

Stevenage Borough Council

Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage

Part 2: Site Assessment and Capacity Testing



September 2015

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& Infrastructure UK Limited



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Executive summary

Purpose of this report

This report has been produced for the purpose of identifying the extent to which areas for potential release from the Green Belt could be considered within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan as development options, both within the Plan period and beyond. Options for consideration as potential development areas have been identified from the Part 1 Green Belt Review (2013), work undertaken as part of the Stevenage North Action Plan (SNAP, 2010), and proposals in the consultations on the Stevenage Local Plan (2013) and the North Herts Local Plan (2014). The role of potential development areas against Green Belt purposes is set out, as are development constraints and in-principle housing capacity.

Figure ES1 illustrates the location of the areas subject to detailed survey.

Figure ES1 Areas of Search in the Green Belt around Stevenage

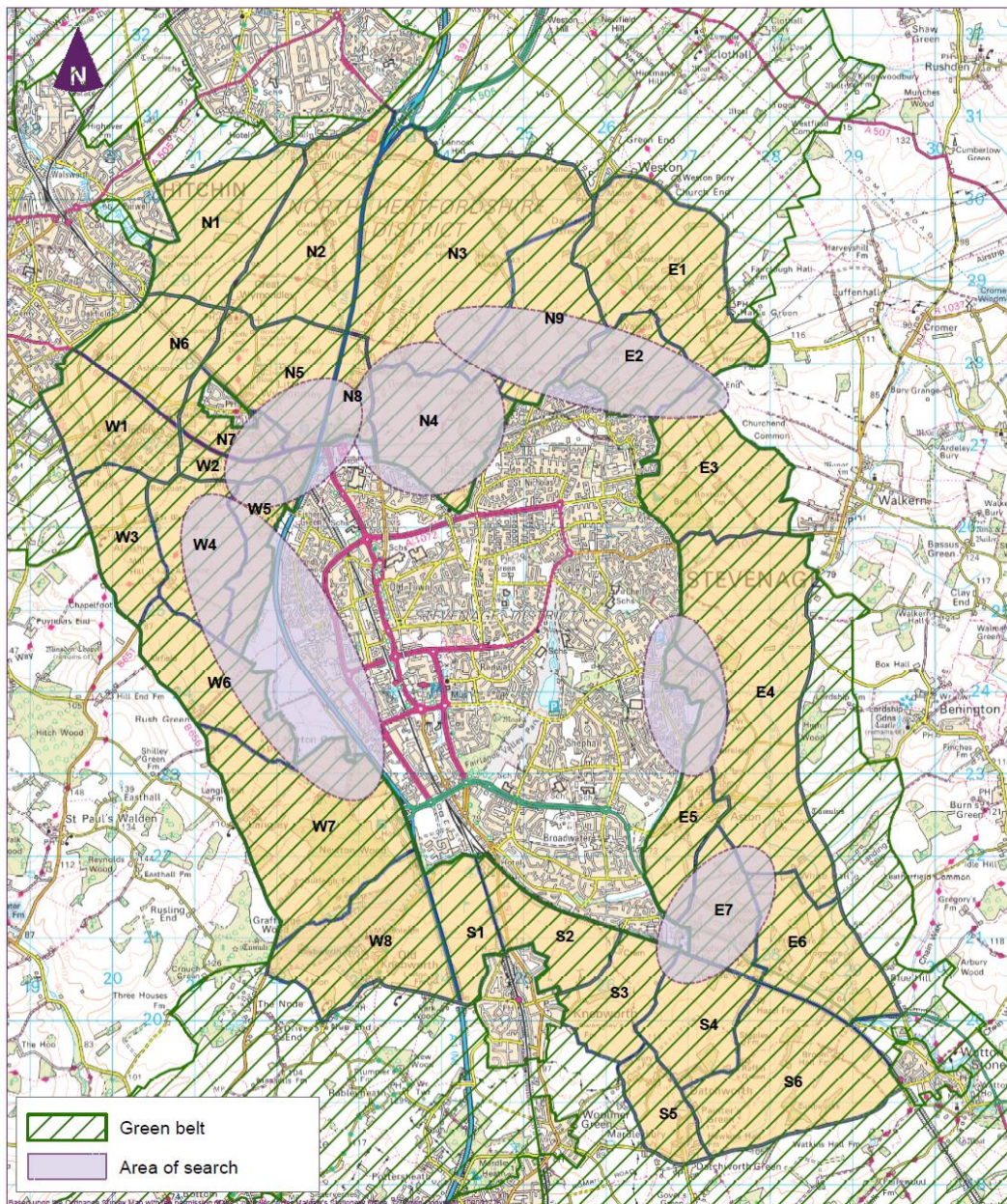


Figure ES2 shows the parcels of land which have been identified as holding potential for release from the Green Belt without incurring significant harm to the purpose of the wider Green Belt. In accordance with the NPPF, two types of release are considered: land which could be released as part of the current Local Plan and safeguarded land for use beyond the plan period.

Figure ES2 Green Belt Parcels with Potential for Plan Period Release and Safeguarded Land

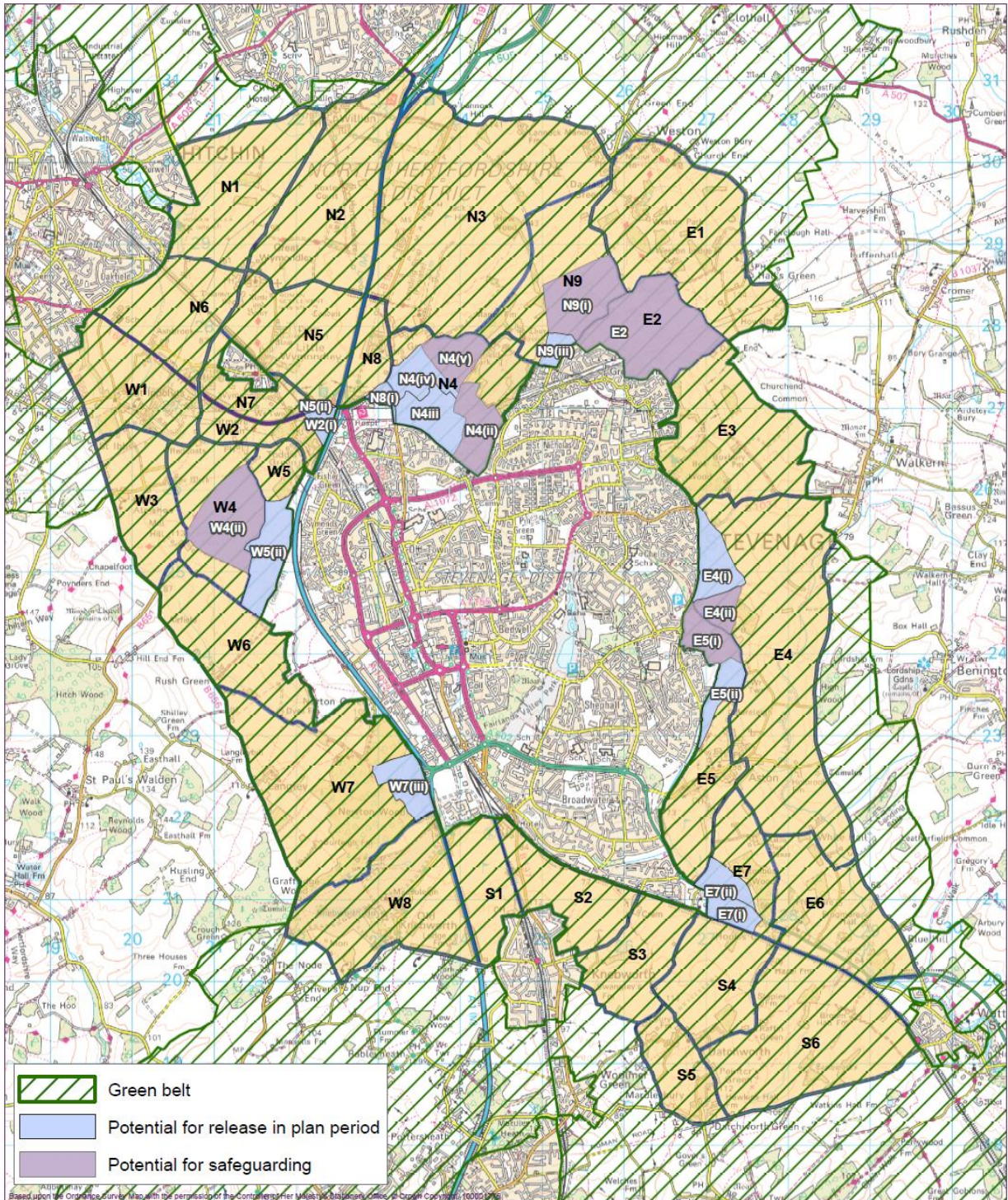




Table ES 1 Summary of Parcels which could be released from the Green Belt, justification and their indicative development capacity (see also Figure ES2)

Parcel	Justification	Timing of release and indicative development capacity (at 60% of parcel size and 35dph)		Constraints and sustainability issues
E7(i)	Well contained land which currently helps to contain the south eastern edge of Stevenage, but the release of which, to the Stevenage Borough boundary, would not damage the purpose of the Green Belt in this location.	Local Plan	490 dwellings	None
E7(ii)	Well contained land which currently helps to contain the south eastern edge of Stevenage. Overall, however release would not damage the overall function of the Green Belt in this location.	Local Plan	294 dwellings	None
E4(i)	Clear evidence of advance planting - significant buffer planting required to the east of the parcel.	Local Plan	770 dwellings	None
E4(ii)	Well-contained with potential for sensitive use of existing character.	Safeguarded	400 dwellings	None
E5(i)	Well-contained with potential for sensitive use of existing character.	Safeguarded	350 dwellings	None
E5(ii)	Potential for modest development associated with well-contained arable land running from Aston End Lane to Gresley Way.	Local Plan	470 dwellings	None
E2	Whilst this is open countryside, it is part of the plateau to the north east of Stevenage and development here could be visually contained. Long term safeguarding is recommended as part of a direction of growth which could extend existing development. However, the configuration of the Green Belt in this location means that removal of the land at E2 from the Green Belt would require an extension of the boundary eastwards to retain its coherent purpose to the east of Stevenage.	Safeguarded	2,895 dwellings	Remoteness from service provision. Limited access.
N9(i)	Whilst this is open countryside, it is part of the plateau to the north east of Stevenage and development here could be visually contained. Long term safeguarding is recommended as part of a direction of growth which could extend existing development.	Safeguarded	3,780 dwellings	Remoteness from service provision. Limited access.
N9(iii)	The scale, degree of enclosure and relationship with existing development at Great Ashby means that there could be release without affecting the wider purpose of the Green Belt in this area.	Local Plan	245 dwellings	None
N4(ii)	Opportunity to consider longer term release once the character of development on adjacent parcels is established.	Safeguarded	840 dwellings	None
N4(iii)	Notwithstanding its open aspect, this parcel could be released within the local plan period given its current containment by strong boundaries and opportunities to substantiate these through further landscaping.	Local Plan	875 dwellings	None
N4(iv)	Whilst this parcel is less well contained than N4(iv) and visually more open, it is complementary and with sensitive landscaping could accommodate development without significant erosion of Green Belt purposes in this location. The narrowing of the gap between Stevenage and Graveley would have to be carefully considered.	Local Plan	665 dwellings	None
N4(v)	Opportunity to consider longer term release once the character of development on adjacent parcels is established, but this is uncertain given the visual connection with open countryside to the north.	Safeguarded	560 dwellings	None
W4(ii)	Although of open character with insubstantial boundaries (being rights of way), the land could be released over the long term without significant	Safeguarded	1,350 dwellings	None



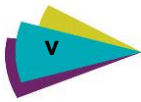
Parcel	Justification	Timing of release and indicative development capacity (at 60% of parcel size and 35dph)		Constraints and sustainability issues
	damage to the wider Green Belt, following development to the south east and using advance planting to help define permanent boundaries.			
W5(ii)	Whilst visually open, this land is oriented toward the A1(M) and development with appropriate landscaping could be accommodated without significant damage to the Green Belt in this location, particularly as part of a wider development scheme to the west of the A1(M).	Local Plan	1,150 dwellings	None
W7(iii)	Visually enclosed and strongly bounded by Newton Wood, release of this parcel will not compromise the wider purpose of the Green Belt.	Local Plan	Employment	None
N8(i)	Brownfield land enclosed by roads to the east and north east, with no visual connection to the wider Green Belt to the north. Release would not compromise principal function of the Green Belt in this location.	Local Plan	Employment	None
N5(ii)	Tightly enclosed parcel bounded by the A602 to the south and minor roads to the north. Separate from wider Green Belt to the north.	Local Plan	Employment	None
W2(i)	Tightly enclosed parcel bounded by the A1(M), A602 and railway line, physically separated from wider parcel to the west. Overall function of the Green Belt in this location would not be harmed.	Local Plan	Employment	None
		TOTAL LOCAL PLAN	4,959 dwellings	
		TOTAL SAFEGUARDED	10,175 dwellings	

This study has identified Green Belt land which could be released for development in the Plan period and beyond without damage to the purposes of the Green Belt as a whole in this area. Land identified for release in the Plan period could accommodate approximately 5,000 dwellings. This relies on the release of Green Belt land primarily within North Hertfordshire district but also to a lesser extent East Hertfordshire District through the Duty to Co-operate.

The conclusions reached are intended to give a broad indication of options for removing areas from the Green Belt around Stevenage, their potential capacity (and thereby making a contribution to Stevenage's housing needs) and how the 'Exceptional Circumstances' arguments which will be required to justify removal of land from the Green Belt can be assembled. Identification of an area as holding potential for release from the Green Belt does not imply that all the identified area should or could be developed. For example, Green Infrastructure could form significant parts of some areas, complementing and enhancing existing landscape and environmental features. In addition, as with any other potential development site, detailed work on site capacity, character and viability would be required.

In light of the recommendations set out in this report, Stevenage Borough Council will use this evidence as part of the plan preparation process to review the case for the revision of Green Belt boundaries weighed against other aspects of the evidence base, including:

- ▶ Housing need for the plan period and beyond;
- ▶ The identification of sites submitted through the SHLAA process;
- ▶ Sustainability Appraisal findings;
- ▶ Environmental and landscape constraints; and
- ▶ The wider development strategy of the Borough in respect of an appropriate distribution of growth.



Land which could be added to the Green Belt to strengthen its current purpose and respond to proposed removals could focus on three areas:

1. A small area of land surrounding the hamlet of Norton Green which would address an anomaly relating to previous removal of the Green Belt.
2. Land to the west of the B656 in North Hertfordshire District. This is proposed in the NHDC Local Plan Preferred Options and would address the issue of an overly narrow Green Belt to the west of Stevenage should the Green Belt be rolled back to accommodate growth.
3. Land to the north west of Walkern within East Hertfordshire District between the current easterly boundary and the B1037 to the east and A507 to the north. This would address removal of Green Belt designation to the north east of Stevenage in the long term to create a suitably wide Green Belt in this location.





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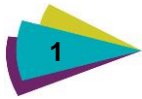
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1. Background, Study Remit and Method

1.1 Background to the Part 2 Review and Study Remit

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) commissioned Amec to undertake a review of the Green Belt around Stevenage as part of the evidence base for the emerging Stevenage Local Plan. As an 'underbounded' authority (i.e. largely developed to its administrative boundary), surrounded by Green Belt (Figure 1.1), meeting development needs is likely to require release of Green Belt land in adjoining Districts. The Part 1 Green Belt Review (February 2013) evaluated segments of land against Green Belt purposes (Figure 1.1) as a starting point for the consideration of where land might be released from the Green Belt without significant harm to Green Belt purposes in this locality.

