 5) was adjudged as **moderate** Green Belt; and
- A General Area fulfilling the criteria relatively weakly, weakly or very weakly (1 or 2) across all purposes was deemed to be **weak** Green Belt.

The assessment also considered whether there were any small-scale sub-areas within General Areas which might be less sensitive and thus able to accommodate change. In these cases if present, a further assessment would consider the potential for Green Belt boundaries to be adjusted without significantly reducing ability to

meet NPPF purposes. These recommendations will be taken forward to inform any decisions taken on amending the Green Belt boundaries following further assessment work if required.

The following sections examine the definition of each of the five purposes of the Green Belt in relation to local objectives and role of the Green Belt in terms of achieving its purpose locally; and set out the criteria and associated scoring applied.

4.4.1 Purpose 1

Purpose 1: To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.

The original strategic purpose of the Metropolitan Green Belt was to check the sprawl of London. However, given the Uttlesford Green Belt is not directly adjacent to Greater London, this assessment also considers the role of General Areas in restricting the sprawl of large built-up areas across the District and within neighbouring local authorities. Large built-up areas for the purpose of this Review have generally been defined to correspond to the Tier 1 settlements (or equivalent) identified in the respective Local Plans for each authority or used in recent Green Belt studies, both within and outside Uttlesford, to ensure a robust and evidence-based approach to the assessment (see Map 4.4; Table 4. 1)¹⁵

For Uttlesford, large built-up areas are defined as the Market Towns identified in the withdrawn Uttlesford Local Plan (2014). Although withdrawn, the settlement hierarchy is considered to be a robust assessment of the settlement hierarchy for the district and is therefore appropriate for this Review. In addition, Stansted Airport is also considered a large built-up area given the size and scale of the built-form that the area covers, which is comparative to the extent of other large built-up areas that have been included in the Review. Similarly, Stansted Mountfichet has been defined as a large built-up area in the Review, contrary to its identification as a ‘*key village*’ in the withdrawn Uttlesford Local Plan 2014. Stansted Mountfichet has a different scale and character to other identified key villages and is considered to be more comparable in scale to other large built-up areas that have been considered for assessment, notably Sawbridgeworth which occupies a similar geographical area.

Although ‘*sprawl*’ is a multi-faceted concept and thus has a variety of different definitions, this Review has adopted a simple definition, considering sprawl as ‘*the outward spread of a large built-up area at its periphery in a sporadic, dispersed or irregular way*’. In order to appraise the extent to which the Green Belt keeps this in check, it is necessary to consider:

- a) Whether the General Area falls at the edge of one or more distinct large built-up area(s);

¹⁵ These were confirmed with officers from the respective neighbouring authorities at a workshop held on 4th December 2015.

- b) The degree to which the General Area is contained by built-form, and the nature of this physical containment, as well as the linkage to the wider Green Belt; and
- c) The extent to which the edge of the built-up area has a strongly defined, regular or consistent boundary.

Table 4. 1 Large Built-Up Areas Considered in Purpose 1 Assessment

Uttlesford ¹⁶	Neighbouring Local Authorities ^{17, 18}
Stansted Airport ¹⁹ Stansted Mountfitchet	Bishop's Stortford (East Herts) Chelmsford Urban Area (Chelmsford) Harlow (Harlow) Sawbridgeworth (East Herts) / Lower Sheering (Epping) ²⁰

There are two stages in this assessment:

Assessment 1(a)

Firstly, a General Area must be at the edge of one of more distinct large built-up areas in order to prevent development which would constitute sprawl. This criterion must therefore be met for Purpose 1 to be fulfilled and was applied on a *Pass/Fail* basis.

Assessment 1(b)

As stated at Assessment 1(a), Green Belt should function to protect open land at the edge of large built-up area(s) (Table 4.1). However, the extent to which a General Area prevents sprawl is dependent on its relationship with the respective built-up area(s).

Assessment 1(b) initially focussed on the degree to which Green Belt abuts or is contained by the built-up area(s), the nature of this relationship and links to the wider Green Belt. The following criteria area were used for assessment (see Figure 4. 3):

¹⁶ While Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow are identified as Market Towns, it was considered that they are located sufficiently far from the Uttlesford Green Belt so as to make them not relevant for this Review.

¹⁷ Large built-up areas within East Herts have been defined as the six 'main towns' and the one large 'Group 1' village (Watton-at-Stone) identified for consideration under Purpose 1 in the East Herts Green Belt Review (August 2015). However, it was considered that the following large built-up areas are located sufficiently far from the Uttlesford Green Belt so as to make them not relevant for this Review: Hertford, Ware, Stanstead Abbots, St Margarets, Watton-at-Stone.

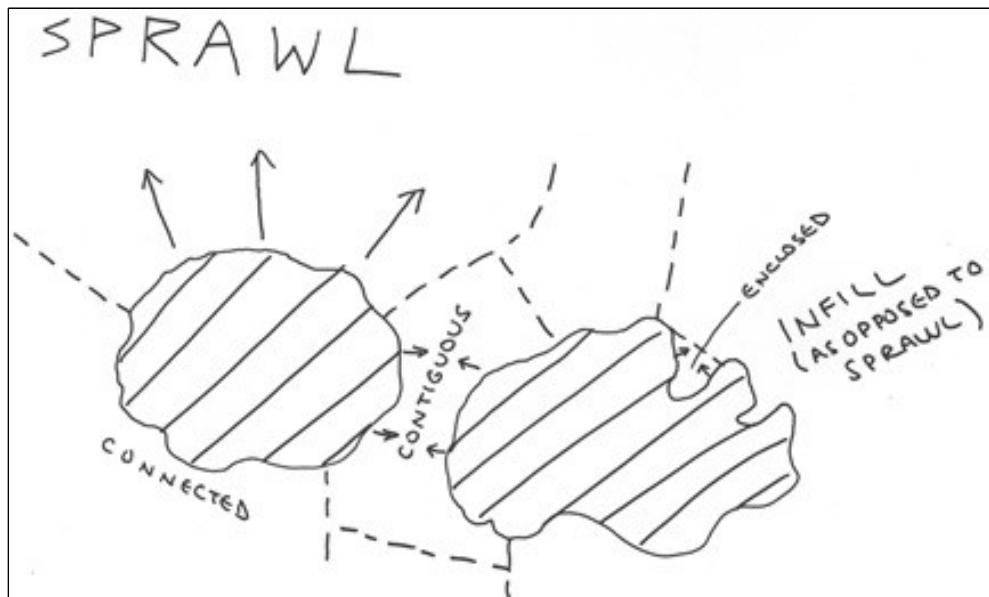
¹⁸ Large built-up areas within Chelmsford have been defined using the Settlement Hierarchy contained in the adopted Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (February 2008). However, it was considered that the South Woodham Ferrers Urban Area is located sufficiently far away from the Uttlesford Green Belt so as to make it not relevant for this Review.

¹⁹ The boundaries of the Stansted Airport large built-up area are defined by the Countryside Protection Zone.

²⁰ Sawbridgeworth / Lower Sheering are considered to act as a single functional settlement with regard to Purpose 1, as discussed and agreed at the workshop on 4th December 2015.

- A General Area predominantly surrounded or enclosed by two or more distinct areas of built form and that also retains a strong link to the wider Green Belt, would play a particularly important role in preventing sprawl. For the purpose of this assessment, this is referred to as ‘*contiguous*’.
- A General Area displaying a low level of containment by a large-built area, such as if it was simply abutting a large-built area, may prevent sprawl but to a lesser extent. This assessment refers to such areas as ‘*connected*’ with a large built-up area.
- A General Area almost entirely contained or surrounded by built development which forms part of a single built-up area and has limited connections to the wider Green Belt, would only prevent sprawl to a limited extent (rather, potential development would likely be classified as infill), is referred to here as ‘*enclosed*’ by a single built-up area.

Figure 4. 3 Diagram illustrating the relationship between large-built areas and land parcels, and whether the General Areas are contiguous, connected or enclosed.



This initial assessment was supplemented by additional analysis on the role of Green Belt in preventing sprawl which would not otherwise be restricted by another barrier. The NPPF states that Local Authorities should ‘*define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent*’ (paragraph 85). Boundary identification reflected this, based on the following definitions:

- Examples of durable features (likely to be permanent):
 - Infrastructure: motorway; public and made road; railway line; river.

- Landform: stream, canal or other watercourse; prominent physical feature (e.g. ridgeline); protected woodland/hedge; existing development with strongly established, regular or consistent boundaries.
- Examples of features lacking in durability (soft boundaries):
 - Infrastructure: private/unmade road; bridleway/footpath; power line.
 - Natural: field boundary; tree line.

