

GREEN BELT REVIEW PURPOSES ASSESSMENT

Prepared for Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

FINAL REPORT

November 2013



SINCLAIR KNIGHT MERZ

SKM



Green Belt Review: Purposes Assessment

(Prepared for Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council)

FINAL REPORT

- November 2013

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1. Introduction

1.1. Study Objectives

- 1.1.1. SKM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Green Belt Review on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. This study has been undertaken in collaboration with Professor Nick Gallent from University College London (UCL).
- 1.1.2. The Study Brief is clear in its aspiration to deliver a review that provides a robust assessment of the various functions of different areas of Green Belt:

The Councils require the selected consultant to carry out the following services: To carry out an independent and comprehensive Green Belt review for the Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield administrative areas. This should include the definition of sub areas and provision of advice on the role that each sub area plays in fulfilling the fundamental aim of the Green Belt and the five purposes set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The study objectives are to:

- 1) *Examine best practice in Green Belt Reviews in order to identify and agree a methodology for the study;*
- 2) *Review the existing Green Belt in the study area, including the aim and purposes and define sub areas for analysis;*
- 3) *Take full account of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt;*
- 4) *Review the role of each of the sub areas (seen as 'strategic parcels') in the context of the NPPF and consider the extent to which each contributes to the fundamental aim of retaining openness and the purposes of including land in the Green Belt;*
- 5) *Rank and score the strategic parcels by how well they contribute to the fundamental aim and purposes of Green Belts;*
- 6) *Consider whether, in the context of the NPPF, other areas of countryside in the study area should be proposed as Green Belt;*
- 7) *Provide advice on the efficacy and consistency of existing local policies applying to the Green Belt in the study area; and*
- 8) *For land within Dacorum Borough, consider whether any further, 'major developed sites' should be identified, in addition to those listed in Table 2 in the Dacorum Core Strategy.*

In relation to point 4 above, the definition of the sub areas will necessitate clearly identifiable and well justified boundaries. In order to form logical sub areas they may need to extend into adjoining local authority areas.

Clear evidence for, and full explanation and justification of, conclusions is essential.