This Part 2 Review considers parcels of land in more detail as to their potential for release in light of their contribution to Green Belt purposes, landscape characteristics and environmental constraints. In addition, SBC requested the identification of:

- ▶ A wider boundary for the Green Belt should North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) recommend release to the west, north and north east of Stevenage, testing their proposed outer boundaries. This will include recommendations for potential release to the east within EHDC.
- ▶ Appropriate inner boundaries for the Green Belt around Stevenage to meet the town's development aspirations should NHDC not proceed with their proposed strategy. This will include recommendations for potential release to the east within East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC).

1.2 Method

Selection of Areas for Detailed Survey

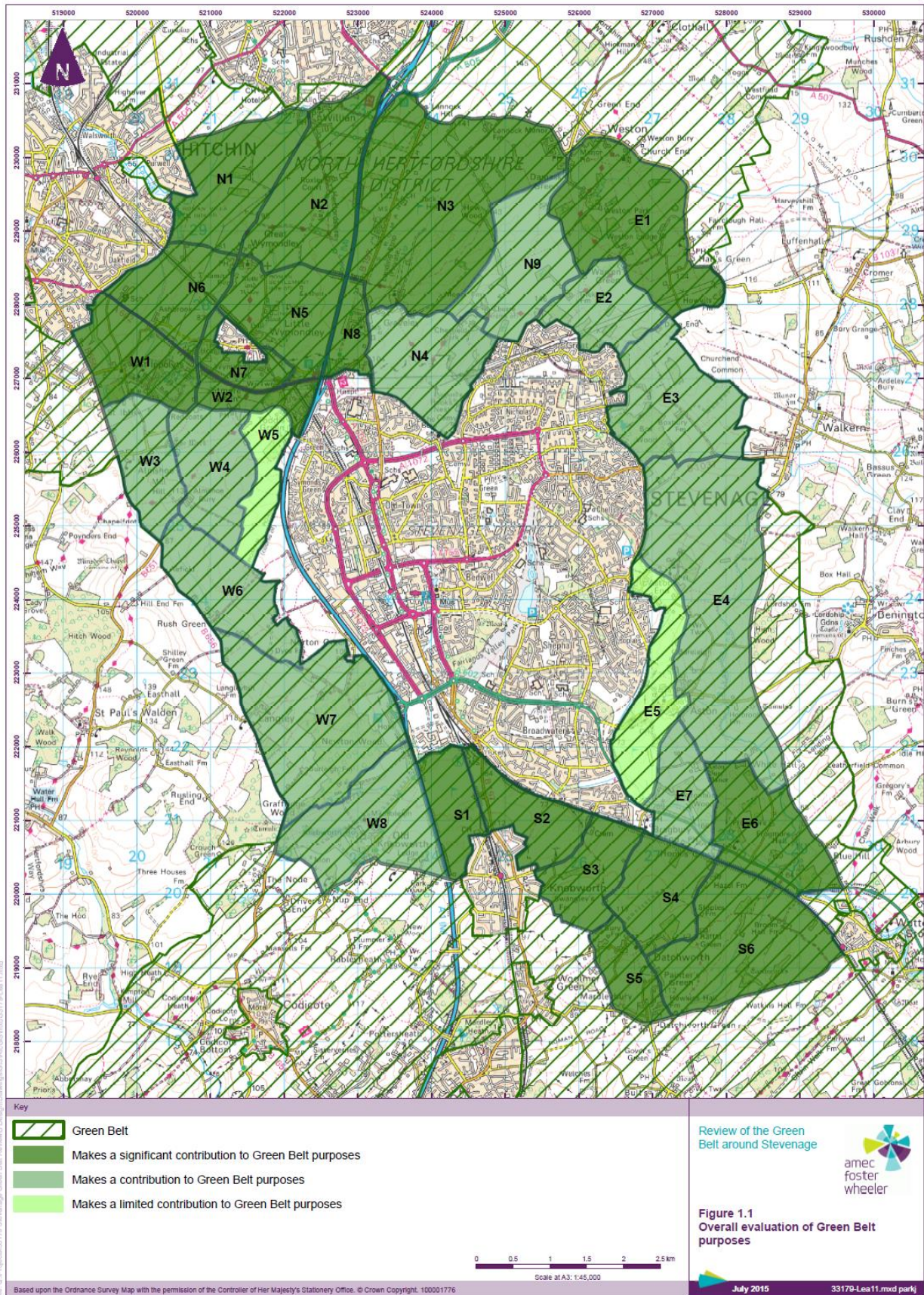
The areas identified for detailed survey of the implications of release are based on the following sources:

- ▶ Part 1 Green Belt Review (2013)
- ▶ Stevenage North Action Plan (2010)
- ▶ Stevenage Local Plan Preferred Options (2013)
- ▶ North Hertfordshire Local Plan Preferred Options (2014)

Part 1 Green Belt Review (2013)

The Part 1 Green Belt Review was a technical review of Green Belt purposes only and did not propose that land could or should be released for development. The results (Figure 1.1) identify the implications of release on the Green Belt, factors which would need to be taken into account as part of the justification of release under the Exceptional Circumstances test of the NPPF.

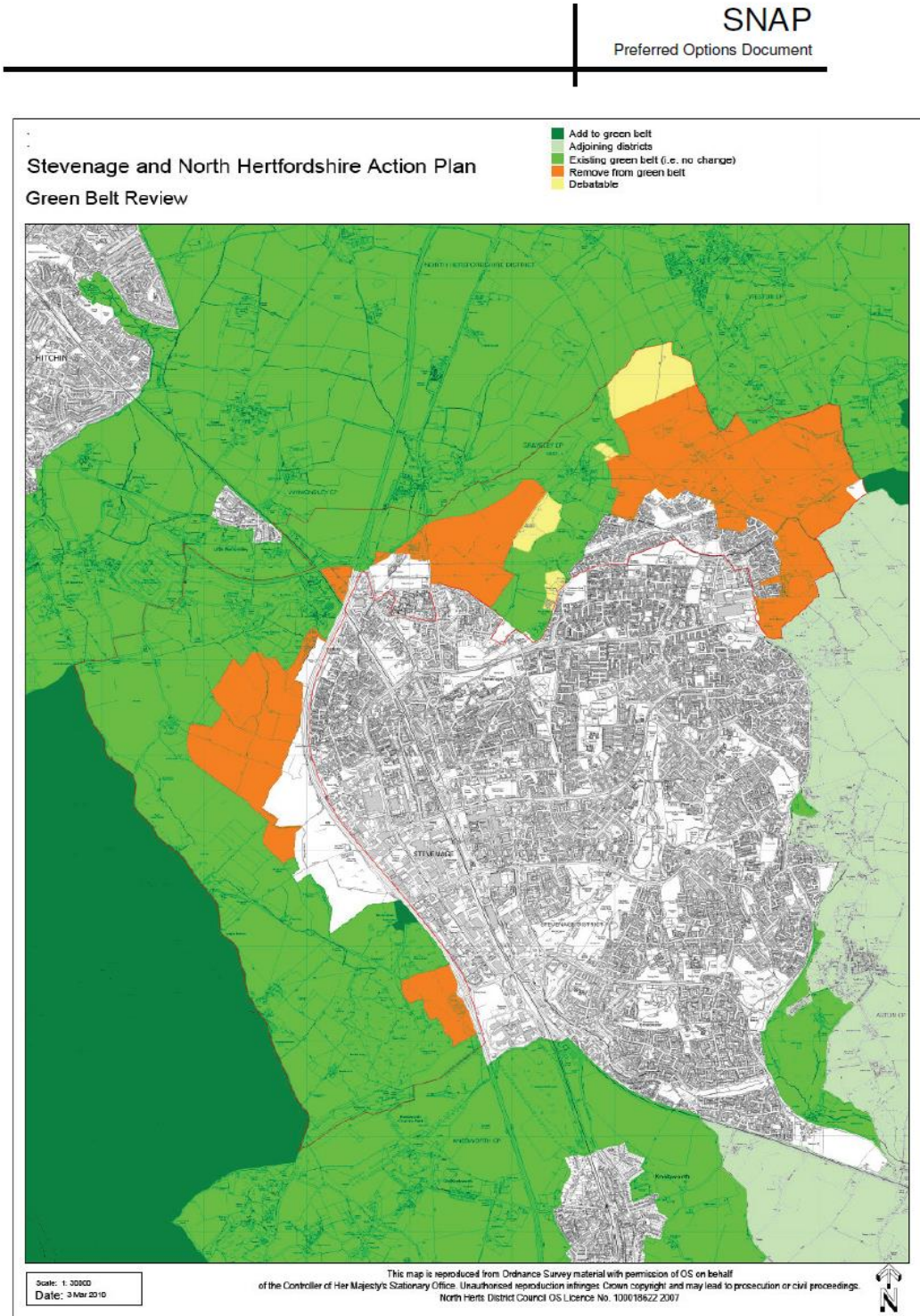
Figure 1.1 Overall Evaluation of Green Belt Purposes



Stevenage North Action Plan (SNAP) (2010)

SNAP proposed detailed areas for the long term growth of Stevenage to the east north and north east of the town (Figure 1.2). The proposals were based on detailed evaluation of the capacity of land to absorb development but did not take into account the potential impacts on Green Belt purposes.

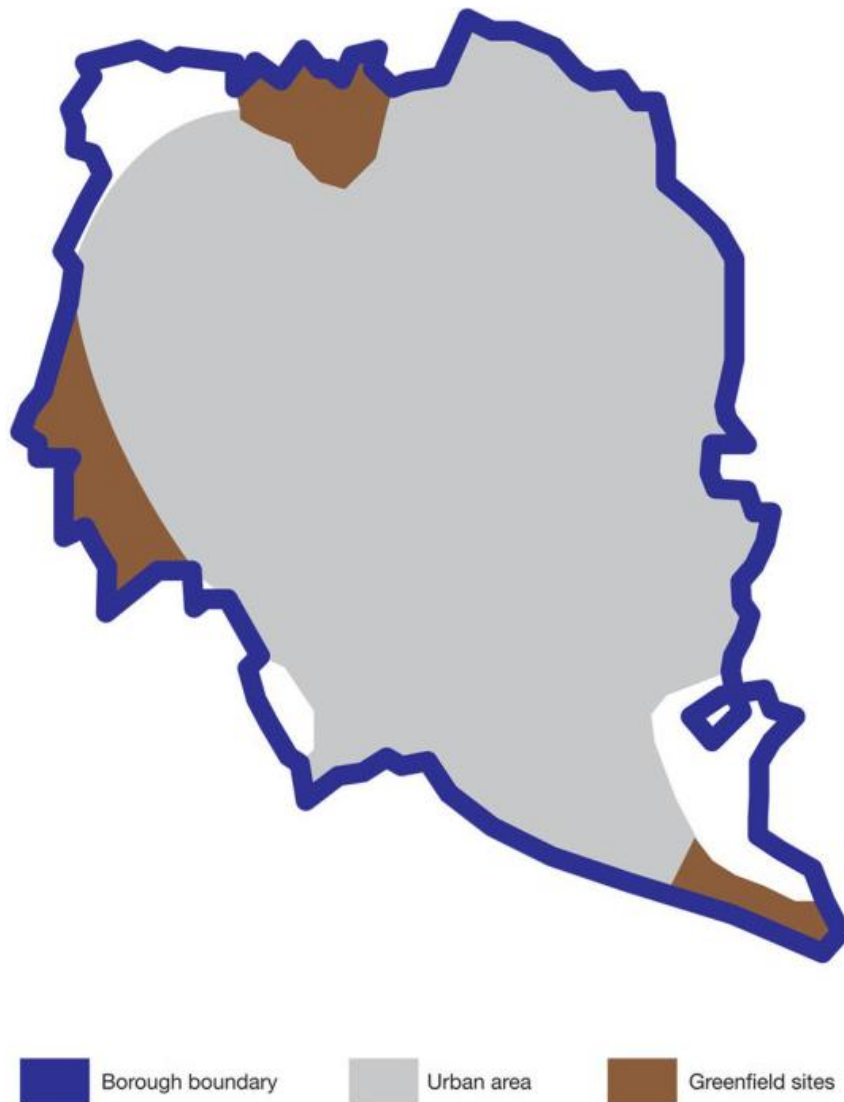
Figure 1.2 SNAP: Proposed Development Areas to the North and West of Stevenage



Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031: First Consultation (June 2013)

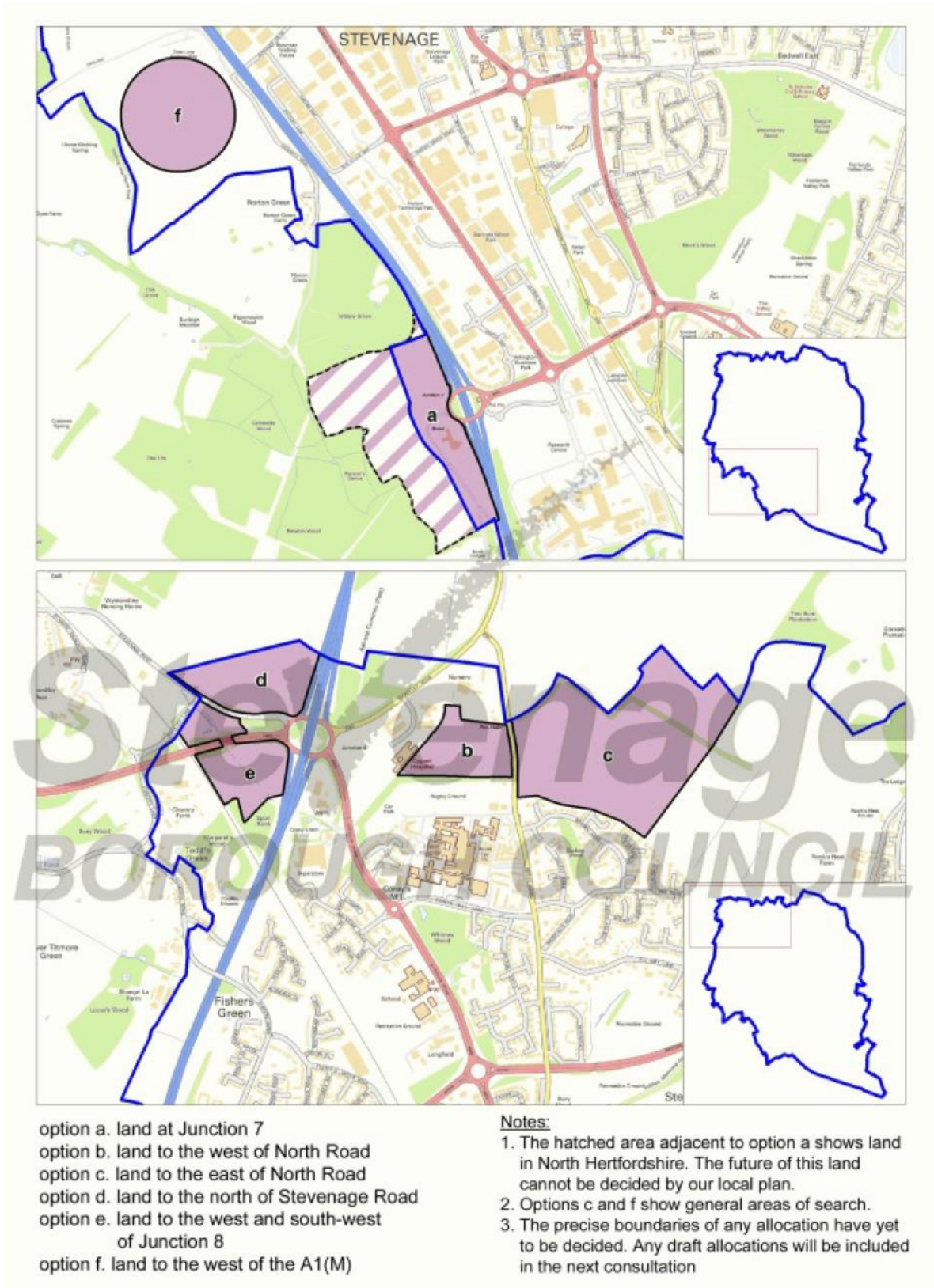
The preferred option of the Local Plan is Option b (Figure 1.3) which “*would provide enough homes to meet the Government’s latest household projections. We would release land from the inner Green Belt to meet development needs. We would use all reasonable and available capacity within the Borough.*”

Figure 1.3 Stevenage Local Plan First Consultation: Preferred Option



Land to the north of Stevenage in the vicinity of Junction 8 of the A1(M) and to the west of the A1(M) at Junction 7 was also identified as holding potential for employment/retail uses (Figure 1.4) and these areas are assessed on this basis.