Where sprawl would not otherwise have been restricted by a durable boundary feature, the extent to which the existing built form had strongly established or recognisable boundaries was assessed based on the following definitions:

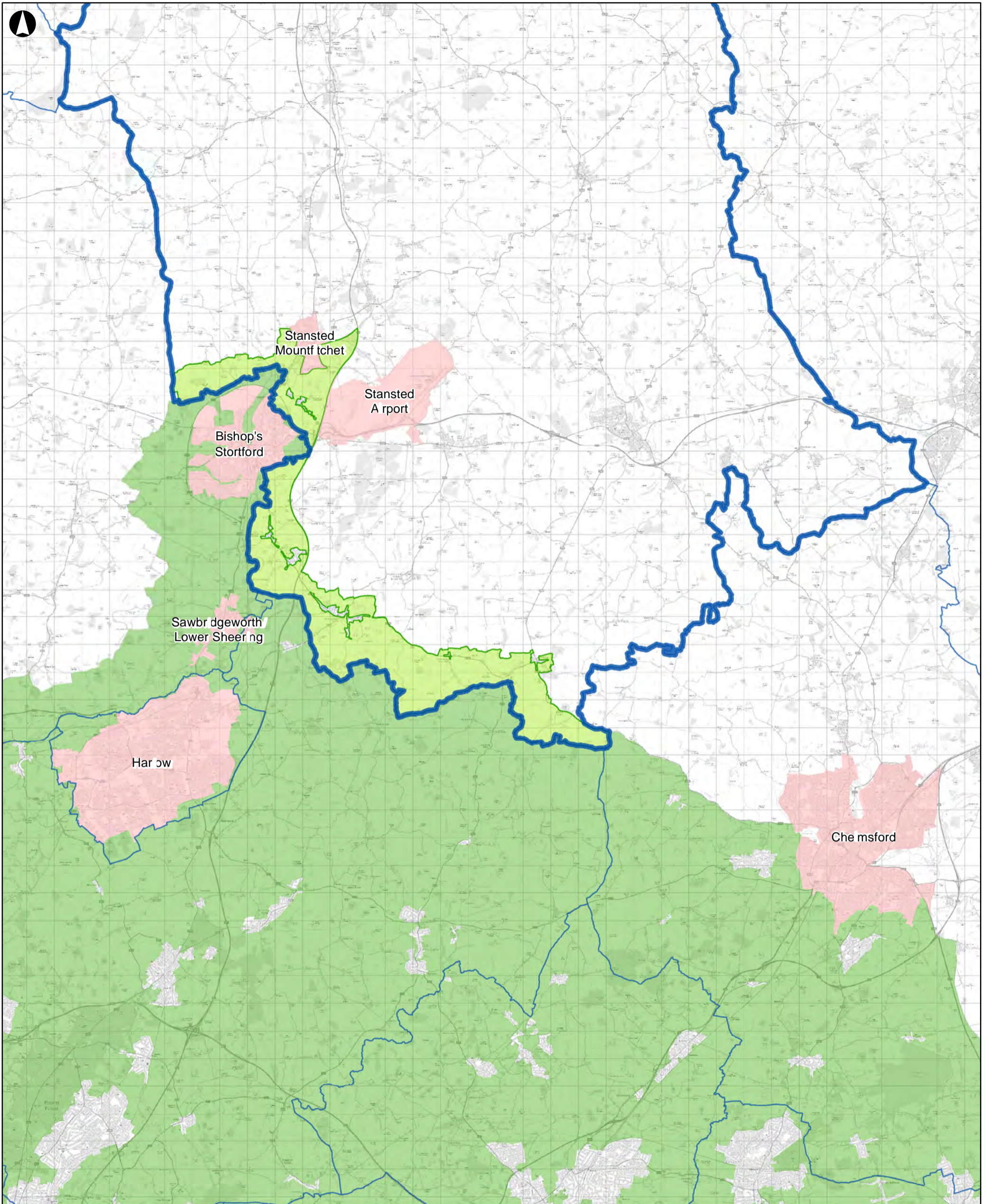
- '*Regular*' or '*Consistent*' built form comprising well-defined or rectilinear built-form edges, which would restrict development in the Green Belt.
- '*Irregular*' or '*Inconsistent*' built-form comprising imprecise or softer edges, which would not restrict growth within the Green Belt.

Purpose 1 Assessment Criteria

The criteria used to assess the General Areas against Purpose 1 are set out below. Ordnance Survey base maps and aerial photography, together with observations during the site visits, was used to undertake this assessment.

Purpose 1 Assessment Criteria

Purpose	Criteria	Score
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one or more large built-up areas.	PASS: General Area meets Purpose 1. FAIL: General Area does not meet Purpose 1 and will score 0 for Criteria (b).
	(b) Prevents the outward sprawl of a large built-up area into open land, and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary.	5+: General Area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas which are predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.
		5: General Area is contiguous with two or more large built-up areas which are predominantly bordered by prominent, permanent and consistent boundary features.
		3+: General Area is connected to one or more large built-up area(s) which is/are predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.
		3: General Area is connected to one or more large built-up area(s) which is/are predominantly bordered by prominent, permanent and consistent boundary features.
		1+: General Area is enclosed by one large built-up area which is predominantly bordered by features lacking in durability or permanence.
		1: General Area is enclosed by one large built-up area which is predominantly bordered by prominent, permanent and consistent boundary features.
	Score	xx/5



Legend

- Large Built-Up Areas
- Uttlesford Green Belt
- Neighbouring Green Belt
- Neighbouring District Boundary
- Uttlesford District Boundary

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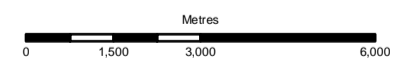
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**Map 4.4 Large Built Up
Areas Considered in Purpose 1
Assessment**

Scale at A3
1:130,000

Job No
000000-00

Drawing Status
Draft

Drawing No
4.4

Issue
P1

4.4.2 Purpose 2

Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

In addition to the clear function of this purpose in preventing towns from merging and therefore protecting existing gaps between towns, it also forms the basis for maintaining the existing settlement pattern. National policy provides no guidance over what might constitute ‘towns’ and whether this purpose should also take into consideration the gaps between smaller settlements.

Given the general concentration of development outside of the Green Belt in Uttlesford, the assessment of General Areas considered gaps between all non-green Belt settlements, together with relevant Key Villages beyond the boundaries of the Green Belt identified in the withdrawn Uttlesford Local Plan (2014). Although withdrawn, it is understood that this settlement hierarchy will be utilised in the forthcoming Local Plan and is therefore appropriate for this Review. Settlements in neighbouring local authority areas adjacent to areas of Green Belt in Uttlesford were identified as being all non-Green Belt settlements, together with settlements identified in respective Green Belt Review and using relevant local plans (Map 4.5; Table 4. 2:)²¹.

Table 4. 2: Settlements Considered in Purpose 2 Assessment

Uttlesford	Neighbouring Local Authorities
Birchanger	Bishop’s Stortford (East Herts)
Elsenham	Chelmsford Urban Area (Chelmsford)
Hatfield Heath	Fyfield (Epping Forest)
Leaden Roding	Harlow (Harlow)
Little Hallingbury	Lower Sheering (Epping Forest)
Stansted Airport	Roxwell (Chelmsford)
Stansted Mountfitchet	Sawbridgeworth (East Herts)
Takeley	Sheering (Epping Forest)
Wright’s Green	Writtle (Chelmsford)
White Roding	

The extent to which an area of Green Belt protects a land gap was assessed using the following definitions:

- ‘*Essential gaps*’, where development would significantly reduce the perceived or actual distance between settlements.
- ‘*Wider gaps*’, where limited development may be possible without coalescence between settlements.
- ‘*Less essential gaps*’, where development is likely to be possible without any risk of coalescence of settlements.

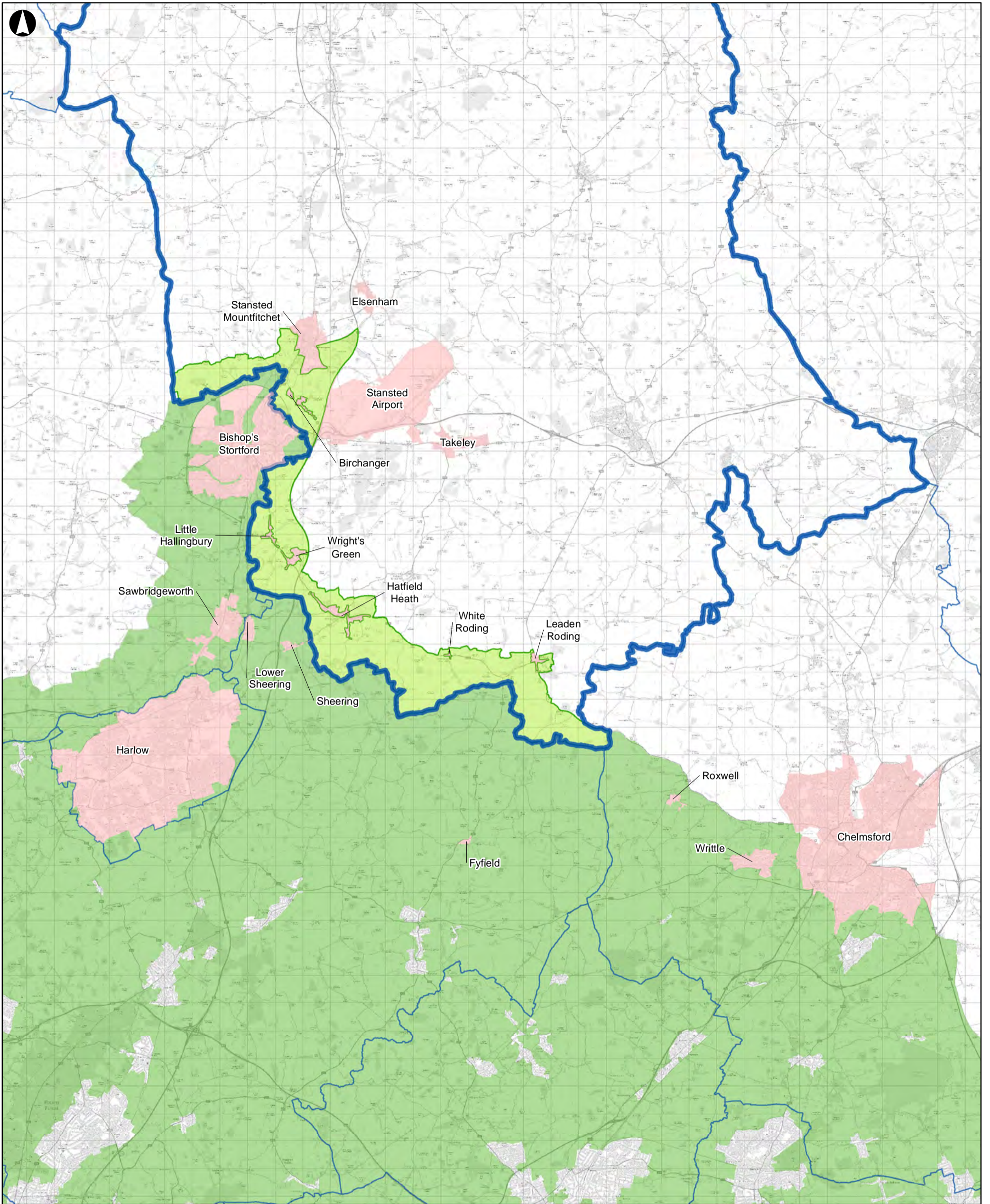
²¹ These were confirmed with officers from the respective neighbouring authorities at a workshop held on 4th December 2015.

Purpose 2 Assessment Criteria

The criteria used to assess the General Areas against Purpose 2 are set out below.

Purpose 2 Assessment Criteria

Purpose	Criteria	Score
To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Prevents development that would result in merging of, or significant erosion of, gap(s) between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements.	5: An essential gap between non-Green Belt settlements, where development would significantly visually or physically reduce the perceived or actual distance between them.
		3: A wider gap between non-Green Belt settlements where there may be scope for some development, but where the overall openness and the scale of the gap is important to restricting merging.
		1: A less essential gap between non-Green Belt settlements, which is of sufficient scale and character that development is unlikely to cause merging of settlements.
		0: General Area does not provide a gap between any settlements and makes no discernable contribution to separation.
	Score	xx/5



Legend

- Settlement
- Uttlesford Green Belt
- Neighbouring Green Belt
- Neighbouring District Boundary
- Uttlesford District Boundary

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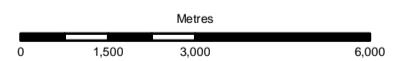
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Map 4.5 Settlements Considered in Purpose 2 Assessment

Scale at A3
1:130,000

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Drawing Status
Draft

Drawing No
4.5

Issue
P1

4.4.3 Purpose 3

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

This purpose seeks to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, or a gradual advancement of urbanising influences through physical development or land use change. The assessment considered openness and the extent to which the Green Belt can be characterised as ‘*countryside*’, thus resisting encroachment from development. Openness refers to the extent to which Green Belt land could be considered open from an absence of built development rather than from a landscape character perspective, where openness might be characterised through topography and presence or otherwise of woodland and hedgerow cover.

Historic open land uses associated with the urban fringe and urban characteristics as well as the countryside exist in the Uttlesford and include, but are not limited to public utilities, motorways and their intersections, educational institutions, hotels and some small areas of residential development. Some of these semi-urban uses have an impact on the ‘*openness*’ of the Green Belt as identified in the assessment.

Purpose 3 Assessment Criterion

The criterion used to assess the General Areas against Purpose 3 is set out below. Ordnance Survey base maps and aerial photography were reviewed in order to undertake the openness assessment. The percentage of built form within a General Area was calculated using GIS tools based on the land area of features that are classified as manmade (constructed) within the Ordnance Survey MasterMap data, excluding roads and railway lines. The data includes buildings, surfaced areas such as car parks, infrastructure such as sewerage treatment works, glasshouses and other miscellaneous structures.

The score attributed to a Local Area was initially determined on the basis of the percentage built form. Scores were considered further in light of qualitative assessments of character, undertaken through site visits and revised as judged appropriate²². This assessment considered, in particular, the extent to which Local Areas might be reasonably identified as ‘*countryside*’ / ‘*rural*’ (in line with the NPPF). In order to differentiate between different areas, broad categorisation was developed encompassing assessments of land use (including agricultural use), morphology, context, scale and links to the wider Green Belt:

- ‘*Strong unspoilt rural character*’ was defined as land with an absence of built development and characterised by rural land uses and landscapes, including agricultural land, forestry, woodland, shrubland/scrubland and open fields.

²² For example, General Areas with a relatively low level of built form (i.e. between 10-15%) and a largely rural character would score 3; however a General Area with a relatively low level of built form (i.e. between 10-15%) but with an urban character (such as formal open space designation covering the entire General Area) would score 1. This allows for adjustments to the score as appropriate in situations where the character and the percentage of built form are not aligned.

- ‘*Largely rural character*’ was defined as land with a general absence of built development, largely characterised by rural land uses and landscapes but with some other sporadic developments and man-made structures.
- ‘*Semi-urban character*’ was defined as land which begins on the edge of the fully built-up area and contains a mix of urban and rural land uses before giving way to the wider countryside. Land uses might include publicly accessible natural green spaces and green corridors, country parks and local nature reserves, small-scale food production (e.g. market gardens) and waste management facilities, interspersed with built development more generally associated with urban areas (e.g. residential or commercial).
- ‘*Urban character*’ was defined as land which is predominantly characterised by urban land uses, including physical developments such as residential or commercial, or urban managed parks.

Purpose 3 Assessment Criteria

Purpose	Criteria	Score
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development.	5. Contains less than 5% built form and possesses a strong unspoilt rural character.
		4. Contains less than 10% built form and possesses a largely rural character.
		3. Contains between 10% and 15% built form and/or possesses a largely rural character.
		2. Contains more than 15% built form and/or possesses a semi-urban character.
		1. Contains less than 20% built form and possesses an urban character.
		0. Contains more than 20% built form and possesses an urban character.
Score		xx/5

4.4.4 Purpose 4

Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

This purpose serves to protect the setting of historic settlements by retaining the surrounding open land or by retaining the landscape context for historic centres. As outlined in the advice note published by PAS²³, the assessment of this purpose relates to very few settlements in practice, due largely to the pattern of modern development that often envelopes historic towns today. Cambridge is a good example of a settlement where the setting of the historic centre is contextualised by rural features, where the views across the ‘backs’ retain a special status in planning terms.

Following discussions with the Council at the project inception meeting, it was determined that there are no instances where the Uttlesford Green Belt directly

²³ PAS (2015) *Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt*.

abuts, or plays a functional role in the setting of, historic towns/cores within the District. However, examination of Green Belt studies undertaken by neighbouring authorities, together with the Essex Historic Towns SPG (1999), identified the following settlements as being of possible relevance to Purpose 4:

- East Herts (East Herts Green Belt Review (2015):
 - Bishop’s Stortford – Some ‘inner’ parts of the Bishop’s Stortford green wedges identified.
 - Sawbridgeworth – In particular the north-east side which is identified in the East Herts Green Belt Review as having a noticeable historical character that extends to the edge of the settlement. The settlement as a whole is also identified in the Epping Forest Green Belt Review Stage 1 (September 2015).
 - Watton-at-Stone.
- Epping Forest (Epping Forest Green Belt Review Stage 1 (September 2015) and the Essex Historic Towns SPG (1999)):
 - Epping.
 - Chipping Ongar.
 - Waltham Abbey.
- Chelmsford (Essex Historic Towns SPG (1999):
 - Chelmsford.
 - Pleshey.