Figure 1.4 Land Identified as Holding Potential for Employment/Retail Uses

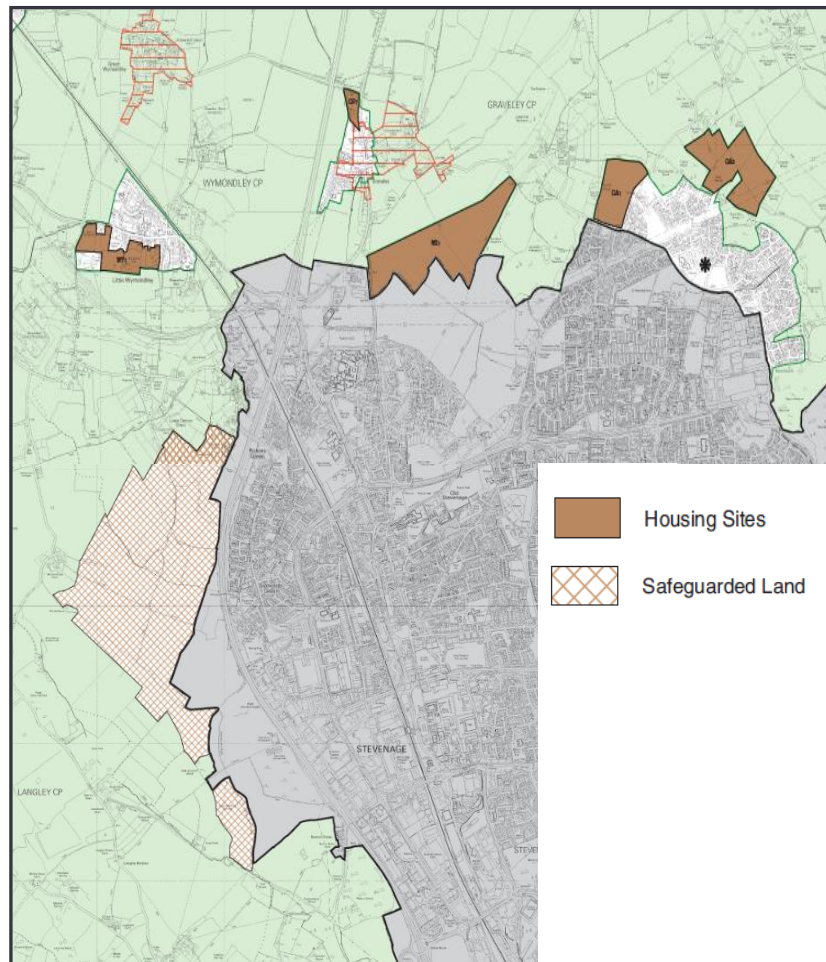


North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan Preferred Options (December 2014)

This document identifies a number of parcels of land in the vicinity of Stevenage which could form the basis for site allocations, recognising the need to meet, in part, the town's development needs within North Hertfordshire District.

The proposed allocations are shown in Figure 1.5, and reflect the proposals of SNAP to the west, north and north east of Stevenage, and the preferred options of the Stevenage Local Plan for growth to the west and north.

Figure 1.5 North Herts DC Preferred Options for Green Belt Release in the Vicinity of Stevenage



Approach to Detailed Assessment

The following approach to determining where Green Belt release might be considered has been used:

- Identification of parcels of land which could be proposed for removal from the Green Belt for release in the short and longer term. In some cases this might coincide with potential allocations. The segments identified in the Part 1 Green Belt Review have been used as the basis for the delineation of detailed parcels of land which could in principle form the basis for development areas. The segments were originally broadly drawn to reflect the strategic nature of the Part 1 study and were defined (reflecting the NPPF) using strong boundaries such as roads, railway lines and watercourses. The identification of parcels within these segments again seeks to use recognisable, distinct and permanent boundaries such as roads, but where this has not proven not to be possible, supplements these with field boundaries, hedgerows, woodland edges and Public Rights of Way which could in principle act as new boundaries should land be sought to be

released. The identification of parcels which could form development areas does not imply that these areas could or should be released but demonstrates how development might in principle be accommodated should other aspects of the evidence base indicate that this is required.

- ▶ Site surveys undertaken jointly by a Chartered Landscape Architect and Chartered Town Planner to determine the potential for removing land from the Green Belt in respect of the following criteria:
 - Would development of this parcel affect the openness and purposes of the Green Belt?
 - Would development of this parcel impact negatively on the visual amenity of the countryside/locality?
 - Would development relate well to the existing development pattern?
 - Would development detract from the landscape setting or special character of a settlement?
- ▶ Identification of development constraints which need to be taken into consideration (flood risk, nature conservation designations, landscape sensitivity, heritage assets and access).
- ▶ Identification of initial sustainability considerations which need to be explored in more detail elsewhere and tested through the Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan.
- ▶ Assessment of potential defensible Green Belt boundaries where (following the NPPF para 85) potential development sites/areas have been identified, specifically:
 - Is this area of Green Belt associated with clearly defined boundary features which are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?
 - Are there any issues which may weaken the ability of the Green Belt to endure beyond the plan period?

As part of this study, the role of landscape character and capacity is an important aspect of considering the effects of Green Belt release on the visual character of an area. To this end, the Stevenage Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Study (2006) is used to inform the evaluation of the areas surveyed in detail. This ensures continuity of analysis and avoids needless re-surveying of aspects of the landscape which have remained relatively stable, namely:

- ▶ **Landscape character** which is the distinct and recognisable pattern of **landscape elements** such as land use and pattern of enclosure, topography, tree belts, hedgerows, woodland blocks and built form which together create a sense of place.
- ▶ **Landscape capacity and sensitivity** which is a reflection of landscape character and relates to the ability of a particular area to receive development by virtue of its visual sensitivity, tranquillity and remoteness, and potential for mitigation.

The use of judgements on landscape character, capacity and sensitivity remains at a relatively high level for what is a strategic study, and would have to be re-visited in detail should parcels of land be considered for detailed masterplanning. This is particularly important in respect of visual containment and the establishment of long term boundaries which are needed to define the Green Belt.

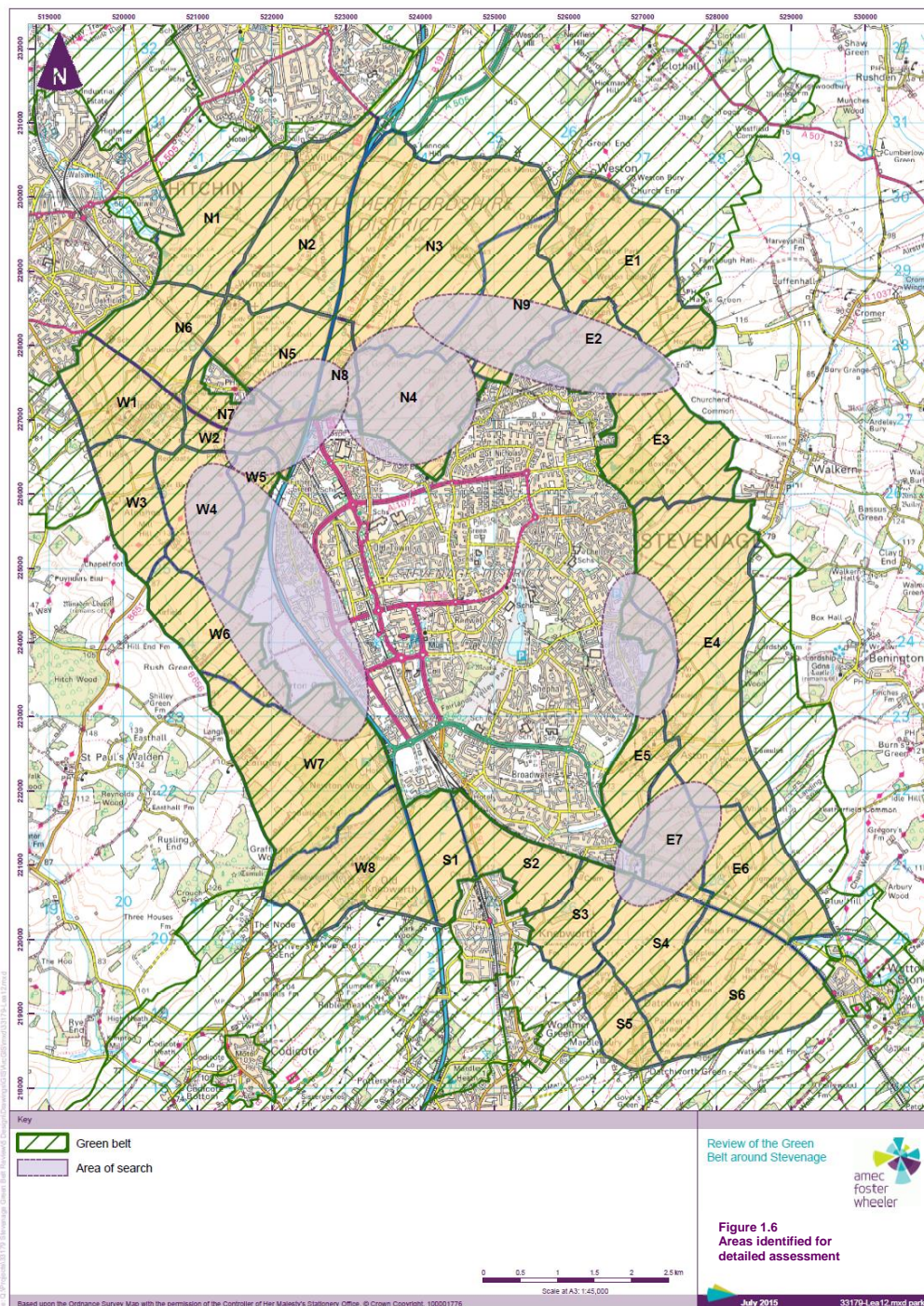
There is an important difference between the boundaries that might be used to determine appropriate development boundaries in a landscape-led appraisal and those which need to be identified to establish permanent Green Belt boundaries. In some cases these coincide, but in others they will not, particularly where the contours of land are likely to guide how development might be accommodated without undue visual impact. Allied to this is the use of advance planting to screen development and in doing so establish a clear plot boundary which might also be used as a Green Belt boundary.

Figure 1.6 illustrates the areas of detailed search for the Part 2 Study, based on the conclusions of the Part 1 Review as well as consideration of the studies considered above which present substantial

background material in relation to potential development areas. The areas identified for detailed assessment are:

- ▶ Land to the south east (segment E7)
- ▶ Land to the east (segments E5 and E4)
- ▶ Land to the north east (segments N9, E2 and E3)
- ▶ Land to the north (segment N4)
- ▶ Land to the north west (segments N8, N5 and W2)
- ▶ Land to the west (segments W4, W5, W6, W7)

Figure 1.6 Areas Identified for Detailed Assessment



2. Study Results

2.1 Introduction

The following sections consider in detail the Green Belt purpose of the segments identified in Chapter 1 through their subdivision into component parcels of land and their potential to be released from the Green Belt.

2.2 Land to the south east (segment E7; parcels E7(i), E7(ii), E7(iii) & E7(iv))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

Segment E7 was considered to overall make a contribution to Green Belt purposes in the 2013 Green Belt Review, in conjunction with other segments, helping to contain the eastern edge of Stevenage. There are four distinct parcels within the segment which can be assessed in more detail (Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Land to the South East: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

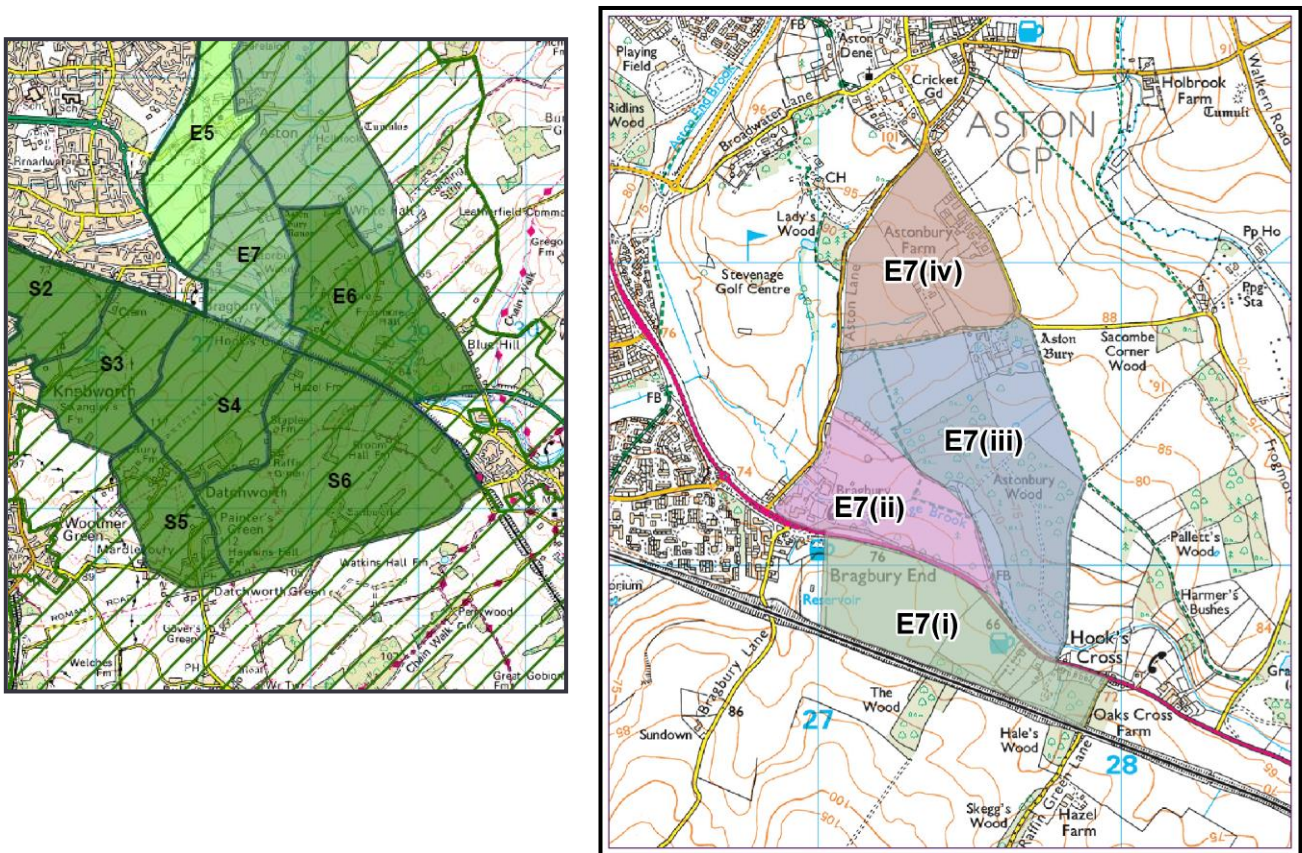


Table 2.1 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segment E7 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Preventing Merger	Safeguarding from Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
E7	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Dominated by Astonbury Wood to the south-east of the segment and mixed arable/pastoral land uses to the west and north, this segment helps in the containment of the south-east of Stevenage, particularly in terms of sprawl along the A602 and the maintenance of the gap between Stevenage and Watton at Stone. However, when viewed as part of the overall Green Belt in this area, its strategic purpose is less clear, particularly in the context of segment E6 performing this role. Roads (albeit of varying size) form strong boundaries to this segment.
E7(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Bounded by the A602 to the north and the Stevenage – Hertford railway line, this parcel makes a contribution to Green Belt purposes by restricting sprawl along these transport corridors but the containment of the land means that sprawl can be contained. There is a case for release of this land from the Green Belt without damage to its overall purpose in this location.
E7(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Centred on Stevenage Brook, this parcel is characterised by pasture and woodland and is well contained by strong boundaries. The degree of enclosure, principally by Astonbury Wood means that there is very limited visual connection with the wider countryside and therefore could be released without damage to the overall purposes of the Green Belt in this location.
E7(iii)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Dominated by Astonbury Wood and Aston Bury, this parcel contributes to the protection of the countryside from encroachment by urbanising influences.
E7(iv)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	This parcel forms the context for the south part of Aston, protecting its setting and preventing urbanisation of the wider countryside.