Table 4. 3 sets out those settlements from the above listed which were initially considered relevant to the Review on the basis of their potential functional relationship with the Uttlesford Green Belt.

Table 4. 3 Historic Settlements identified for consideration in Purpose 4 Assessment

Uttlesford	Neighbouring Local Authorities
N/A	Sawbridgeworth (East Herts)

However, following the site visits, it was agreed with the Council that Purpose 4 was not relevant to the Uttlesford Green Belt Review only one General Area (15) was located near to the historic element of Sawbridgeworth (defined by a Conservation Area) and only adjoined on its very south-east corner (land within East Hertfordshire). It was therefore deemed that the General Area, in particular the land within Uttlesford District, had no functional relationship with the historic area of Sawbridgeworth. Given that no other General Areas abut any identified historic areas, it was agreed that Purpose 4 should be excluded from the Review. See section 5.2.5 for further information relating to General Area 15 and Purpose 4.

4.4.5 Purpose 5

Purpose 5: To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Purpose 5 focuses on assisting urban regeneration through the recycling of derelict and other urban land. As outlined in Section 3.3, the advice note issued by PAS suggests that the amount of land within urban areas that could be developed will already have been factored in before identifying Green Belt land. Therefore, assessment of Green Belt against this purpose will not enable a distinction between General Areas as all Green Belt achieves the purpose to the same extent.

Furthermore, during engagement with the Council, it was confirmed that there are no planned urban regeneration schemes that were being inhibited by Green Belt designations.

As a result, Purpose 5 was excluded from the Review.

4.5 Pro-Forma

The pro-forma template for the General Area assessments is provided in Appendix B.

4.6 Recommendations

Following completion of the General Area assessments, the criterion scores for Purposes 1-3 were collated and tabulated across all of the General Areas, to highlight those areas meeting the purposes to a lesser or greater extent.

General Areas which meet the Green Belt purposes strongly have been identified clearly and the recommendation made to the Council that these Areas are less preferable for release.

As identified in chapter 5, no General Areas were identified as performing weakly. However, where Green Belt boundary anomalies were identified during the assessments, these are identified in the findings of this report.

It is understood that the outcome and recommendations from the Review will form part of the Council's suite of evidence-based studies to determine which of the identified Areas of Search should be progressed in its forthcoming plan making (and conversely, which to rule out). It is this suite of documents which will demonstrate any 'exceptional circumstances' to justify an amendment to the Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan process.

5 Key Findings

5.1 Fundamental Aims

According to the NPPF, the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to ‘*prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open*’ and the essential characteristic of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. Whilst General Areas have been assessed individually to ascertain their contribution to preventing sprawl under the Purpose 1 assessment, the Study has also noted qualitatively that, at the strategic level, wider swathes of Green Belt play a particularly important role with respect to the fundamental aim.

Collectively, the areas of land in the north extent of the Uttlesford Green Belt play an important strategic role in keeping the land permanently open. Four of the five large built-up areas identified in Map 4.4 are located in the north half of the Uttlesford Green Belt designation where the Green Belt has an enhanced role to prevent sprawl. This is particularly seen around the large built-up areas of Bishop’s Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport which would be at risk of merging as a result of sprawl in the northern part of the Green Belt. The scale of the gaps are narrower and sprawl would result in the actual or perceived distance between the large built-up areas being significantly reduced, and potentially lost altogether. Large built-up areas are able to extend into open countryside where it is not bound by Green Belt policy, however the Uttlesford Green Belt is important in maintaining the distinct settlement patterns in the Green Belt and in keeping them as separate large built-up areas. There are fewer large built-up areas in the southern extent of the Green Belt designation, which are also at a greater scale apart. The Green Belt plays less of an important strategic role in keeping land permanently open in the south extent.

5.2 Green Belt General Areas

5.2.1 Local Areas for Assessment

A total of 31 General Areas were identified for assessment (see Map 4.3) using the methodology described in Section 4.3. General Areas were defined using permanent and durable features including motorways, roads, railway lines, and rivers. Following consultation with stakeholders and site visits, parcel boundaries were reviewed and revised if necessary.

The completed pro-formas for each General Area can be found in Annex Report 1. Table 5.1 sets out the scores for each General Area against NPPF Purposes 1-3. The scoring is illustrated spatially in Maps 5.1 – 5.3, and overall scores in Map 5.4.

5.2.2 Purpose 1 Assessment

19 of the 31 General Areas (61%) do not lie at the edge of an identified large built-up area and do not directly prevent sprawl, thus failing to meet Purpose 1. While some of these General Areas abut the edges of settlements such as Hatfield

Heath and White Roding, they play no role in preventing the sprawl of 'large built-up areas' (in reference to the specific policy set out in NPPF Paragraph 80, and defined for the purposes of this Assessment in of this report).

With the exception of General Areas 1, 3, 14 and 16, all the General Areas that fail Purpose 1 and do not prevent the sprawl of large built-up areas are in the southern half of the Uttlesford Green Belt, lying to the east of the M11 as shown in Map 5.1. This southern area of the Green Belt has no identified large built-up areas (as shown in Map 4.4) so were able only to score a 0 for Purpose 1 in line with the methodology. This highlights the importance of the northern half of the Uttlesford Green Belt in preventing sprawl of large built-up areas.

No parcels score a 1 or 1+ for Purpose 1 which would have indicated General Areas that were enclosed by a large built-up area and which were predominantly bordered by features which were either lacking in durability or permanence (1+), or that were permanent and consistent boundary features (1).

11 of the 31 General Areas (35%) score a 3 or 3+ for Purpose 1, meaning that the General Area is connected to large built-up areas. All of these parcels are located in the north of the Uttlesford Green Belt (west of the M11) where the Green Belt plays a role in preventing the sprawl of Bishop's Stortford (eight General Areas), Stansted Mountfitchet (four General Areas), and Stansted Airport (two General Areas). Four of these General Areas (three connected to Bishop's Stortford – General Areas 2, 10, 12, and 13; and one connected to Stansted Mountfitchet – General Area 2) score a 3+ for Purpose 1 meaning the land parcels play a heightened role in preventing sprawl by providing a barrier where the boundary between the Green Belt and the large built-up area is not robust, durable or readily recognisable.

General Area 8 is the only land parcel that meets Purpose 1 strongly and scores a 5 as it is contiguous with both Bishop's Stortford and Stansted Airport. General Area 8 plays a particularly important role in preventing sprawl from two large built-up areas into open land. None of the parcels score a 5+.

5.2.3 Purpose 2 Assessment

Four of the 31 General Areas (13 %) fail to meet Purpose 2 and make no discernable contribution to the separation of settlements. Three of these (General Areas 7, 19, and 26) are located at the outer edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt and are not situated between settlements considered in the Purpose 2 Assessment (shown in Map 4.5). As such, these parcels cannot score more than 0. General Area 27 is located between Leaden Roding and Fyfield, but the scale of the gap is large enough that it makes no discernible contribution to separation.

A total of six land parcels (19%) meet Purpose 2 weakly scoring 1; five of which are in the south half of the Uttlesford Green Belt where there are fewer settlements considered for this purpose (as shown in Map 4.5). Parcels 23 and 30 are the two largest parcels in the Study and provide a less essential gap between non-Green Belt settlements where some development would be unlikely to cause the merging of settlements.

The highest proportion of General Areas score a 3 for Purpose 2, totalling 15 of the 31 land parcels (48%). This indicates that the land parcels meet the Green Belt purpose, but where there may be some scope for development without causing the merging of neighbouring towns. These General Areas are predominantly located in the north and middle of the Uttlesford Green Belt, forming a wider gap between settlements including Stansted Mountfitchet, Wright's Green, and Hatfield Heath. The scale of the gap between these neighbouring towns is smaller than in the southern extent of the Green Belt.

Six of the 31 land parcels (19%) score a 5, meeting Purpose 2 strongly. These General Areas are identified as essential gaps between non-Green Belt settlements where development would significantly visually or physically reduce the perceived or actual distance between them. The scale of the gaps are at the narrowest here and between settlements situated in close proximity to one another, for example General Area 8 which separates Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport from merging and General Area 20 which is essential in preventing Sheering and Hatfield Heath from merging. These land parcels are particularly important to keeping the settlement pattern in the Uttlesford Green Belt.

5.2.4 Purpose 3 Assessment

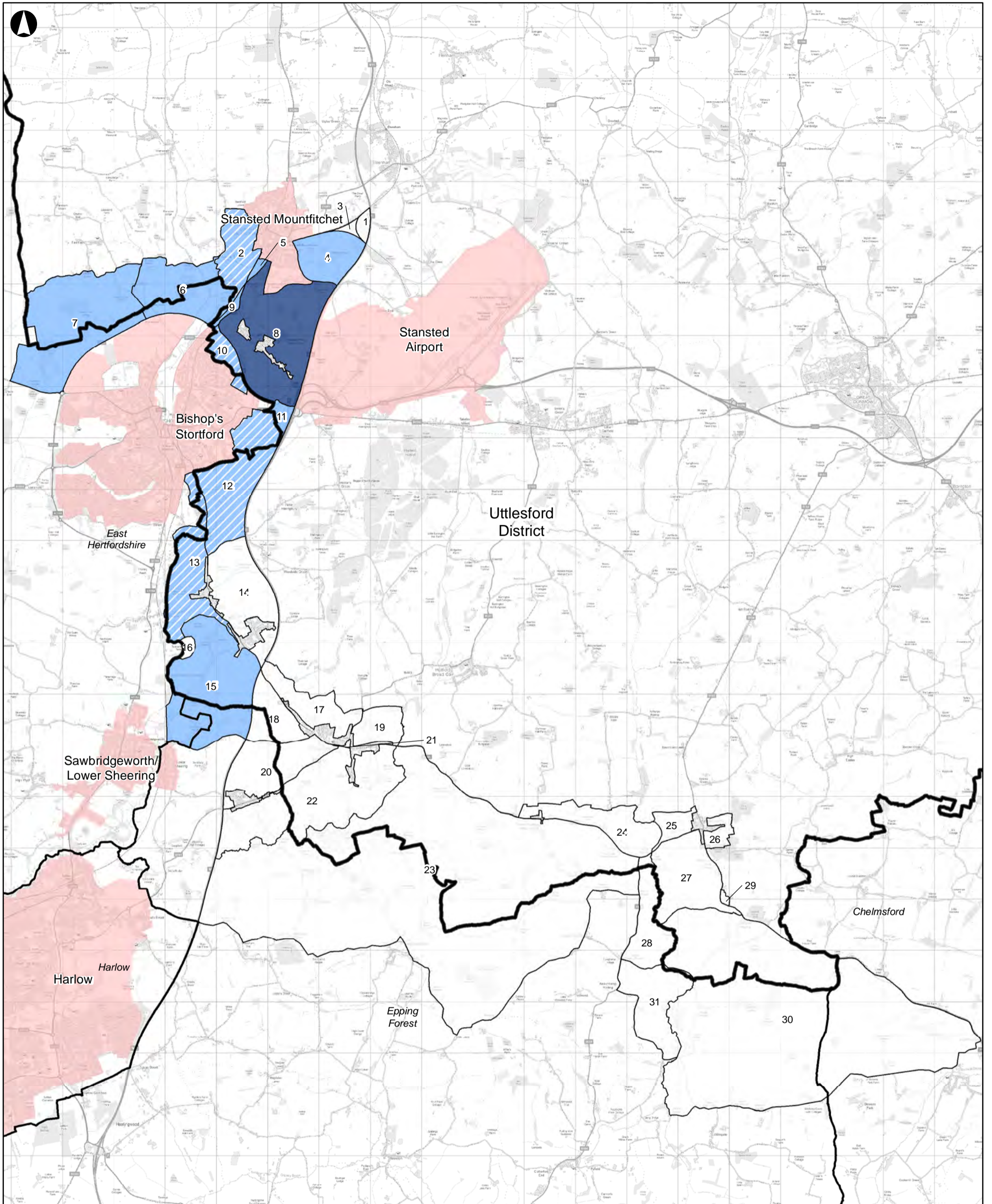
The majority of the General Areas meet Purpose 3 strongly in contributing to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. 25 of the 31 land parcels (81%) contained less than 3% built form, an indication of the largely rural character of the Uttlesford Green Belt. Qualitative assessment on site affirmed the lack of urbanising influences and showed that the existing built-form was largely small areas of ribbon development, agricultural buildings, or churches/community uses. There were also some small business parks and utilities distributed across the study area, but their urbanising impact was low.

Only one land parcel (General Area 11, situated east of Bishop's Stortford) scored a 0 for Purpose 3. 24% of this land parcel is covered by built form, including a hotel, Welcome Break services, and a petrol station. The rural feel is significantly diminished by the M11 and approach roads. This land parcel does little to assist the countryside from encroachment.

No land parcels scored a 1 or 2, which would have indicated General Areas that have 15-20% built-form and possess a semi-urban or urban character.

Only General Area 5, situated north-east of Bishop's Stortford, scored a 3 for Purpose 3, characterised as largely rural with approximately 13% built form. This is a very small land parcel with a large manor house, small-industrial site, and several houses.

Despite the two anomalies discussed above, the remaining land parcels were largely open and rural in feel, with a general absence of built-form. 14 of the 31 General Areas (45%) score a 4 for Purpose 3, and characterise the land parcels as containing less than 10% built form and possessing a largely rural character. These land parcels show where the Green Belt is protecting the openness of the countryside to a large extent.



Legend

Purpose 1b		3+		General Areas
0		4		Neighbouring District Boundary
1		4+		Uttlesford District Boundary
1+		5		P1 Settlements
3		5+		

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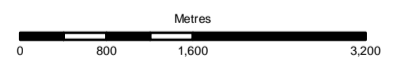
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**Map 5.1b Purpose 1b
Assessment Scores**

Scale at A3

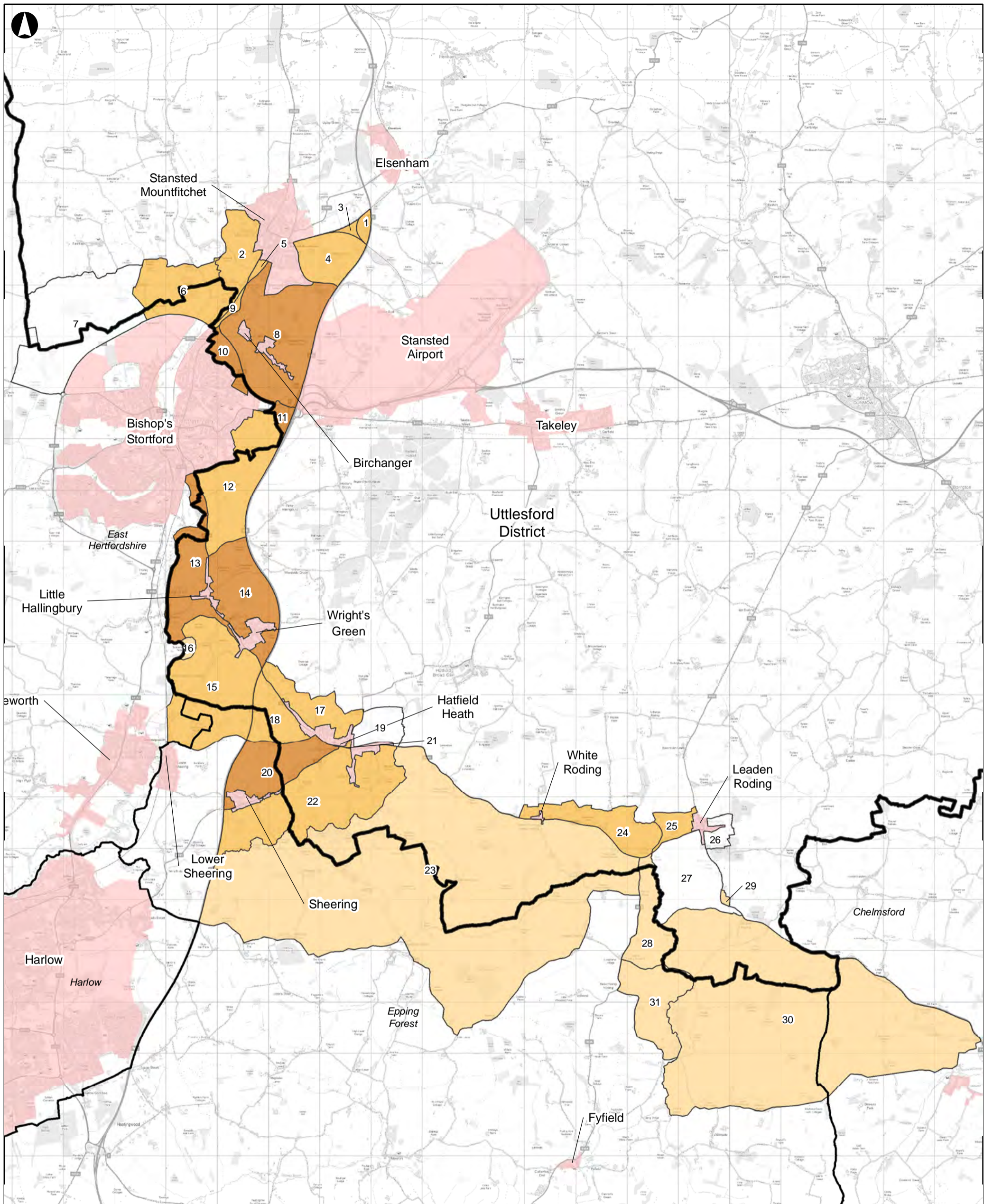
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Job No
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Drawing Status
Draft