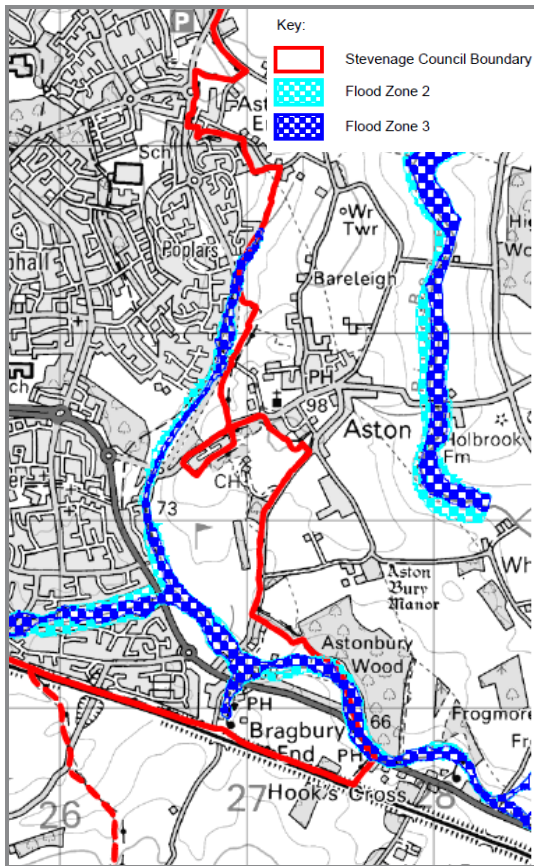
Landscape Character

Segment E7 is contained within the Local Character Areas of: 1. Bragbury and Hooks Cross to the south and 2. Ladyswood and Aston Bury Farm to the north. The land contains the valley of Stevenage Brook and is characterised by gently undulating landform, pastoral, arable and woodland land uses with dispersed roadside development, with the transport corridors of the A602 and the Stevenage – Hertford railway line intruding to the south of the area. The land rises from the valley bottom toward Aston Bury and the village of Aston through mixed estate farmland and parkland with fields of varying scale and land use and which is well wooded and hedged. Astonbury Wood is a large mixed deciduous woodland. The landscape has moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.

Environmental and Cultural Heritage Constraints

Stevenage Brook is subject to flood risk (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Flood Risk to the South East of Stevenage



source: Stevenage SFRA

Summary Evaluation and Recommendations

Table 2.2 Evaluation of Parcels E7(i) to E7(iv)

Criteria	E7(i)	E7(ii)	E7(iii)	E7(iv)
Principal features	Open arable land	Pastoral and woodland	Dominated by Astonbury Wood, open arable to north	Open arable land
Key boundaries defining parcel	Railway and A602	Enclosed by A602 and Astonbury Wood	Defined by Astonbury Wood to the east and south west and a track to the north.	Defined by Aston Lane to the west, Astonbury Lane to the east and a track to the south.
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	Limited because of enclosure	Limited	Incursion into open countryside	Incursion into open countryside
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	Limited, but a gateway site to Stevenage requiring careful landscaping treatment.	Limited because of enclosure	Potentially significant	Potentially significant
Relationship with existing development pattern	Extension of Stevenage	Not related	Not related	Partially related to Aston immediately to the north.

Criteria	E7(i)	E7(ii)	E7(iii)	E7(iv)
Effect of development on the landscape setting/character of a settlement	Bragbury End would lose its current modest separation from Stevenage.	None	None	Forms part of the southerly setting of Aston.
Constraints	None	Flood risk associated with Stevenage Brook	Astonbury Wood (LWS?)	None
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	Moderate sensitivity & moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity & moderate capacity	High sensitivity & low capacity	High sensitivity & low capacity
Recommendation	Release to Stevenage boundary	Release to Stevenage boundary	Retain	Retain
In principle development area (60% of parcel area) and capacity @ 35dph	14ha 490 dwellings	8.4ha 294 dwellings	NA	NA

Table 2.3 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning/Caveats
E7(i)	✓ (Local Plan)	Well contained land which currently helps to contain the south eastern edge of Stevenage, but the release of which, to Stevenage Borough boundary, would not damage the purposes of the Green Belt in this location.
E7(ii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Well contained land with limited connection to the wider countryside which could be released without damage to the overall purposes of the Green Belt in this location
E7(iii)	✗	Forms part of open countryside - development would have to be part of a wider arc.
E7(iv)	✗	Forms part of open countryside and the settings for the southern edge of Aston.

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the workforce of the Borough.
A Viable Town Centre	Support for town centre services.
Transport and Infrastructure	The proximity of Parcels E7(i) and (ii) to the existing built up area means that there is reasonable access to service provision, such as schools in Broadwater 1.5km away, although access by car is likely to be required.
High Quality Homes	Site is large enough to ensure a suitable mix.
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Reflect identity/sensitivity of Bragbury End through masterplanning.
Healthy Communities	Green infrastructure.

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.

2.3 Land to the east (segments E5 and E4; parcels E5(i), E5(ii), E5(iii), E5(iv), E5(v), E4(i) and E4(ii))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

The Part 1 Green Belt Review concluded that overall segment E5 made a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes because of the degree of containment from open countryside to the east associated with the Beane Valley, whilst segment E4 overall makes a contribution to Green Belt purposes principally because of its relationship with the Beane Valley. Nevertheless, Parcel E4(i) to the west of Holders Lane has different Green Belt purposes, being on the modest plateau between the Beane Valley and Stevenage and in combination with extensive edge planting is not as visually prominent as the rolling slopes of the Beane Valley to the east.

Figure 2.3 Land to the East: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

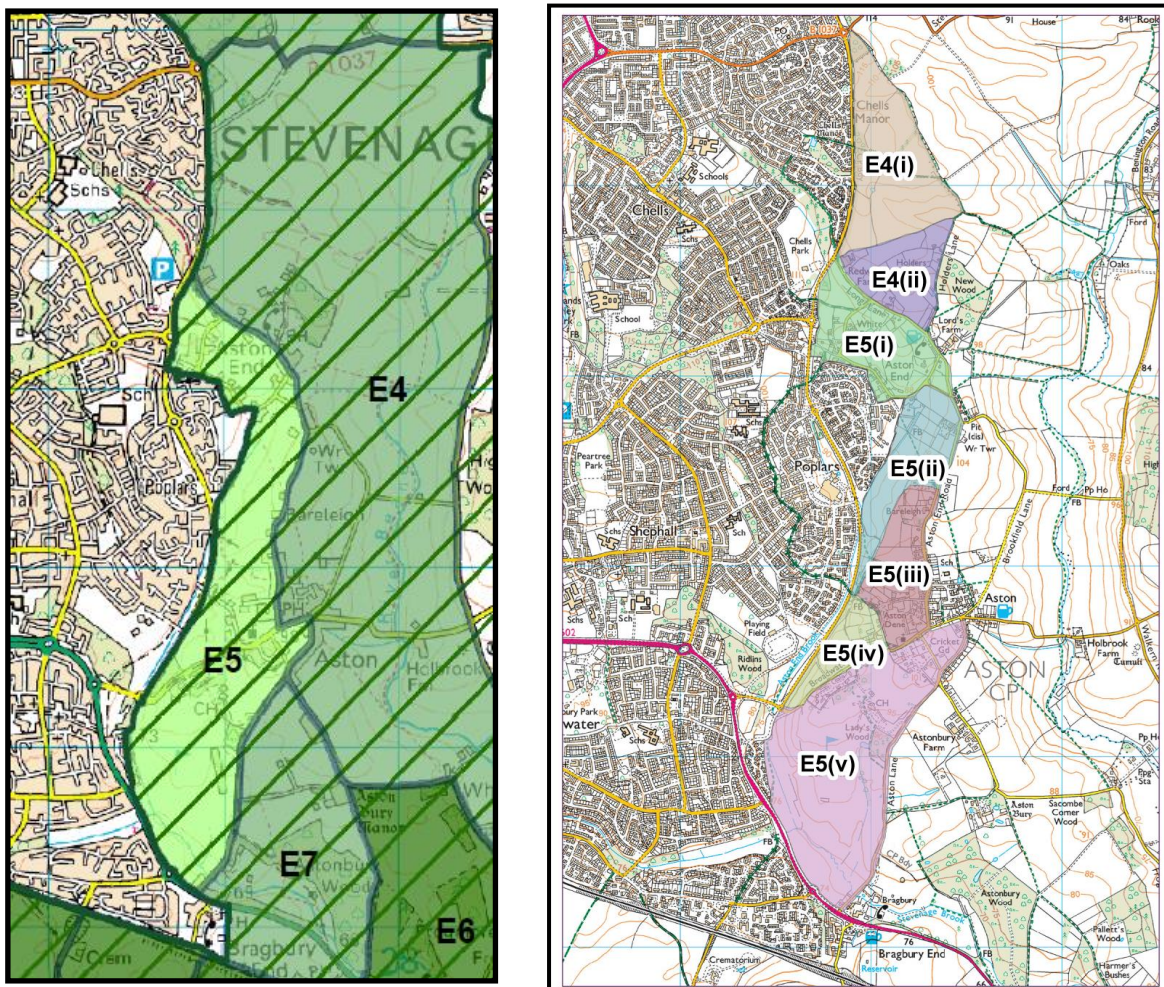


Table 2.4 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segments E4 and E5 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Preventing Merger	Safeguarding from Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
E4	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	The combination of topography, large-scale open fields, distant views and no immediate visual connection with the urban edge of Stevenage to the west, give this segment a strongly rural character and openness. As such the segment is an important part of the Green Belt to the east of Stevenage. Roads (albeit of varying size) form strong boundaries to this segment.
E4(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Characterised by large scale open fields which part of the plateau between the Beane Valley and Stevenage, this parcel makes a contribution to containing the easterly edge of Stevenage, but has been subject to extensive boundary planting which contributes significantly to its visual containment.
E4(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Whilst having a similar role as E4(i), this parcel is characterised by a more enclosed landscape of small fields in largely pastoral use, contributing to a strong sense of visual containment.
E5	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	The location of this segment, immediately to the east of the urban edge, means that whilst it makes a contribution to limiting the encroachment of the urban area, this is not significant given the clear boundaries which demarcate the segment, notably Gresley way to the east. Openness and visual connections to the open countryside to the east are limited meaning that its overall contribution to the Green Belt is limited.
E5(i)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Characterised by an enclosed landscape of small fields in pastoral use, this parcel is well contained and is part of the transition between the urban edge of Stevenage immediately to the west and open countryside to the east.
E5(ii)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	This parcel is dominated by a large west-facing arable field which is well contained and whilst it has a role as part of the wider Green Belt to the east in preventing encroachment into open countryside, overall, the parcel makes a relatively limited contribution.
E5(iii)	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Forming the westerly context for Aston, this parcel makes a string contribution to maintaining the separate identity of Aston village from the urban edge of Stevenage approximate half a mile to the west currently bounded by Gresley Way.
E5(iv)	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Whilst this parcel is of limited scale and well enclosed and overall makes a limited contribution, it nevertheless makes a contribution to the separation of Aston village and the easterly edge of Stevenage bounded by Gresley Way.
E5(v)	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Dominated by a golf course, but extending to the built edge of Aston, this parcel is well contained by Aston Lane and its largely west facing aspect, Nevertheless, its scale and relationship with Aston village means that its contribution to the Green Belt is relatively strong.

Landscape Character

This area is covered by the following Local Landscape Areas:

2. Ladyswood and Astonbury Farm – gently undulating farmland which is well wooded and hedged and contains the Stevenage Golf Centre. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
4. Aston – ridgetop nucleated settlement with a parkland setting to Gresley Way to the east, character by small fields and mature trees and hedgerows. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
5. Aston End – small scale fields, farms and small holdings running from the ridge-top Aston End Road to Gresley Way to the east. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.
6. Chells Manor Farmland – dominated by large arable fields on a plateau with extensive views to the Beane Valley to the east and Langley Valley to the west. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.

Ecological & Cultural Heritage Designations

There are no ecological designations in this area; a significant proportion of Aston is designated as a Conservation Area.

Environmental Constraints

There are no environmental constraints such as flood risk associated with this area.

Summary Evaluation and Recommendations

Table 2.5 Evaluation of Parcels E5(i), E5(ii), E5(iii), E5(iv), E5(v), E4(i) and E4(ii)

Criteria	E4(i)	E4(ii)	E5(i)	E5(ii)	E5(iii)	E5(iv)	E5(v)
Principal features	Open arable land. Mature hedgerows, with evidence of advance planting along external and internal boundaries	Small scale pastoral, mature hedgerows	Small scale pastoral, mature hedgerows	Arable, pastoral mix, sloping from Aston End Road toward Gresley Way	Pastoral/ residential uses	Pastoral/ woodland, steeply sloping from Broadwater Lane to Gresley Way.	Recreation and associated uses Dispersed residential
Key boundaries defining parcel	Mature hedgerows and advance planting	Holders lane to east, Lanterns Lane/Long lane to south, hedgerow to north	Lanterns Lane/Long lane to north, Tatlers Lane to south	Aston End Road to east, Gresley Way to west	Forms western part of and approaches to Aston	Broadwater Lane to south east, Gresley Way to west	Aston Lane to east, A602 to south west, Broadwater Lane to north west
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	Moderate – would affect open land	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – would affect open land but contained	Moderate	Limited given scale and enclosure	Moderate
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	Would urbanise open countryside but visually contained	Would remove small scale landscape	Would remove small scale landscape	Would remove semi-rural context	Would remove semi-rural context	Would remove small scale landscape	Would remove semi-rural context
Relationship with existing development pattern	Gresley Way/Chells Manor to west	Isolated dwellings	Context of the hamlet of Aston End	Isolated dwellings	Western half of Aston	Isolated dwellings	Adjacent to Aston
Effect of development on the landscape setting/character of a settlement	None	Context of the hamlet of Aston End	Context of the hamlet of Aston End	None	Forms northerly setting of Aston	Would remove eastern landscape context beyond Gresley Way	North eastern part forms context for Aston
Constraints	None	None	None	None	Aston Conservation Area	Aston Conservation Area	Aston Conservation Area
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity
Recommendation	Release (Local Plan)	Release (safeguarded)	Release (safeguarded)	Release (Local Plan)	Retain	Retain	Retain
In principle development area (60% of parcel area) and capacity @ 35dph	22ha 770 dwellings	11.5ha 400 dwellings	10ha 350 dwellings	13.5ha 470 dwellings	NA	NA	NA

Table 2.6 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning/Caveats
E4(i)	✓ (Local Plan)	Clear evidence of advance planting - significant buffer planting required to the east of the parcel.
E4(ii)	✓ (Safeguarded)	Well-contained with potential for sensitive use of existing character.
E5(i)	✓ (Safeguarded)	Well-contained with potential for sensitive use of existing character.
E5(ii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Potential for modest development associated with well-contained arable land running from Aston End Lane to Gresley Way.
E5(iii)	✗	Northern part of parcel only to maintain separation from Aston.
E5(iv)	✗	Part of the separation of Aston from Stevenage.
E5(v)	✗	Part of the separation of Aston from Stevenage and dominated by leisure uses.