Drawing No
5.1b

Issue
P1



Legend

Purpose 2

- General Areas
- Neighbouring District Boundary
- Uttlesford District Boundary
- 0
- 1
- 3
- 5

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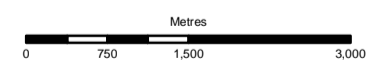
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**Map 5.2 Purpose 2
Assessment Scores**

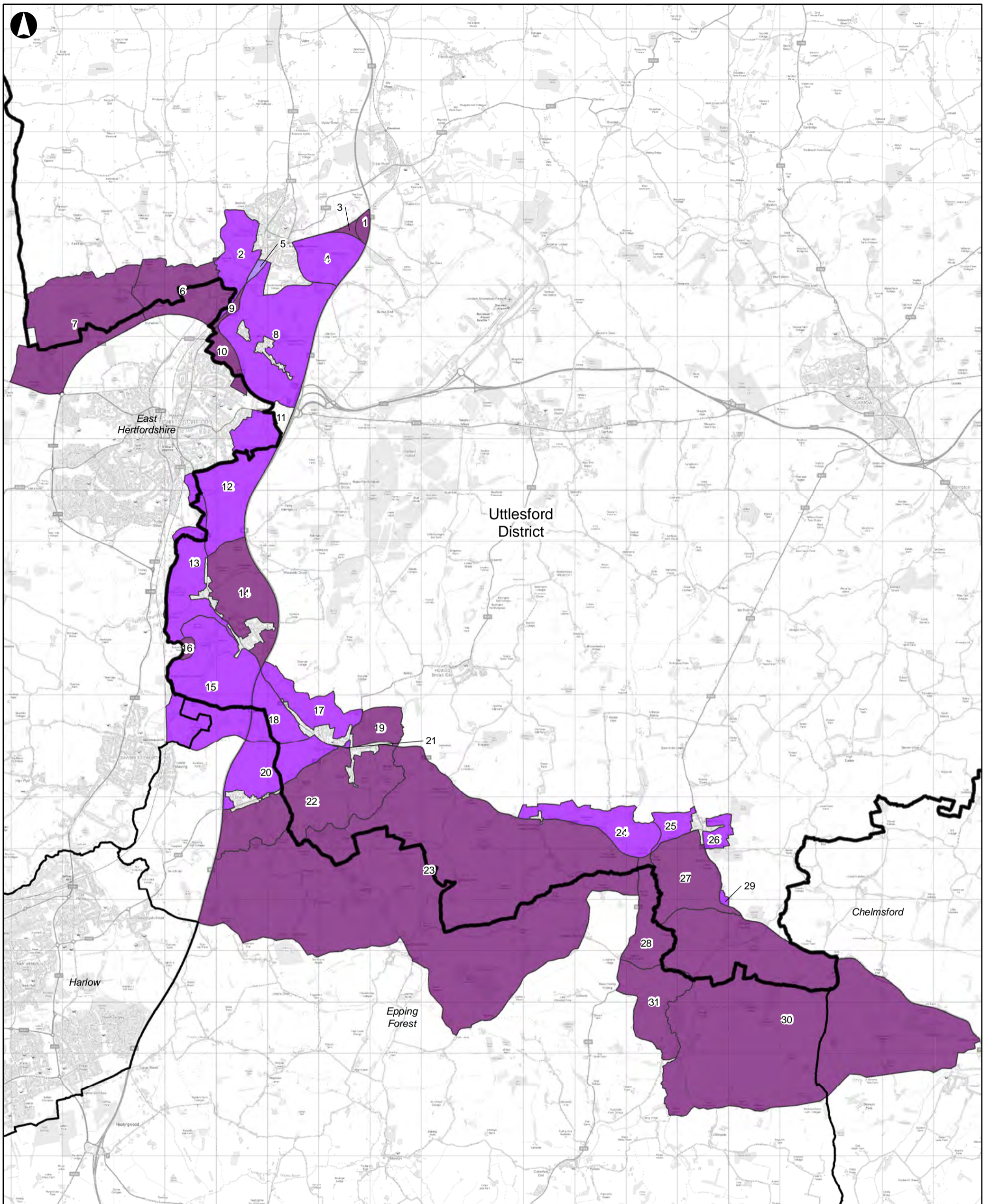
Scale at A3
1:70,000

Job No
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Drawing Status
Issue

Drawing No
5.2

Issue
P1



Legend

Purpose 3

- General Areas
- Neighbouring District Boundary
- Uttlesford District Boundary
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

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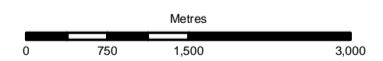
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Map 5.3 Purpose 3 Assessment Scores

Scale at A3

1:70,000

Job No
000000-00

Drawing Status
Issue

Drawing No
5.3

Issue
P1

General Areas scoring 4 were largely situated in the north of the Uttlesford Green Belt (to the west of the M11), apart from General Areas 24, 25, and 26 which were noted for their largely rural interiors to the parcel, but with the presence of some commercial use, a sub-station/sewage works, a church and a school. Those land parcels scoring 4 in the north of the Green Belt are in closer proximity to large built-up areas so are more susceptible to encroachment to the countryside. General Area 2 for example contains some housing development and sewage works on Limekiln Lane, and in General Area 13 there is development associated with an allotment, a canoe club, and a caravan site. Despite the small percentage of built-form, land parcels scoring 4 were largely characterised with areas of arable uses, rural settings, and rolling hills with views across open countryside, and which assist the prevention of the countryside from encroachment to a greater extent.

The remaining 15 land parcels (55%) scored very highly for Purpose 3. With a score of 5, these land parcels contained less than 5% built-form and possess a strong unspoilt rural character. Around half of these parcels are in the south of the Uttlesford Green Belt, and given their distance from large-built up areas and urban influences, their score is perhaps unsurprising. These land parcels are dominated by rural land uses, rolling hills, and long views. However, even land parcels located near large-built up areas including Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport in the north of the Green Belt score strongly on Purpose 3, and share similar characteristics to those described in the south part of the Green Belt. These 15 land parcels strongly assist the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment.

5.2.5 Purpose 4 Assessment

Purpose 4 seeks to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. The purpose serves to protect the surrounding open land or by retaining the landscape context for historic centres. As set out in section 4.4.4, the only historic town of relevance to the Study is Sawbridgeworth; specifically the Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area which is located to (but not within) the very south-west corner of General Area 15. There are some references in the Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area Appraisal (2014) to the relationship between this section of the Conservation Area and the wider countryside. These are provided below (emphasis added):

*6.22 From the east the Lower Sheering conservation area is **approached through rolling countryside down a steep winding lane with hedgerows and trees either side. The group of former malting buildings which form the basis of the conservation area can be seen across the fields in splendid isolation.** The approach is thence down Lower Sheering Lane, lined with abundant trees to the right but open to the fields to the left.*

*6.23 Closer views are of the listed buildings looming above a small group of brick cottages which emphasise their massive height. **Views out from the conservation area here are over open countryside which enhances their setting.***

7.107 There are good middle distance views of each group [re East Maltings buildings] from the opposite sides of the railway line and long distance views from the river valley to the north, the Hatfield Heath Road and Hallingbury Road.

There is therefore an identified relationship between the wider countryside (East Herts Green Belt) and the Conservation Area. However, it was noted from the site visits that only the furthest south-west corner of General Area 15 (within East Herts) is connected to the Conservation Area and the relationship between the land parcel and the Conservation Area is minimal. The approach is not characterised by rolling hills and views are short. The photographs below show the view from the edge of the Conservation Area looking towards the East Herts Green Belt (Figure 5.1) and the view from the edge of the East Herts Green Belt looking towards the Conservation Area (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.1 View looking north-east from the level crossing at Sawbridgeworth railway station in the south-west of the land parcel.



Figure 5.2 View looking south-west towards the level crossing at Sawbridgeworth Station in the south-west of the parcel.



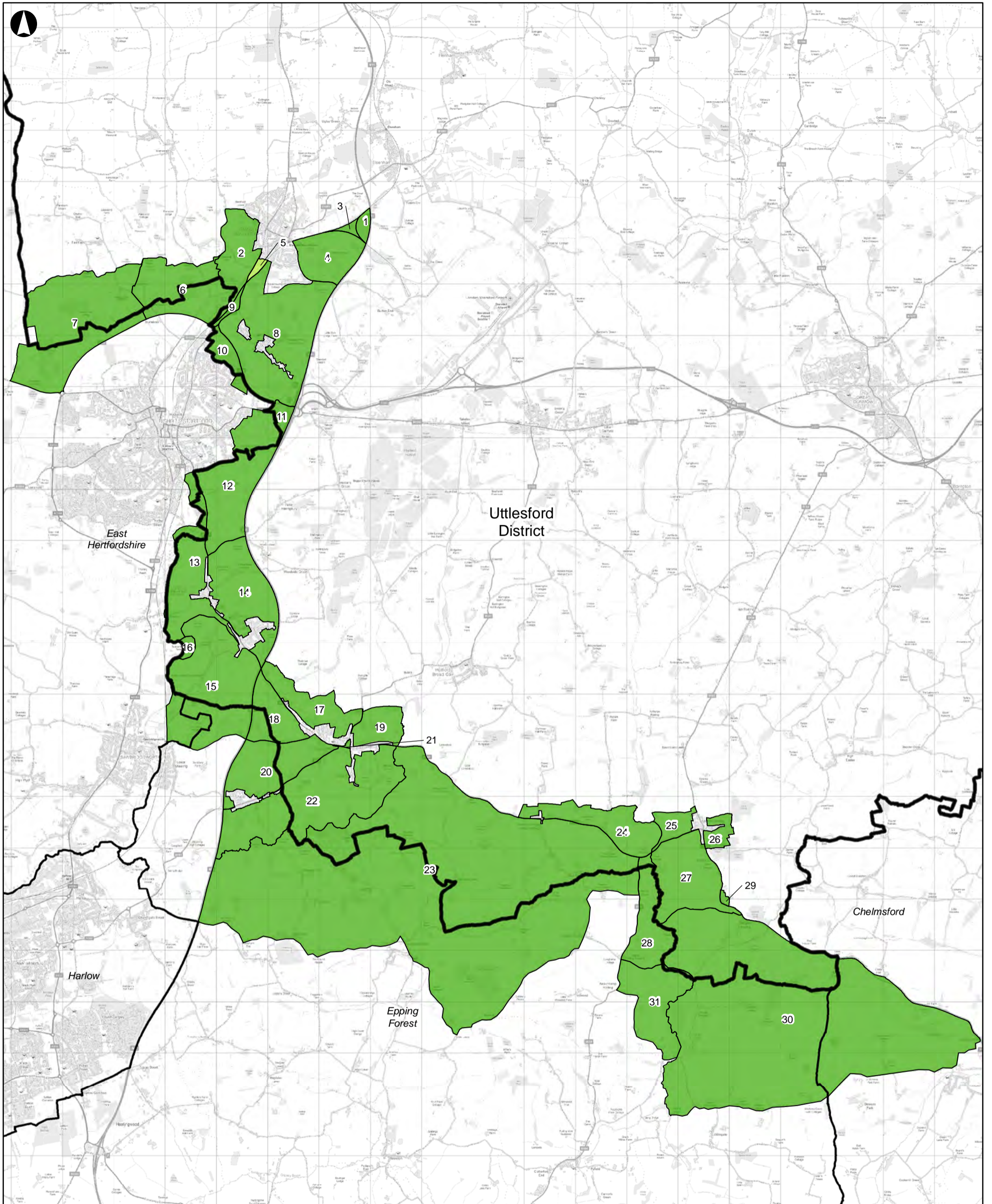
It was deemed that General Area 15 makes a very limited contribution to Purpose 4 and no contribution to Purpose 4 to the Uttlesford Green Belt. Although providing a broad contextual setting for the north-east corner of the Conservation Area by maintaining open land, there is little direct visual interface with the Conservation Area itself as the approach offers no long views into countryside and is marred by the backs of buildings including a pub and railway station.

5.3 Overall Summary

All 31 General Areas meet two or more of the NPPF purposes. The individual purpose scores for the Green Belt General Areas are set out in Table 5. 1 below, and are shown geographically in Maps 5.1b-5.3, and overall scores in Map 5.4.

In order to summarise the outcomes from the assessment, the Local Areas have been categorised as follows:

- 30 Local Areas are judged to be **strong** Green Belt, meeting **at least one** of the purposes strongly (scoring 4 or 5);
- 1 Local Area is judged to be **moderate** Green Belt, scoring moderately (3) against **at least one** purpose and failing to score strongly against any purpose (4 or 4);
- 0 Local Areas are judged to be **weak** Green Belt, as **at least one** purpose is met moderately or strongly.



Legend

- Overall Scores**
- Strong
 - Moderate
 - Weak
- General Areas
 - Neighbouring District Boundary
 - Uttlesford District Boundary

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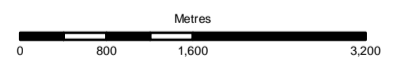
P1	08-02-16	MM	ML	AB
Issue	Date	By	Chkd	Appd

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Uttlesford District Council

Job Title
Uttlesford Green Belt Boundary Review



Map 5.4 Overall Assessment Scores

Scale at A3

1:70,000

Job No
000000-00

Drawing Status
Draft

Drawing No
5.4

Issue
P1

Table 5. 1 Overall summary of findings for Purpose Assessment

Parcel	Area (hectares)	Purpose Assessments				
		Purpose 1 – To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas		Purpose 2 – To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Purpose 3 – Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Overall Summary
		(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one large built up area	(b) Prevents the outward sprawl of a large built-up area into open land, and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary	Prevents development that would result in merging of or significant erosion of gap between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development	- Weak - Moderate - Strong
1	12.71	FAIL	0	3	5	Strong
2	99.76	PASS	3+	3	4	Strong
3	6.94	FAIL	0	3	5	Strong
4	102.97	PASS	3	3	4	Strong
5	6.30	PASS	3	3	3	Moderate
6	180.44	PASS	3	3	5	Strong
7	378.47	PASS	3	0	5	Strong
8	329.45	PASS	5	5	4	Strong
9	8.15	PASS	3	3	5	Strong
10	38.61	PASS	3+	5	5	Strong
11	17.94	PASS	3	5	0	Strong
12	224.67	PASS	3+	3	4	Strong

Parcel	Area (hectares)	Purpose Assessments				
		Purpose 1 – To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas		Purpose 2 – To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Purpose 3 – Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Overall Summary
		(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one large built up area	(b) Prevents the outward sprawl of a large built-up area into open land, and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary	Prevents development that would result in merging of or significant erosion of gap between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development	- Weak - Moderate - Strong
13	161.67	PASS	3+	5	4	Strong
14	186.61	FAIL	0	5	5	Strong
15	341.41	PASS	3	3	4	Strong
16	9.64	FAIL	0	1	5	Strong
17	95.58	FAIL	0	3	4	Strong
18	90.02	FAIL	0	3	4	Strong
19	62.66	FAIL	0	0	5	Strong
20	155.37	FAIL	0	5	4	Strong
21	1.78	FAIL	0	3	4	Strong
22	376.83	FAIL	0	3	5	Strong
23	2270.29	FAIL	0	1	5	Strong
24	125.85	FAIL	0	3	4	Strong
25	35.46	FAIL	0	3	4	Strong
26	28.39	FAIL	0	0	4	Strong

Parcel	Area (hectares)	Purpose Assessments				Overall Summary
		Purpose 1 – To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas		Purpose 2 – To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Purpose 3 – Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	
		(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one large built up area	(b) Prevents the outward sprawl of a large built-up area into open land, and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary	Prevents development that would result in merging of or significant erosion of gap between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development	
27	175.98	FAIL	0	0	5	Strong
28	109.03	FAIL	0	1	5	Strong
29	5.07	FAIL	0	1	4	Strong
30	1537.20	FAIL	0	1	5	Strong
31	153.84	FAIL	0	1	5	Strong

6 Recommendations

6.1 Overview

As set out in chapter 5, all General Areas were deemed to meet Green Belt purpose either moderately or strongly. There are no General Areas which do not meet Green Belt purposes and therefore no parcels in their entirety are recommended for further consideration for release. It has been shown that the Green Belt in Uttlesford is performing an important role in terms of national policy requirements.