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the workforce of the Borough.
A Viable Town Centre	Support for town centre services.
Transport and Infrastructure	Proximity to the existing built up area means that there is reasonable access to service provision, such as schools, although realistically access by car is likely.
High Quality Homes	Sites are large enough to ensure a suitable mix.
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Reflect identity/sensitivity of environs to Aston and Aston End through masterplanning.
Healthy Communities	Green infrastructure.
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.

2.4 Land to the north east (segments E3, E2 and N9; parcels E2, E3(i) & E(ii) and N9(i), N9(ii) & N9(iii))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

Segments E3, E2 and N9 were identified in the Part 1 Review as making a contribution to Green Belt purposes, reflecting their role as the transition zone between the urban edge of Stevenage and open countryside to the north and north east. They can be subdivided into six parcels for more detailed assessment (Figure 2.4 and Table 2.7).

Figure 2.4 Land to the North East: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

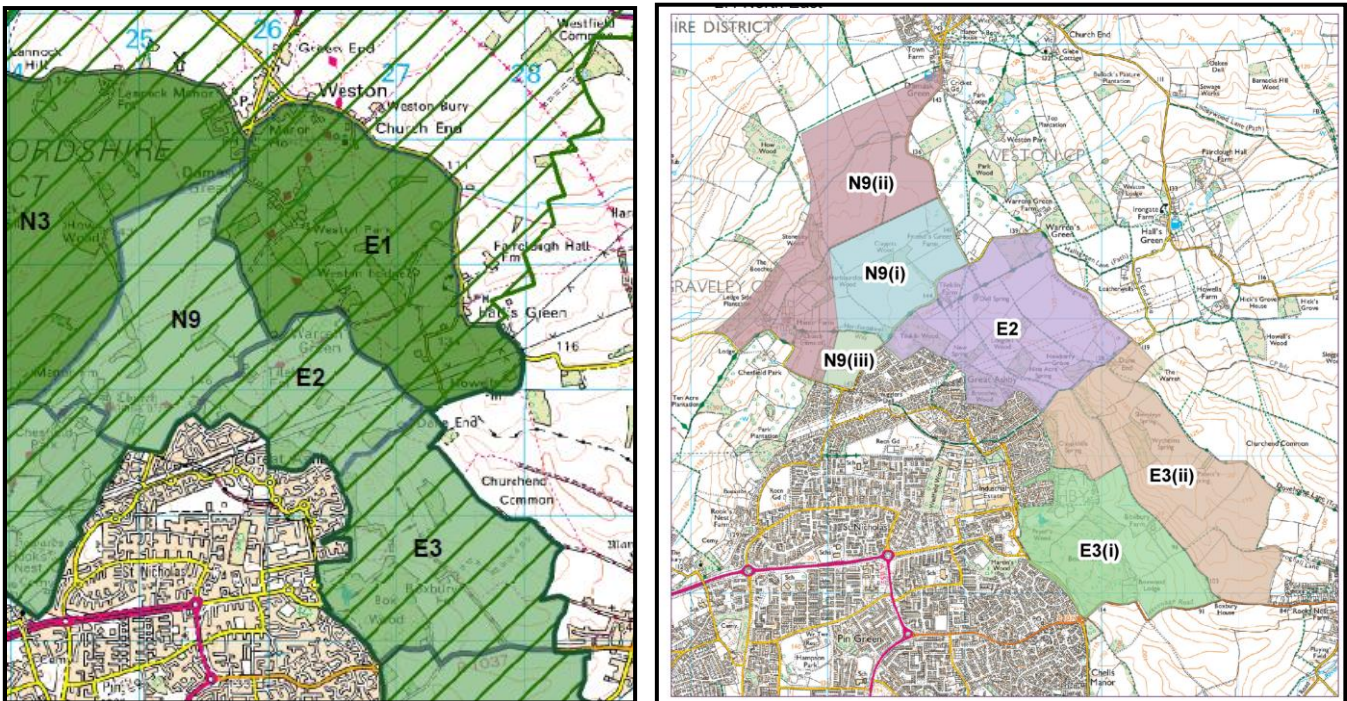


Table 2.7 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segments N9, E2 and E3 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Preventing Merger	Safeguarding from Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
N9	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Consisting of a plateau landscape with substantial hedgerows and woodland blocks, this segment in combination with segment E2 prevents the northward encroachment of Stevenage into open countryside. However, extent of its woodland cover and enclosure of views through substantial hedgerows means that, in principle, development could be absorbed without significant compromising of the wider Green Belt to the north-east of Stevenage. Boundaries of this segment are relatively weak, consisting of minor roads to the south, south east and north east, and woodland edge and hedgerows to the west and north.

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Preventing Merger	Safeguarding from Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
N9(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Open countryside characterised by large scale arable fields and extensive woodland blocks, hedgerows and hedgerow trees. This is part of the plateau extending towards Weston which includes Weston Park to the east. Reflecting the scale of the landscape, clear boundaries between parcels of land are not always present and comprise woodland edges and rights of way. In Green Belt terms there is a clear role in protecting the countryside from the encroachment of urbanising influences.
N9(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Related to parcel N9(i) this includes relatively remote countryside typified by extensive arable cultivation to the north and a mixture of large woodland blocks and arable cultivation to the south, with glimpsed extensive views. As part of the arc of Green Belt to the north of Stevenage, the parcel performs a clear role in protecting the countryside from the encroachment of urbanising influences.
N9(iii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	A well enclosed arable field situated adjacent to relatively recently completed development at Great Ashby which is currently bounded by Back Lane. The strategic Green Belt purpose of this parcel is limited.
E2	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Land situated immediately to the north-east of the urban edge, generally characterised by large-scale arable fields but with significant woodland blocks closer to the urban edge. Whilst making a significant contribution to containing the current extent of the urban area, this would not preclude its subdivision without being detrimental to the Green Belt to the east of Stevenage as a whole. The absence of clear internal boundaries to this segment makes this problematic, however, and further additions to the Green Belt to the east would be required to form an effective easterly Green Belt.
E3	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Akin to segment E2, this land contains the eastern edge of Stevenage and contains no clear internal boundaries by which the segment could be subdivided. Box Wood LNR is a significant presence to the south of the segment, immediately adjacent to the urban edge, although land immediately to the north could be released, although outer boundary definition is again problematic.
E3(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Land immediately to the urban edge of Stevenage dominated by Box Wood and extensive arable cultivation. Performs a clear role in preventing urbanisation of the countryside in this location.
E3(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Forming part of the rolling open landscape extending towards Walkern characterised by large scale arable cultivation and distant views, performing a clear role in preventing urbanisation of the countryside in this location.

Landscape Character

This area is covered by the following Local Landscape Areas:

7. Middle Beane Valley North – characterised by large irregular fields set in a wide sweeping valley with panoramic views, of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.

9. Dane End and Churchend Common – dominated by large arable fields and occasional medium-sized woods, generally of a relatively remote rural character. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.

10. Boxbury Valley – a landscape of large arable fields, pasture and woodlands forming the transition between the urban edge of Stevenage and open countryside to the east. Contains Box Wood a substantial mixed deciduous woodland. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.

11. Tilekiln and Warrens green Farmlands – generally of a small scale, hedged fields of pasture and arable, flat/undulating with many small woodlands limiting views and creating a strong sense of enclosure. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.

12. Roundwood and Claypitts Farmlands – of medium scale, well hedged arable fields and small woodlands with some urban intrusion. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.

Ecological & Cultural Heritage Designations

There are no nationally significant ecological or cultural heritage designations.

Environmental Constraints

There are no environmental constraints such as flood risk associated with this area.

Recommendations and Sustainability Considerations

Table 2.8 Evaluation of Parcels E3(i), E3(ii), E2, N9(i), N9(ii), N9(iii)

Criteria	E3(i)	E3(ii)	E2	N9(i)	N9(ii)	N9(iii)
Principal features	Woodland, some arable and pastoral. Filtered long distance views.	Extensive arable, long distance views to the east.	Arable/pockets of woodland. Filtered views across plateau.	Arable/woodland. Filtered long distance views.	Extensive arable/pastoral. Filtered long distance views.	Arable
Key boundaries defining parcel	Gresley Way to the west, Stevenage Road to the south, unnamed track to the east.	Unnamed track to the east, Stevenage Road to the south, PRoWs to the east,	Edge of Stevenage to the west, unmade tracks to the south, Warrensgreen Lane to the east and north.	Warrensgreen Lane to the south, PRoW to the north, various woodland edges to the west.	PRoW to the north and south, various woodland edges to the east and west.	Back Lane/ Warrensgreen Lane to the south and east, woodland edge to the west, PRoW to the north.
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	Would introduce built form into semi-open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into semi-open land beyond the current urban boundary.
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	Would introduce built form into a semi-rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a semi-rural setting.
Relationship with existing development pattern	Part of southerly context for recent eastward extensions of Stevenage.	None	Contains recent eastward extensions of Stevenage.	Adjacent to recently northward extensions of Stevenage.	None	None
Effect of development on	None	None	None	None	None	None

Criteria	E3(i)	E3(ii)	E2	N9(i)	N9(ii)	N9(iii)
the landscape setting/character of a settlement						
Constraints	Pryors Wood/Box Wood LNR	Claypithills Spring Wood (LWS?)	Tilekiln Wood/Parsonsgreen Wood (LWS?)	Claypits Wood (LWS?)	Ledgeside Plantation (LWS?); Harbourclose Wood (LWS?); Chesfield Church SAM	None
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity
Recommendation	Retain	Retain	Release (safeguarded)	Release (safeguarded)	Retain	Release (Local Plan)
In principle development area (60% of parcel area) and capacity @ 35dph	NA	NA	77ha 2,695 dwellings	108ha 3,780 dwellings	NA	7ha 245 dwellings

Table 2.9 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning/Caveats
E3(i)	✗	A visually extensive landscape which is a transition to wider open countryside to the east and the separation of Walkern from Stevenage.
E3(ii)	✗	A visually extensive landscape which is a transition to wider open countryside to the east and the separation of Walkern from Stevenage.
E2	✓ (Safeguarded)	Whilst this is open countryside, it is part of the plateau to the north east of Stevenage and development here could be visually contained. Long term safeguarding is recommended as part of a direction of growth which could extend existing development. However, the configuration of the Green Belt in this location means that removal of the land at E2 from the Green Belt would require an extension of the boundary eastwards to retain its purposes to the east of Stevenage.
N9(i)	✓ (Safeguarded)	Whilst this is open countryside, it is part of the plateau to the north east of Stevenage and development here could be visually contained. Long term safeguarding is recommended as part of a direction of growth which could extend existing development.
N9(ii)	✗	Open countryside unrelated to current development.
N9(iii)	✓ (Local Plan)	The scale, degree of enclosure and relationship with existing development at Great Ashby means that there could be release without affecting the wider purpose of the Green Belt in this area.

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the workforce of the Borough.
A Viable Town Centre	Uncertainty over catchment area.
Transport and Infrastructure	The peripheral character of these parcels presents issues of access to jobs and services associated with any development. The issues become more acute the further eastward one goes, whereupon development then becomes unacceptably remote or demands the

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
	provision of services to support the population, notably for schools and health, planned as part of a wider strategic masterplanning exercise.
High Quality Homes	Sites are large enough to ensure a suitable mix.
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Neutral effects.
Healthy Communities	Opportunities for significant green infrastructure.
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.

2.5 Land to the north (segment N4; parcels N4(i), N4(ii) & N4(iii))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

The Part 1 Green Belt Review concluded that this segment makes a contribution to Green Belt purpose containing the current northern edge of Stevenage and being the transition zone to open countryside north of Graveley. Within the segment, six distinct parcels of land can be identified (Figure 2.5 and Table 2.10).

Figure 2.5 Land to the North: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

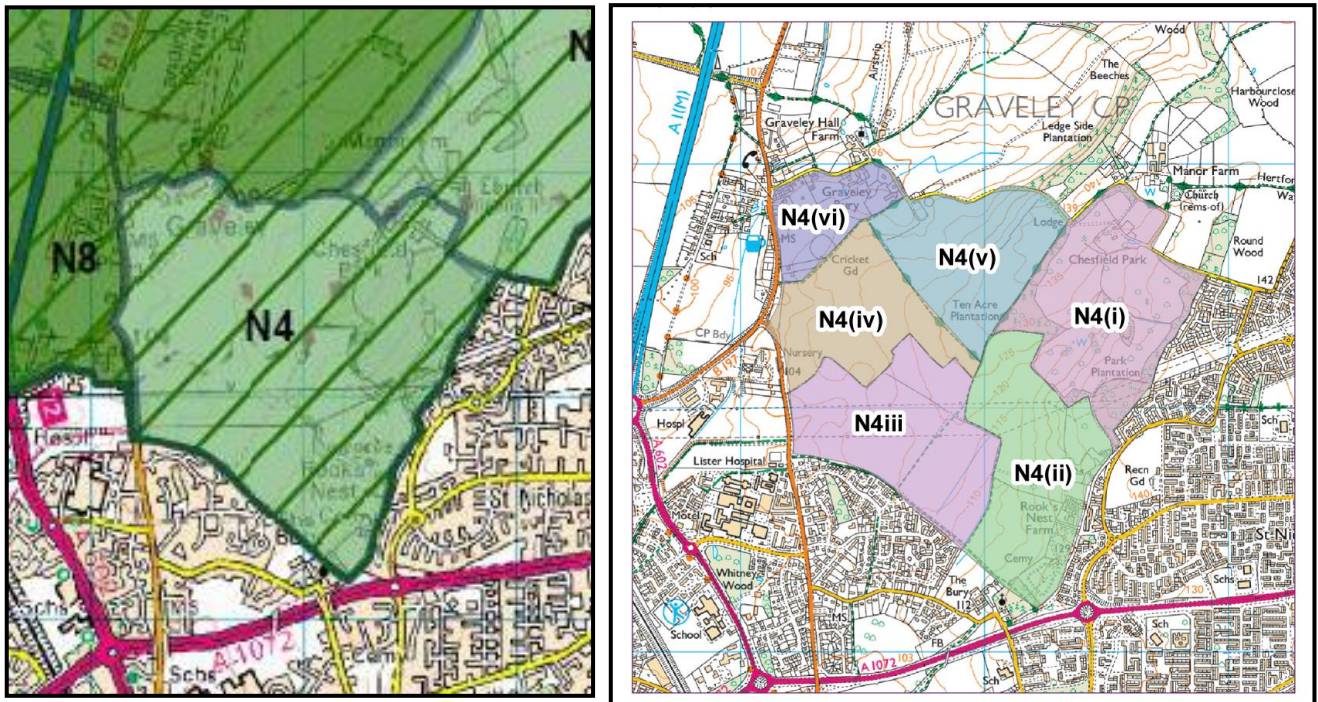


Table 2.10 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segments N4 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Merger	Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
N4	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	The landscape to the west of the segment is fairly open, but the eastern section which contains a greater amount of tree planting, is more enclosed. This segment, whilst protecting the open countryside from encroachment, overall makes a contribution to Green Belt purpose by virtue of its visual relationship with the current urban edge and containment by Church Lane/Back Lane. Boundaries to this segment are of varying strength, being the B197 to the west, Church Lane/Back Lane to the north and Weston Lane and the urban edge to the south and west.
N4(i)	Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Comprising the landscape associated with Chesfield Park, this parcel forms the transition between urban fringe and open countryside to the north. As such it makes a significant contribution in helping to prevent encroachment and overall a contribution to the purpose of the Green Belt in this area.
N4(ii)	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Forming the context for the edge of the north eastern extension of Stevenage, this parcel has a very open aspect with large scale arable fields and strong visual connection with similar land immediately to the west. Overall there is a contribution to Green Belt purpose but this is not especially strong.
N4(iii)	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	This parcel forms the immediate fringe to north Stevenage and as such contains it, but its south facing topography means that there is relatively limited connection with the open countryside to the north. Mature boundary planting along Stevenage's boundary makes the visual containment stronger.
N4(iv)	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Related to parcel N4(vi), this parcel has good boundary definition on three side, but is weaker on its north eastern edge which has a strong visual connection to open countryside to the north. As such it makes a contribution to Green Belt purpose overall.
N4(v)	Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Large scale open arable land offering extensive views to north, south and west, rising towards Chesfield Park, bounded to the north by the strong boundary of Church Lane. This land is the transition zone between the urban fringe to the south and open countryside to the north, and combined with its elevated topography is visually sensitive.
N4(vi)	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Forms the immediate landscape context for Graveley, dominated by small scale pasture and leisure uses, in contrast to open land extending eastwards.