At a strategic level, the northern part of the Uttlesford Green Belt plays a particularly important role in preventing sprawl (Purpose 1) and coalescence (Purpose 2) given the close relationship between the Green Belt and the large built-up areas of Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet, Stansted Airport and Sawbridgeworth/Lower Sheering. This swathe of Green Belt scores particularly strongly compared to the southern end of the Green Belt with regard to Purpose 1, and still strongly but to a lesser extent with regard to Purpose 2. In contrast, the southern part of the Uttlesford Green Belt plays more of a strategic role with regard to Purpose 3 in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

At a local level, individual parcels are responsible for protecting the Green Belt from sprawl from large built-up areas and a high proportion of the land parcels form the wider, if not the essential, gap between settlements. All parts of the Green Belt therefore are evidenced to play an important strategic role in preventing the countryside from encroachment to a large extent. Any further subdivision of these General Areas would jeopardise the role they play in maintaining settlement patterns and avoiding encroachment into open countryside. The Green Belt has contributed to the low percentage of built-form observed throughout the designated area, ensuring limited encroachment across most areas in the Green Belt. The General Areas demonstrate policy compliancy with the NPPF purposes and show a very good example of where the Green Belt is serving well across the original functions and across the different purposes.

6.2 Boundary Amendments

In undertaking the site visits and assessments, it was observed that there may be opportunity to rationalise some of the land parcel boundaries to better align with the NPPF paragraph 85 which states that Local Authorities should '*define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent*'.

General Areas 24, 25, 26 and 29 are located to the north of the A1060 which acts as a permanent and defensible boundary for much of the northern edge of the Uttlesford/Metropolitan Green. To the north of the A1060, these parcels lack clear outer edges, often comprising small-scale tree-lines, field boundaries, and small river tributaries. As these four parcels lie at the outer extend of the Green Belt, it may be considered appropriate whether the boundary of the Green Belt might be

better defined by the A1060. It must be noted that these parcels all score strongly in their overall assessment, so boundary amendments would be justified on rationalisation alone rather than their NPPF compliancy. However, it is not considered that the strategic purpose of the Green Belt would be harmed if such a change was made.

General Area 21 is also considered to contain a boundary anomaly. Taken as a whole, the General Area scores strongly for Purposes 2 and 3 (however failing to meet Purpose 1). However, the land parcel contains a small slither of Green Belt land running along the northern edge of the A1060 (Stortford Road) which in practice is simply a grass verge to this road. It is suggested that the Green Belt boundary might be amended to align with the A1060 (Stortford Road) and omit the grass verge, which in itself makes no contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

In General Area 4, planning permission has recently been granted for the construction of 53 residential units, together with flood alleviation works and landscape re-profiling, public open space, community allotments, and footpaths and cycleway in the north-west corner of the site at Elms Farm (planning application reference UTT/14/2133/DFO). It may therefore be appropriate to consider adjustment of the Green Belt boundary in this location to be the outer extent of this approved scheme, which may act to strengthen the role of the rest of General Area 4 in preventing the outward sprawl of the large built-up area of Stansted Mountfitchet. Similarly, within General Area 17, a new development of 14 new residential properties and allotments on Broomfields Road north of Hatfield Heath has recently been built within the Green Belt. As with General Area 4, revision of the Green Belt could be made to exclude this built-form from the designation.

7 Conclusions

This review has examined the performance of the Green Belt in and around Uttlesford against the Green Belt purposes, as set out in the NPPF. The assessment has considered 31 Green Belt General Areas, bounded by readily recognisable, durable physical features.

The Uttlesford Green Belt, totalling approximately 6% of the District, was originally established as part of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt to curtail the further unchecked growth of London's urban area by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. In 1995, the Uttlesford Local Plan extended the designation further to prevent the communities from merging into an urban sprawl from the south of Bishop's Stortford to the north of Stansted Mountfitchet.

Although the Green Belt is not designated on the basis of environmental quality, within Uttlesford the Green Belt offers protection to areas of attractive countryside, arable farmland, and small villages. Conversely it is likely that Uttlesford will come under pressure to accommodate the demand of housing growth in the East of England and possibly neighbouring authorities' objectively assessed needs. The core function of the Green Belt is however to maintain the historic settlement pattern and prevent the encroachment of unsuitable development into open countryside, in particular around Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport.

The 31 identified General Areas were assessed against three of the five NPPF purposes which were deemed relevant to the Uttlesford context. Overall, 30 of these land parcels were identified as performing strongly against Green Belt purposes, and the final land parcel was identified as moderately performing. Uttlesford is an example of well-functioning Green Belt, demonstrating that it meets the original purposes of preventing outward sprawl of its large built-up areas and is compliant to both NPPF and local policies.

It is not recommended that any General Areas are considered for release from the Green Belt. The north part of the Uttlesford Green Belt plays a strategic role in preventing the sprawl of Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Mountfitchet and Stansted Airport, whereas the southern part of the designation performs highly at preventing the encroachment of the countryside. At a local assessment level, individual parcels are essential to contributing to avoiding the merging of settlements and maintaining the historic settlement pattern. The scale, design and siting of existing development does not harm the character of the countryside and the Green Belt will ensure that this character is not further diminished.

The report has identified where consideration might be given to Green Belt boundary adjustments, to ensure boundaries are permanent and defensible. For any such amendments to the Green Belt boundary the Council should consider whether there are 'exceptional circumstances' to justify any alterations in the preparation of the new Local Plans. This will apply equally to any proposed additions or subtractions to land designated Green Belt.

Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Connected	Displaying a low level of containment and rather simply adjoining the urban area.
Contiguous	Predominantly surrounded by built form (from at least two large built-up areas) but also retaining a strong link to the wider Green Belt.
Duty to Cooperate	A legislative requirement in the Localism Act 2011 which places a duty on local planning authorities and county councils in England and public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local and Marine Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.
Enclosed	Almost entirely contained or surrounded by built development.
Encroachment	A gradual advancement of urbanising influences through physical development or land use change.
Essential Gap	A gap between settlements where development would significantly reduce the perceived or actual distance between them.
General Area	Green Belt land parcel defined by permanent and defensible boundaries, for use during the Green Belt assessment.
Large Built-Up Area	Areas defined to correspond to the major settlements identified in the respective Local Plans for each local authority, both within and outside Uttlesford, and used in the NPPF Purpose 1 assessment.
Largely Rural Character	Land with a general absence of built development, largely characterised by rural land uses and landscapes but with some other sporadic developments and man-made structures.
Less Essential Gap	A gap between settlements where development is likely to be possible without any risk of coalescence between them.
Neighbouring Town	Refers to settlements within Uttlesford, as well as settlements in neighbouring authorities immediately adjacent to Uttlesford's Green Belt, for the assessment against NPPF Purpose 2.
Open Land	Open land refers to land that is lacking in built development.
Openness	Openness refers to the extent to which Green Belt land could be considered open from an absence of built development.
Semi-Urban Character	Land which begins on the edge of the fully built up area and contains a mix of urban and rural land uses before giving way to the wider countryside. Land uses might include publicly accessible natural green spaces and green corridors, country parks and local nature reserves, small-scale food production (e.g. market gardens) and waste management facilities, interspersed with built development more generally associated with urban areas (e.g. residential or commercial).
Sprawl	The outward spread of a large built-up area at its periphery in a sporadic, dispersed or irregular way.
Strong Unspoilt Rural Character	Land with an absence of built development and characterised by rural land uses and landscapes, including agricultural land, forestry, woodland, shrubland/scrubland and open fields.

Term	Definition
Urban Character	Land which is predominantly characterised by urban land uses, including physical developments such as residential or commercial, or urban managed parks.
Wider Gap	A gap between settlements where limited development may be possible without coalescence between them.

Appendix B

Pro-Forma

General Area		[Insert Context Plan]
Area (ha)		
Local Authority		
Description		

Location Plan	[Insert Location Plan]
---------------	------------------------

Purpose 1	Criteria	Assessment	Score
(1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	(a) Land parcel is at the edge of one or more distinct large built-up areas.		
	(b) Prevents the outward sprawl of a large built-up area into open land, and serves as a barrier at the edge of a large built-up area in the absence of another durable boundary.		
Purpose 1: Total Score			/5

Purpose 2	Criteria	Assessment	Score
(2) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging	Prevents development that would result in merging of or significant erosion of gap between neighbouring settlements, including ribbon development along transport corridors that link settlements.		
Purpose 2: Total Score			/5

Purpose 3	Criteria	Assessment	Score
(3) Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Protects the openness of the countryside and is least covered by development.		
Purpose 3: Total Score			/5

Site Photos	[Insert Site Key Plan]
Photograph 1:	[Insert Photo]
Photograph 2:	[Insert Photo]
Photograph 3:	[Insert Photo]
Photograph 4:	[Insert Photo]