Landscape Character

This area is covered by the following Local Landscape Areas:

13. Chesfield Park – historic parkland characterised by small scale pasture centred on Chesfield Manor. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development. 14. St Nicholas and Rooks Nest Farm Valley – large arable fields on valley side providing the setting for St Nicholas and the Bury. Of high

sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development. 15. North Stevenage Farmlands – gently undulating arable fields with few field boundaries rising to ridgeline towards Graveley. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development. 16. Graveley Farmlands – large scale, rolling landform with views to open countryside to the north. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development. 18. Graveley – historic settlement surrounded by well hedged small and medium scale pasture with hedgerow trees. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.

Ecological & Cultural Heritage Designations

St. Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area affecting N4(ii) and N4(iii) and Graveley Conservation Area affecting N4(vi)

Environmental Constraints

There are no environmental constraints such as flood risk associated with this area.

Summary Evaluation and Recommendations

Table 2.11 Evaluation of Parcels N4(i) to N4(vi)

Criteria	N4(i)	N4(ii)	N4(iii)	N4(iv)	N4(v)	N4(vi)
Principal features	Mixed pastoral, woodland and arable landscape, of large, open scale with extensive views to the west. Northern half dominated by Chesfield Park.	Large scale arable	Large scale arable	Large scale arable	Large scale arable	Small scale, enclosed pastoral and leisure uses in the immediate environs of Graveley.
Key boundaries defining parcel	Urban edge to the east, woodland edge and PRoW to the west.	Urban edge to the east, PRoW to the west.	Urban edge to the south, tree belt to the north associated with Stevenage/North Herts boundary	PRoW to the north, tree belt to the south associated with Stevenage/North Herts boundary	PRoW to the south and north, Church and to the north.	PRoW to the east, B197 to the west, Graveley village to the north.
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	Would introduce built form into semi-enclosed land beyond current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.	Would introduce built form into open land beyond the current urban boundary.
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	Would introduce built form into a semi-rural setting.	Would introduce built form into an urban fringe setting.	Would introduce built form into an urban fringe setting.	Would introduce built form into semi-rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a semi-rural setting.	Would introduce built form into a semi-rural setting.
Relationship with existing development pattern	Adjacent to urban edge.	Adjacent to urban edge.	Adjacent to urban edge.	Unrelated to development.	Remote from development.	Adjacent to Graveley.
Effect of development on the landscape setting/character of a settlement	Would remove countryside setting of current urban edge.	Would remove countryside setting of current urban edge.	Would remove countryside setting of current urban edge.	None	None	Would introduce built form into semi-rural setting of village.
Constraints	(Mature parkland)	St. Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area	None	None	None	Graveley Conservation Area
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity
Recommendation	Retain	Release (Safeguarded)	Release (Local Plan)	Release (Local Plan)	Release (Safeguard)	Retain
In principle development area (60% of parcel area) and capacity @ 35dph	NA	24ha 840 dwellings	25ha 875 dwellings	19ha 665 dwellings	16ha 560 dwellings	NA

Table 2.12 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning/Caveats
N4(i)	×	Relatively strong Green Belt purpose and landscape character being a transition between urban fringe and open countryside to the north.
N4(ii)	✓ (Safeguarded)	Opportunity to consider longer term release once the character of development on adjacent parcels is established.
N4(iii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Notwithstanding its open aspect, this parcel could be released within the local plan period given its current containment by strong boundaries and opportunities to substantiate these through further landscaping.
N4(iv)	✓ (Local Plan)	Whilst this parcel is less well contained than N4(iii) and visually more open, it is complementary and with sensitive landscaping could accommodate development without significant erosion of Green Belt purposes in this location. The narrowing of the gap between Stevenage and Graveley would have to be carefully considered.
N4(v)	✓ (Safeguarded)	Opportunity to consider longer term release once the character of development on adjacent parcels is established, but this is uncertain given the visual connection with open countryside to the north.
N4(vi)	×	Strong role in defining the character of Graveley.

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the Borough's workforce.
A Viable Town Centre	Probable orientation towards the Town Centre, although location makes this uncertain.
Transport and Infrastructure	The proximity of this area to Stevenage means that access to schools and health services is likely to be good, with opportunities for the provision of sustainable transport through extensions to bus routes, cycleways and footpaths.
High Quality Homes	Opportunities for a diversity of provision in a development of this scale.
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Protection of the setting of Graveley through good masterplanning.
Healthy Communities	Development could also realise the incorporation of significant green infrastructure, particularly in the context of the area's connection with the wider countryside and the HV power lines crossing the area.
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.

2.6 Land to the north west (segments N8, N5, W2; parcels N8(i), N5(i), N5(ii) and W2(i))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

Segments N5, N8 and W2 were assessed in the Part 1 Review as making a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes, reflecting their strategic role in separating Stevenage and Hitchin. The segments can be subdivided into four parcels for more detailed assessment (Figure 2.6 and Table 2.13). These parcels are considered for release for employment/retail uses.

Figure 2.6 Land to the North West: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

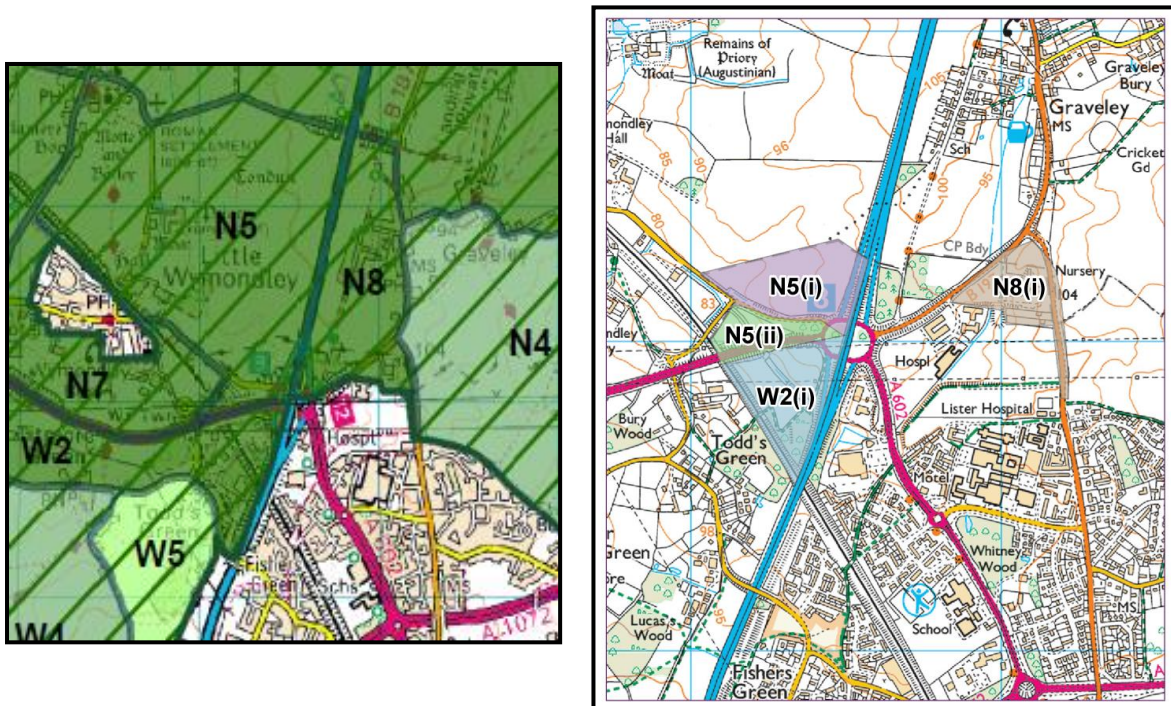


Table 2.13 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segments N8, N5, W2 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Merger	Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
N8	Significant Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contained between the A1(M) and B197, this land forms part of the context for Graveley Village, and contains sprawl along the B197. Along with segments N1, N2, N5, N6 and N7, this land forms a critical part of the separation between Stevenage and Hitchin, and containing sprawl northwards along the B197 and A1(M) through Graveley. Roads of varying size, including the A1(M), form strong boundaries to this segment.

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Merger	Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
N8(i)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Brownfield land contained by Graveley Road to the north west and North Road to the east. The overall Green Belt function of this parcel is limited, reflecting its small scale and strongly enclosed character.
N5	Significant Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Along with segments N1, N2, N6 and N7, this land forms a critical part of the separation between Stevenage and Hitchin. Roads of varying size, including the A1(M) and A602, form strong boundaries to this segment.
N5(i)	Significant Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	This parcel is clearly part of the wider land to the north west which makes a significant contribution to separating Stevenage and Hitchin. Whilst an intermittent hedgerow forms a northerly boundary, it is insubstantial with Graveley Lane, to the north, being the first significant boundary. It is difficult to separate this parcel either visually or functionally from its wider context.
N5(ii)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	A 'remnant' parcel which is strongly enclosed on all three sides. Whilst technically part of the wider Green Belt between Stevenage and Hitchin, the effect of bisection by transport routes means that its visual and functional connection with that wider land is limited. As a result of its location, the parcel does make a contribution to preventing encroachment into the wider countryside.
W2	Significant Contribution	Significant Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	This linear segment is strongly influenced by the A602 which forms its northern boundary, and A1(M) which forms its eastern boundary. The key functions of this segment are the prevention of sprawl along the A602 and contribution to the maintenance of the gap between Stevenage and Hitchin. As such the segment makes a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes.
W2(i)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	A 'remnant' parcel which is strongly enclosed on all three sides. Whilst technically part of the wider Green Belt to the west of Stevenage, the effect of bisection by transport routes means that its visual and functional connection with that wider land is limited. As a result of its location, the parcel does make a contribution to preventing encroachment into the wider countryside.

Landscape Character

This area is covered by the following Local Landscape Areas:

17. North Lister - Small valley, visual/noise intrusion from urban development, road and pylons, lack of field boundaries, patches of scrub. Of low sensitivity and high capacity for employment. 19. West Wymondley Farmlands - Large arable fields, gently undulating topography, very open, visual and noise intrusion from A1(M). Of high sensitivity and low capacity for employment. 21. North Todds Green - Small enclosed fields surrounded by major roads and railway. Significant visual/noise intrusion. Of low sensitivity and high capacity for employment.

Ecological & Cultural Heritage Designations

There are no ecological or cultural heritage designations in this area.

Environmental Constraints

There are no environmental constraints such as flood risk associated with this area.

Summary Evaluation and Recommendations

Table 2.14 Evaluation of Parcels N8(i), N5(i), N5(ii) and W2(i)

Criteria	N8(i)	N5(i)	N5(ii)	W2(i)
Principal features	Brownfield, ex-nursery.	Large-scale arable with extensive views to the north.	Small scale arable, remnants from transport infrastructure development.	Small scale arable, remnants from transport infrastructure development.
Key boundaries defining parcel	Graveley Road to the north west and North Road to the east.	Stevenage Road to the south, A1(M) to the east.	A602 to the south, Stevenage Road to the north.	A1(M) to the east, A602 to the north, railway line to the east.
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	No effect given current urbanised state.	Would introduce built form into open countryside beyond current urban boundary.	No effect given enclosure.	No effect given enclosure.
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	No effect given enclosure.	Would introduce built form into a rural setting.	Would introduce built form into an urban fringe setting.	Would introduce built form into an urban fringe setting.
Relationship with existing development pattern	Adjacent to employment development to the south.	None	None	None
Effect of development on the landscape setting/character of a settlement	No effect	Would erode wider Green Belt which separates Stevenage and Hitchin.	No effect	No effect
Constraints	None	None	None	None
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	Low sensitivity and high capacity for employment	High sensitivity and low capacity for employment	Low sensitivity and high capacity for employment	Low sensitivity and high capacity for employment
Recommendation	Release (Local Plan)	Retain	Release (Local Plan)	Release (Local Plan)

Table 2.15 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning/Caveats
N8(i)	✓ (Local Plan)	Strongly enclosed 'remnant' parcel
N5(i)	✗	Significant role in the separation of Hitchin and Stevenage.
N5(ii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Strongly enclosed 'remnant' parcel
W2(i)	✓ (Local Plan)	Strongly enclosed 'remnant' parcel

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the Borough's workforce.
A Viable Town Centre	Relative proximity to the Town Centre.
Transport and Infrastructure	Excellent access to the local and strategic road network.
High Quality Homes	NA
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Opportunity for masterplanning of these gateway sites.
Healthy Communities	Access by cycle for employees.
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.

2.7 Land to the west (segments W4, W5, W6 and W7; parcels W4(i) & W4(ii), W5(i), W5(ii), W6(i) & W6(ii), W7(i), W7(ii), W7(iii)) & W7(iv))

Green Belt Purpose, Landscape Character and Constraints

Green Belt Purpose

Segments W4, W6 and W7 were assessed in the Part 1 Review as making a contribution to Green Belt purposes, reflecting their role in preventing encroachment into the open land to the west of the Ai(M), whilst segment W5 was considered to have a relatively limited contribution, reflecting its location and degree of containment. The segments can be subdivided into ten parcels for more detailed assessment (Figure 2.7 and Table 2.16).

Figure 2.7 Land to the West: Green Belt Segments, Purposes and Parcels for Further Analysis

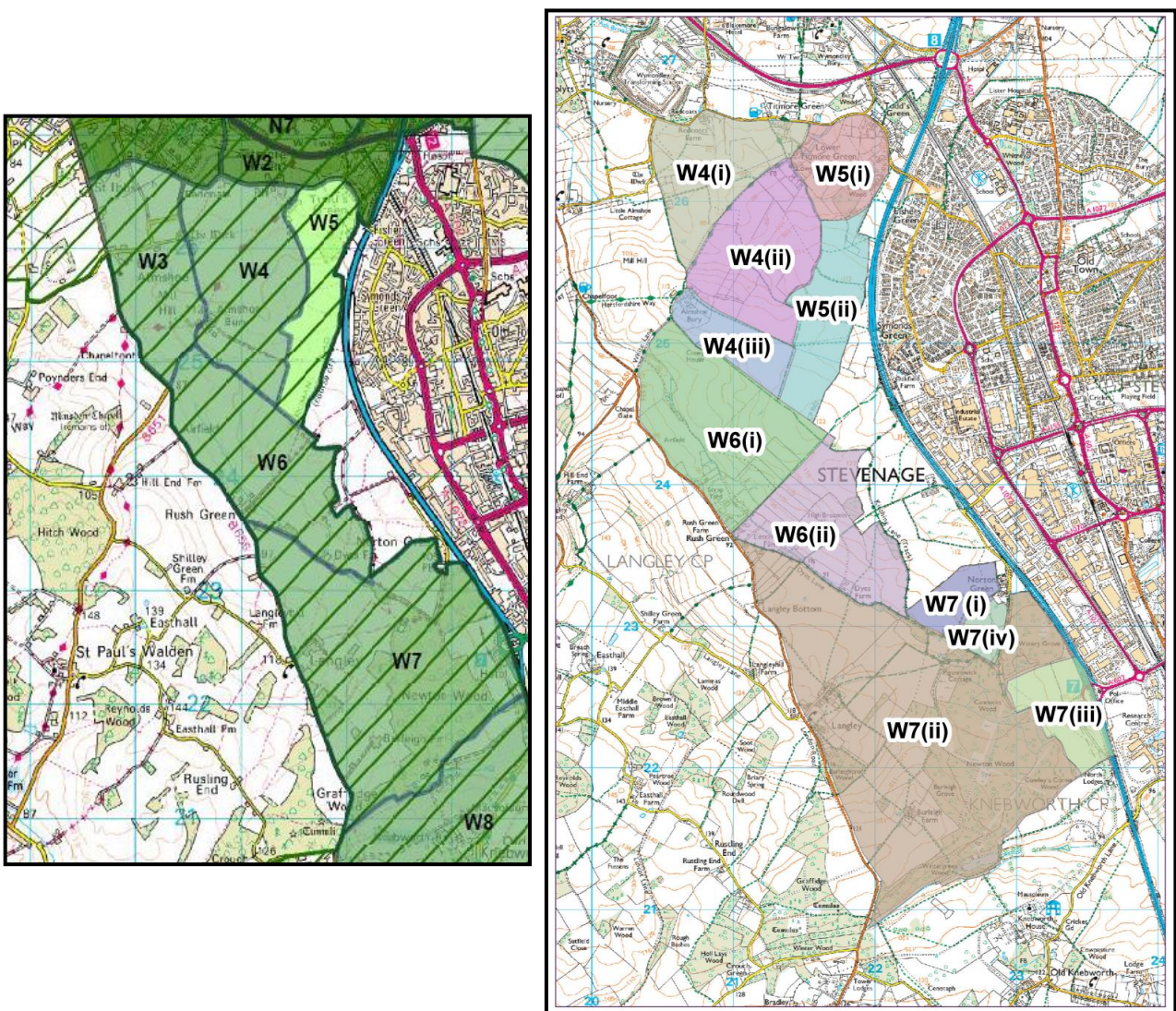


Table 2.16 Contribution to Green Belt Purposes of Segments W4, W5, W6 and W7 and Component Parcels

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Merger	Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
W4	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	This segment is characterised by undulating land of extensive open fields which assists with preventing encroachment into open countryside in this vicinity. However, the landform is such that development would not undermine the integrity of the Green Belt, particularly if were part of a wider masterplanned development which sought to create stronger boundaries than currently exist. The boundaries of this segment are trackways to the west, east and south, and minor roads to the north.
W4(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Extensive open land dominated by arable cultivation with extensive panoramic views. Visually sensitive and vulnerable to the intrusion of built development.
W4(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Extensive open land dominated by arable cultivation with extensive panoramic views. Visually sensitive and vulnerable to the intrusion of built development.
W4(iii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Extensive open land dominated by arable cultivation with extensive panoramic views. Visually sensitive and vulnerable to the intrusion of built development.
W5	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Whilst this segment is nominally part of the open countryside to the west of Stevenage, its purpose as part of the Green Belt is relatively limited. Whilst contributing to checking sprawl and encroachment, this is in combination with other segments to the west, and its overall contribution is considered to be limited, notwithstanding its separation from Stevenage by the A1(M) and western boundary defined by a trackway.
W5(i)	Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Characterised by a patchwork of small to medium sized fields in pastoral use with strong hedgerow boundaries, this parcel provides the setting for the hamlet of Todd's Green to the west and south (its east and northerly context removed by the A1(M) and A602). In addition, this is the first open countryside between Stevenage and Hitchin south of the A602 and as such makes a contribution in combination with other parcels to the separation of the two towns.
W5(ii)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Of a more open character than the parcel immediately to the north, this parcel makes a relatively limited contribution to Green Belt purposes in its current context, although it complements land of a similarly open character immediately to the west. Boundaries are weak in this area (being largely PRoW) and would benefit from strengthening if land were to be released from the Green Belt.
W6	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	The large arable fields combined with a low population density and almost complete absence of woodland creates an open landscape, although the undulating topography provides a level of containment. Forming the eastern flank of the Langley Valley (along with segment W3), this segment contributes to preventing encroachment into open countryside, defined by the B656 to the west and trackways to the north east, east and south west.

Segment/ Parcel	Checking sprawl	Merger	Encroachment	Setting of Settlements	Overall Contribution	Commentary
W6(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	An open landscape dominated by arable cultivation with limited boundaries, forming the eastern slopes of the Langley Valley, of high visual sensitivity and extensive views to the west of the B656.
W6(ii)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	An open landscape dominated by arable cultivation with limited boundaries, forming the eastern slopes of the Langley Valley, of high visual sensitivity and extensive views to the west of the B656.
W7	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Consisting of arable land and significant woodland cover, much of which is designated as SSSI, this segment makes a contribution to preventing the urbanisation of the open countryside to the south-west of Stevenage, complementing segments W6 and W8. This segment also includes land to the west of Junction 7 of the A1(M) which has been developed for hotel uses, and which is part of a larger parcel contained by the A1(M) and the irregular eastern edge of Newton Wood. The hamlet of Norton Green lies immediately adjacent to the segment in land which has been previously removed from the Green Belt.
W7(i)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	This parcel, in combination with W7(iv), forms the westerly context for Norton Green. There are reasonably strong boundaries defining this parcel (being a combination of hedgerows, woodland edge, PRoW and field boundaries) which gives the land relatively strong definition in Green Belt terms. This parcel complements parcels to the west and south.
W7(ii)	Significant Contribution	Limited Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	Contribution	Dominated by Newton Wood and open arable land extending across the eastern slopes of the Langley Valley, this parcel makes a varying contribution across a range of Green Belt purposes, overall being an important part of this arc of Green Belt to the west of Stevenage.
W7(iii)	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Limited Contribution	Visually enclosed by Newton Wood to the west and north, this parcel has been subject in part to commercial development associated with Junction 7 of the A1(M). The parcel makes a limited contribution across all Green Belt purposes.
W7(iv)	Contribution	Limited Contribution	Contribution	Significant Contribution	Contribution	This parcel, in combination with W7(i), forms the westerly context for Norton Green. There are reasonably strong boundaries defining this parcel (being a combination of hedgerows, woodland edge, PRoW and field boundaries) which gives the land relatively strong definition in Green Belt terms. This parcel complements parcels to the west and south.

Landscape Character

This area is covered by the following Local Landscape Areas:

23. Todds Green –linear settlement set within small scale hedged fields, with some intrusion by farm buildings and industrial uses. Of moderate sensitivity and capacity for extensive residential development.

24. Titmore Green Farmlands – hedged arable and pasture fields of small to medium scale with small woods and copses; strong rural character. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.
25. Little Almshoe and Mill Hill Slopes – large arable fields on rolling valley sides with extensive views northward. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
26. Almshoe Bury Plateau/Ridge – a plateau bounded by ridgeline to the west comprising large and medium scale open arable fields, limited hedgerows, intrusion by urban fringe uses and visual and noise intrusion from the A1(M) immediately to the east. Of low sensitivity and high capacity for extensive residential development.
27. Langley Valley Eastern Slopes – undulating valley sides with large open arable fields, and extensive views to the west. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
28. Langley Valley Bottom – small scale hedged pastureland, largely rural in character. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
30. Knebworth Woods and Norton Green – extensive ancient woodland and small, well-hedged pastures, tranquil character. Of high sensitivity and low capacity for extensive residential development.
31. Junction 7 Novotel – large area of rough pasture bounded on two sides by large ancient woodland. Intrusion from the A1(M) immediately to the east. Of moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for extensive residential development.

Ecological & Cultural Heritage Designations

Newton Wood is designated as a SSSI and there are various local wildlife sites across the area. There are no cultural heritage designations in this area.

Environmental Constraints

There are no environmental constraints such as flood risk associated with this area.

Summary Evaluation and Recommendations

Table 2.17 Evaluation of Parcels W4(i) to W4(iii), W5(i) to W5(ii), W6(i) to W6(ii) and W7(i) to W7(iv)

Criteria	W4(i)	W4(ii)	W4(iii)	W5(i)	W5(ii)	W6(i)	W6(ii)	W7(i)	W7(ii)	W7(iii)	W7(iv)
Principal features	Pastoral/ arable, extensive views.	Large scale arable, extensive views.	Large scale arable, extensive views.	Small scale pastoral/ woodland.	Large scale arable with extensive views.	Large scale arable forming easterly slopes of the Langley Valley.	Large scale arable forming easterly slopes of the Langley Valley.	Large scale arable, extensive views.	Large scale arable and woodland. Extensive views on westerly portion.	Pastoral	Pastoral/ arable
Key boundaries defining parcel	Redcoats Green road to north, PRoW to west and south east.	ProW to west and south.	PRoW to north east and south west.	Various to east, Titmore Green to west	A1(M)/ PRoW to east, PRoW to west	B656 to south west, PRoW to north east and south east.	PRoW to north west, PRoW to north east, Dyes Lane to south west.	Intermittent hedgerows to south east and north west.	B656 to south west, Knebworth Park to south east, various to north east.	Newton Wood to the west and north, A1(M) Junction 7 to the east, mature hedgerow to the south.	Newton Wood to the south east and south west, intermittent hedgerow to the north west.
Effect of development on openness and purposes of GB	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.	Would extend current urban footprint.	Would introduce built development into a rural context.
Effect of development on visual amenity of the countryside/ locality	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Significant given openness.	Relatively limited given relative enclosure.	Significant given openness to west.	Limited as enclosed parcel, visible only from Junction 7.	Relatively limited given relative enclosure.
Relationship with existing development pattern	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Effect of development on	Northern part forms the	None	None	Forms the setting for	None	None	None	Part of rural setting for	None	None	None

Criteria	W4(i)	W4(ii)	W4(iii)	W5(i)	W5(ii)	W6(i)	W6(ii)	W7(i)	W7(ii)	W7(iii)	W7(iv)
the landscape setting/character of a settlement	setting for Titmore Green.			Todds Green.				Norton Green.			
Constraints	None	None	None	Lucas Wood (LWS?) Titmore Green Meadow (SWV)	None	None	High Broomin Wood (LWS?)	None	Newton Wood SSSI	None	Meadow west of North Green (SWV)
Landscape sensitivity and capacity (Halcrow 2006 study)	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	Moderate/high sensitivity and moderate/low capacity	Moderate/high sensitivity and moderate/low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity	Moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity	High sensitivity and low capacity
Recommendation	Retain	Release (safeguarded)	Retain	Retain	Release (Local Plan)	Retain	Retain	Retain	Retain	Release (Local Plan)	Retain
In principle development area (60% of parcel area) and capacity @ 35dph	NA	38ha 1,350 dwellings	NA	NA	55ha 1,150 dwellings	NA	NA	NA	NA	20ha (gross) Employment	NA

Table 2.18 Summary of Recommendations

Parcel	Recommended for release?	Reasoning
W4(i)	✗	Provides context for Titmore Green and St Ippolytts.
W4(ii)	✓ (Safeguard)	Although of open character with insubstantial boundaries (being rights of way), the land could be released over the long term without significant damage to the wider Green Belt, following development to the south east and using advance planting to help define permanent boundaries.
W4(iii)	✗	This parcel sits on top of the Langley Valley ridge and as such has a significant visual prominence, notwithstanding the relatively strong boundaries (for this area) of PRoW on all sides. The area would better serve as part of a strong Green Belt boundary for land to the west.
W5(i)	✗	Provides the context for Todd's Green.
W5(ii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Whilst visually open, this land is oriented toward the A1(M) and development with appropriate landscaping could be accommodated without significant damage to the Green Belt in this location, particularly as part of a wider development scheme to the west of the A1(M).
W6(i)	✗	Part of visually sensitive, west-facing slopes of the Langley Valley.
W6(ii)	✗	Part of visually sensitive, west-facing slopes of the Langley Valley.
W7(i)	✗	Provides context for Norton Green – development would compromise its identity.
W7(ii)	✗	Dominated by Newton Wood (SSSI) and open countryside around Langley.
W7(iii)	✓ (Local Plan)	Visually enclosed and strongly bounded by Newton Wood, release of this parcel will not compromise the wider purpose of the Green Belt.
W7(iv)	✗	Provides context for Norton Green – development would compromise its identity.

Sustainability Issues Associated with Areas Recommended for Release

Aspiration	Potential Contribution
A Strong Competitive Economy	Contribution to the Borough's workforce.
A Viable Town Centre	Likely orientation towards the Town Centre.
Transport and Infrastructure	The severance of land to the west of the A1(M) from Stevenage presents a challenge for sustainable development although a high degree of self-containment can be achieved in order to avoid excessive trip generation, as well as opportunities for the provision of sustainable transport through extensions to bus routes and cycleways.
High Quality Homes	Opportunities for a diversity of provision on a development of this scale.
Good Design and the Historic Environment	Neutral effects.
Healthy Communities	Development could also realise the incorporation of significant green infrastructure, particularly in the context of the area's connection with the wider countryside.
The Green Belt	Removal without compromise of wider purpose.
Climate Change and Flooding	Neutral effects.
The Natural Environment	Neutral effects.



3. Summary of Potential for Green Belt Release and Development Capacity

Stevenage Borough Council requested that the Part 2 review consider two scenarios associated with Green Belt release: inner boundaries using Green Belt within SBC’s jurisdiction; and long term Green Belt boundaries within SBC’s and adjoining Councils’ jurisdiction. Drawing from the analysis in Chapter 2, parcels recommended for removal from the Green Belt as potential sites to be proposed in the Local Plan and safeguarded land which could help to meet longer term development needs are illustrated in Figure 3.1 (for land within SBC jurisdiction) and 3.2 (for land within SBC, NHDC and EHDC).

Figure 3.1 Green Belt Parcels within SBC with Potential for Release

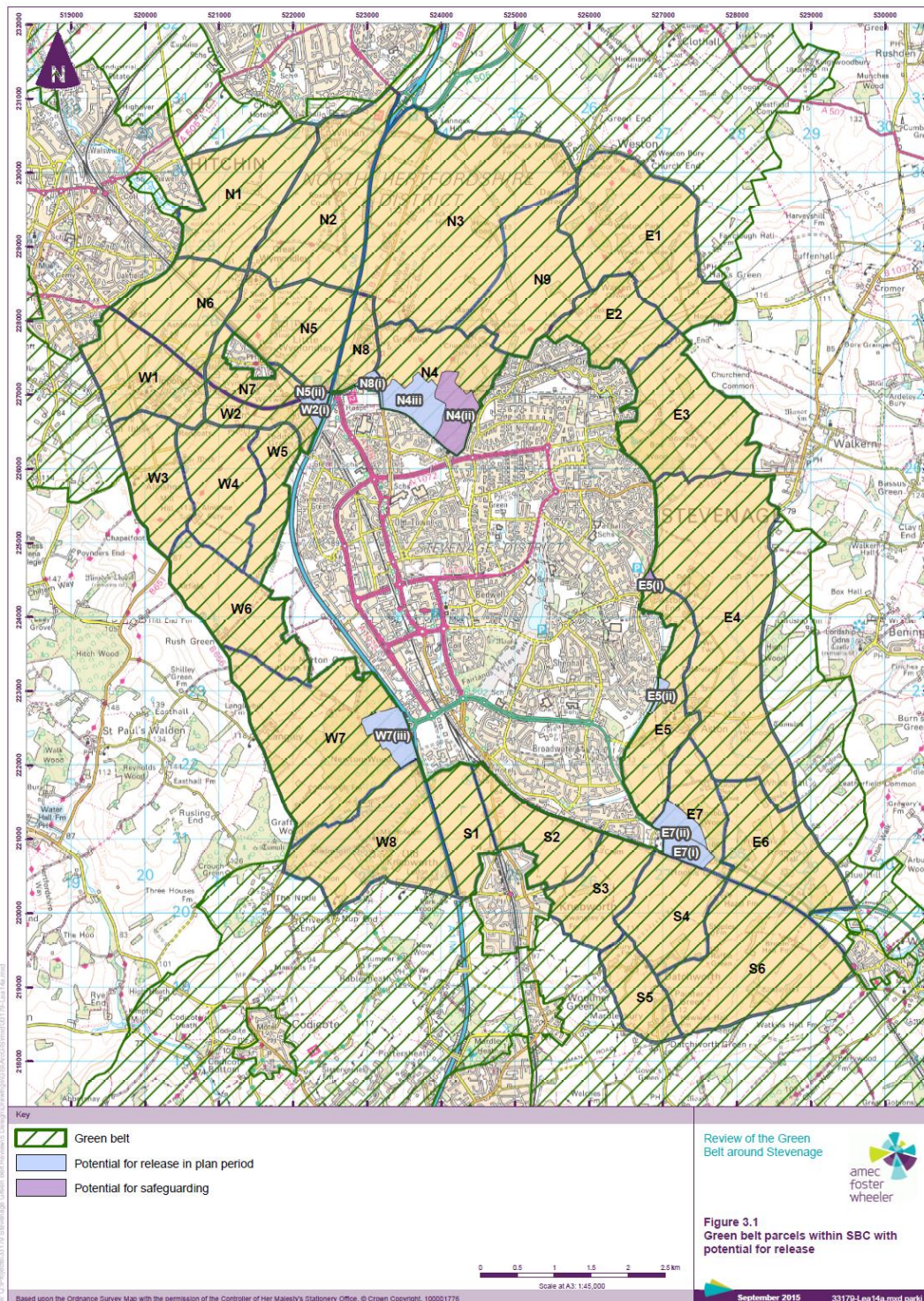


Figure 3.2 Green Belt Parcels within SBC, NHDC and EHDC with Potential for Release

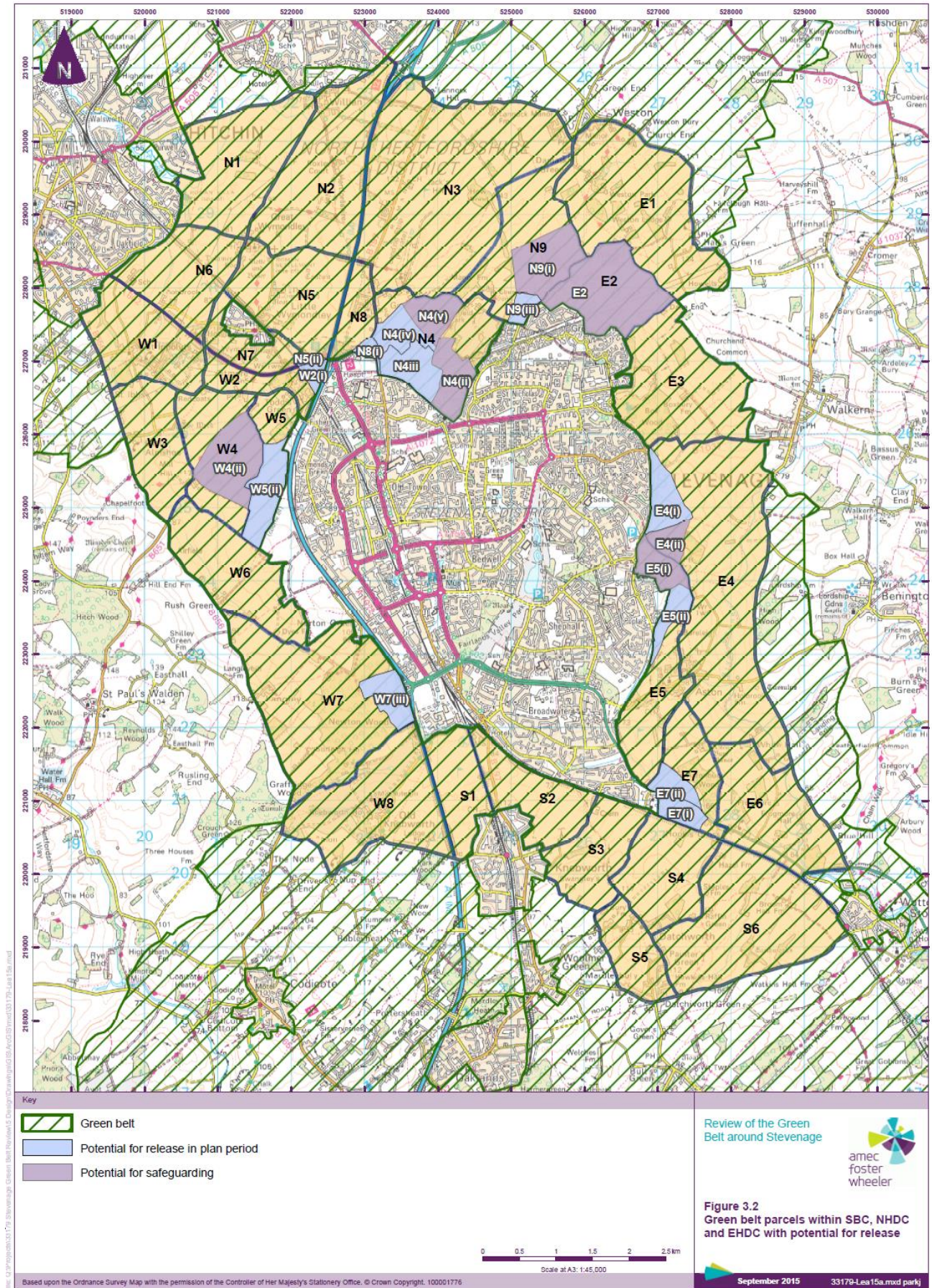


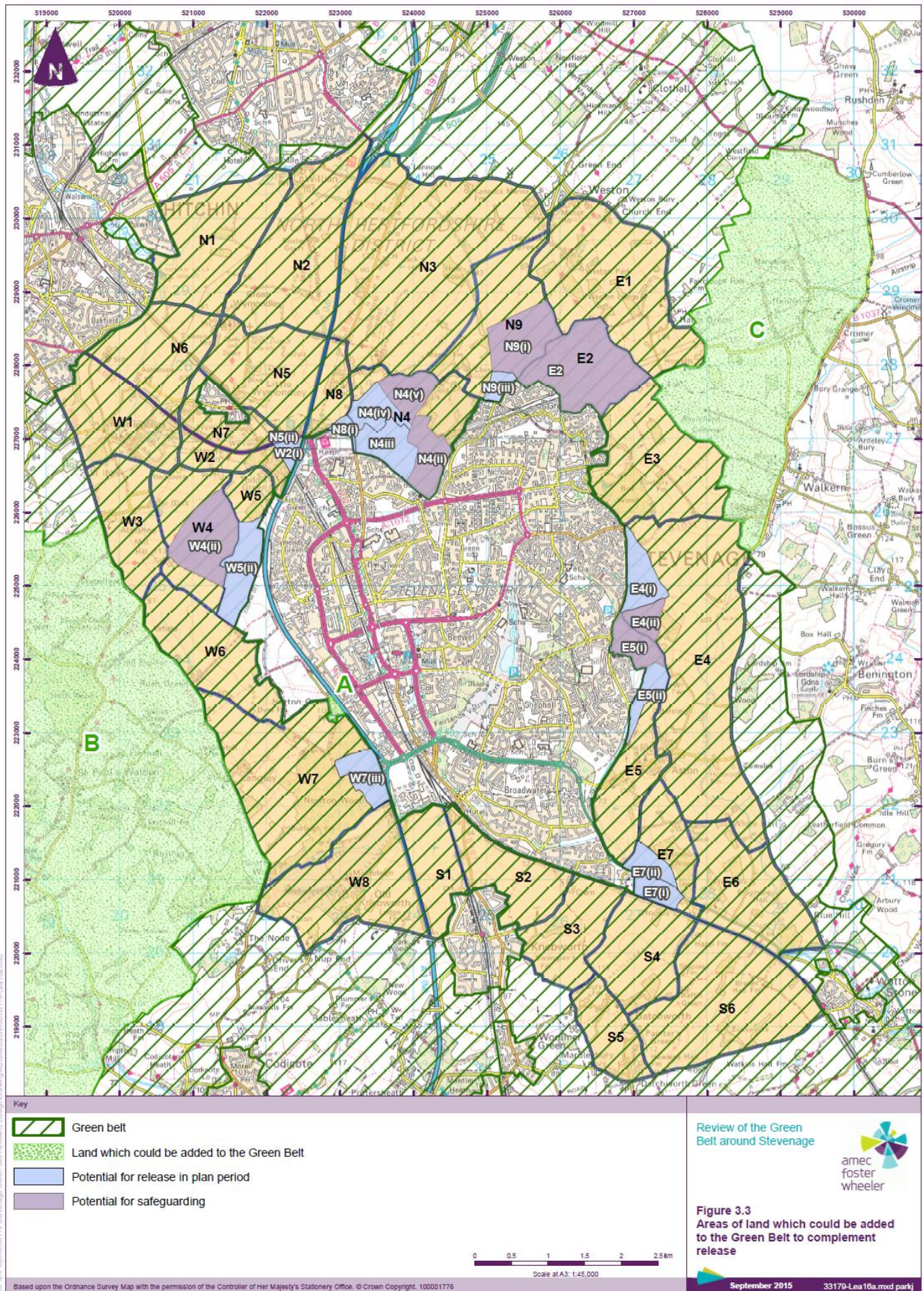
Table 3.1 Indicative Development Capacity of Parcels Recommended for Release

Parcel	Gross Area	Indicative Development Capacity @ 35dph and 60% of gross parcel area	Local Plan Allocation or Safeguarded Land	Jurisdiction
E7(i)	23ha	490 dwellings	Local Plan	SBC
E7(ii)	14ha	294 dwellings	Local Plan	SBC
E4(i)	37ha	770 dwellings	Local Plan	EHDC
E4(ii)	19ha	400 dwellings	Safeguarded	EHDC
E5(i)	17ha	350 dwellings	Safeguarded	EHDC
E5(ii)	23ha	470 dwellings	Local Plan	EHDC
E2	128ha	2,895 dwellings	Safeguarded	NHDC
N9(i)	180ha	3,780 dwellings	Safeguarded	NHDC
N9(iii)	12ha	245 dwellings	Local Plan	NHDC
N4(ii)	40ha	840 dwellings	Safeguarded	SBC
N4(iii)	42ha	875 dwellings	Local Plan	SBC
N4(iv)	32ha	665 dwellings	Local Plan	NHDC
N4(v)	27ha	560 dwellings	Safeguarded	NHDC
W4(ii)	63ha	1,350 dwellings	Safeguarded	NHDC
W5(ii)	55ha	1,150 dwellings	Local Plan	NHDC
TOTAL	238ha	4,959 dwellings	Local Plan	
TOTAL	474ha	10,175 dwellings	Safeguarded	
N8(i)	5ha	Employment	Local Plan	SBC
N5(ii)	3.5ha	Employment	Local Plan	SBC
W2(i)	7.5ha	Employment	Local Plan	SBC
W7(iii)	20ha	Employment	Local Plan	NHDC

Areas of land which could be added to the Green Belt to strengthen its current purpose and respond to proposed removals could focus on three areas (Figure 3.3):

1. **AREA A:** A small area of land surrounding the hamlet of Norton Green which would address an anomaly relating to previous removal of the Green Belt.
2. **AREA B:** Land to the west of the B656 in North Hertfordshire District. This is proposed in the NHDC Local Plan Preferred Options and would address the issue of an overly narrow Green Belt to the west of Stevenage should the Green Belt be rolled back to accommodate growth.
3. **AREA C:** Land to the north west of Walkern within East Hertfordshire District between the current easterly boundary and the B1037 to the east and A507 to the north. This would address removal of Green Belt designation to the north east of Stevenage in the long term to create a suitably wide Green Belt in this location.

Figure 3.3 Areas of land which could be added to the Green Belt to complement release



4. Observations and conclusions

This study has identified Green Belt land which could be released for development in the Plan period and beyond without damage to the purposes of the Green Belt as a whole in this location. Land identified for release in the Plan period could accommodate approximately 4,500 dwellings. This relies on the release of Green Belt land primarily within North Hertfordshire District, but also to a lesser extent East Hertfordshire District, through the Duty to Co-operate.

A key issue identified as part of this study is the tension between Green Belt boundaries as specified through Green Belt policy, and what might constitute appropriate development boundaries which pay heed to local character such as contours and patterns of vegetation. These two types of boundary do not always coincide and in some cases are significantly different from one another, particularly where the openness of the landscape and or absence of distinct boundaries is such that development could be difficult to place appropriately. The starting point for this study is the need to establish long term boundaries based on recognisable features such that they are enduring as a basis for masterplanning which determines the appropriate limits of development based on the detailed consideration of visual enclosure and the role that advance planting may play helping to contain development. In this way, development does not lead Green Belt release.

A related issue is the need to determine how much Green Belt release is appropriate for the Plan period and beyond. To a degree this is led by the need to identify where Green Belt land could contribute to meeting the need for housing land, without damaging its overall purposes, but also the need to plan strategically for future development needs. In Stevenage's case, this will entail developing greenfield land which by definition is currently Green Belt.

The character of the parcels of land recommended for release are characterised by the following:

- ▶ Are of a sufficient scale and number to make a meaningful contribution to meeting the housing needs of Stevenage; that is they are of at least 250 dwellings, providing for medium and longer term release.
- ▶ Are of a sufficient scale to offer opportunities for the incorporation of green infrastructure in combination with their relationship with the wider Green Belt.
- ▶ Concentrate growth in a small number of locations which are well related to the existing urban area and can be integrated accordingly.
- ▶ Offer opportunities for strategic masterplanning to allow for the phased release of land, creation of a sense of place and the provision of sustainable development characteristics such as sustainable transport infrastructure.

The conclusions reached are intended to give a broad indication of options for removing areas from the Green Belt around Stevenage, their potential capacity (and thereby making a contribution to Stevenage's housing needs) and how the 'Exceptional Circumstances' arguments (as per the NPPF paras 83 – 85) which will be required to justify removal of land from the Green Belt can be assembled. In light of the recommendations set out in this report, Stevenage Borough Council will use this evidence as part of the plan preparation process to review the case for the revision of Green Belt boundaries weighed against other aspects of the evidence base, including:

- ▶ Housing need for the plan period and beyond;
- ▶ The identification of sites submitted through the SHLAA process;
- ▶ Sustainability Appraisal findings;
- ▶ Environmental and landscape constraints; and

- ▶ The wider development strategy of the Borough in respect of an appropriate distribution of growth.

Identification of an area as holding potential for release from the Green Belt does not imply that all the identified area should or could be developed. For example, Green Infrastructure could form significant parts of some areas, complementing and enhancing existing landscape and environmental features. In addition, as with any other potential development site, detailed work on site capacity, character and viability would be required.

Several areas for addition to the Green Belt have been identified to complement release of Green Belt land, strengthening overall purposes.

Appendix A

Key Sustainability Issues (SBC Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal NTS para 1.13)

A Strong Competitive Economy

- Improving educational attainment.
- Increasing jobs particularly local jobs for local people.
- Tackling barriers to employment.
- New business development.
- Business retention.

A Viable Town Centre

- A viable, safe and well managed town centre.

Transport and Infrastructure

- Good local access to services and facilities.
- Tackling congestion.
- Increase passenger transport accessibility, cycling and walking.

High Quality Homes

- Access to good housing.
- Affordable housing.
- Sustainable housing.
- Housing mix and types.

Good Design and the Historic Environment

- Heritage assets.
- Sustainable places.

Healthy Communities

- Addressing health inequalities and the health needs of existing and new residents.
- Develop healthy communities and help improve and protect the health and well-being of residents.

The Green Belt

- A review of the Green Belt designation.
- A consideration of the long term future of the Green Belt.

Climate Change and Flooding

- Reducing CO2 emissions.
- Climate change adaptation, including flood risk management.
- Efficient use and management of resources.
- Efficient use and management of water: addressing increasing demand.
- Efficient use and management of energy.
- Efficient management of waste: increasing recycling rates and self-sufficiency in waste disposal
- Pressure on biodiversity and open spaces.

The Natural Environment

- Better use of open space.
- Promoting biodiversity.
- Protecting key features of the natural environment.