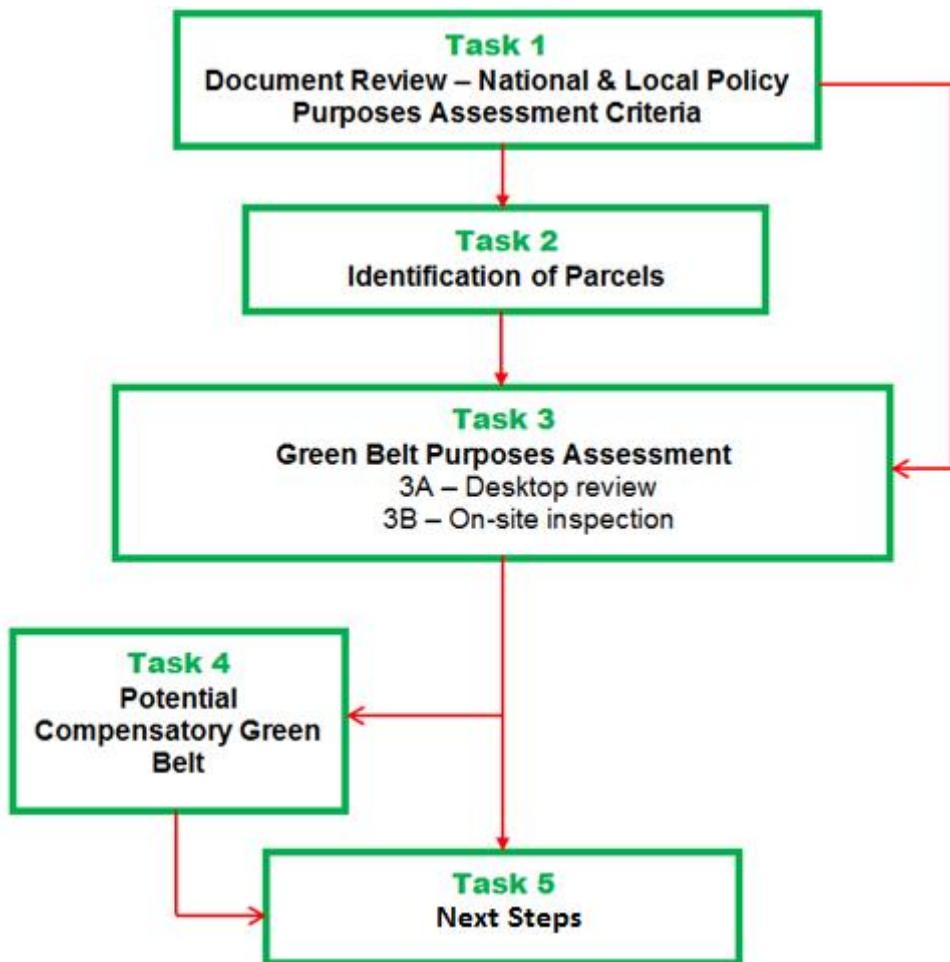


- 1.1.3. The Green Belt Review is required to be undertaken to inform the future planning strategies for each authority as follows:
- Dacorum – The Core Strategy (September 2013) refers to a partial review of the strategy by 2017/18. This will include a reassessment of the role and function of the Green Belt and reflects recommendations of the Inspector's Report.
 - St Albans – To inform the emerging Local Plan and to meet NPPF requirements in the context of recent Inspector's decisions at Local Plan examinations.
 - Welwyn Hatfield – Representations to the Emerging Core Strategy consultation (November 2012 – January 2013) referred to the lack of a Green Belt review and this work is required to inform the next stage of plan preparation.

1.2. Approach to Assessment

- 1.2.1. The agreed approach to the study comprises five tasks as set out in Figure 1.1 below. Task 1 covers a Document Review of relevant national and local planning policy and describes the role and purpose of the Green Belt. This has been used to refine the methodology and set out specific purposes assessment criteria and the approach to the assessment. Task 2 identified strategic land parcels in the study area to be assessed against the purposes criteria. Tasks 3 and 4 were undertaken simultaneously to assess the level of contribution each strategic parcel (including Green Belt and non-Green Belt land) makes or could make towards each Green Belt purpose. Task 5 summarises key findings, conclusions and next steps.
- 1.2.2. This report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 2: National Policy and Green Belt Context
 - Chapter 3: Local Policy
 - Chapter 4: Best Practice Review
 - Chapter 5: Purposes Assessment Criteria
 - Chapter 6: Parcel Plan
 - Chapter 7: Key Findings
 - Chapter 8: Land Contributing Least to Green Belt Purposes
 - Chapter 9: Conclusions and Next Steps.

Figure 1.1: Method Diagram





1.3. Disclaimer

- 1.3.1. This Green Belt Review has been undertaken solely for the purposes of informing the local plan making process. It does not constitute planning policy for any of the three planning authorities which commissioned the study.
- 1.3.2. The Green Belt designation carries significant weight as a material consideration in planning policy and development management. Government policy is explicit that changes to Green Belt designations should be made through the Local Plan process, in the context of promoting sustainable development as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.3.3. The main purpose of the study is to undertake a strategic review of all Green Belt land across the three planning authorities to identify the contribution of the Green Belt towards national Green Belt purposes as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This will identify both the primary functions of the Green Belt, which deliver the national purposes, and identify areas of Green Belt land which are considered to contribute least towards national purposes. This land will be subject to further assessment in separate studies (undertaken by each planning authority) to consider wider issues not covered by this study, but that must be considered in preparing a Local Plan. The outcome of this study will therefore provide only one piece of evidence among a wide range of considerations that must be taken into account before deciding on any changes to Green Belt boundaries. Such issues include infrastructure capacity, the availability of land for development, sustainability and landscape.
- 1.3.4. Given the strategic nature of this study it has not identified precise revised boundaries of land which is considered to contribute least towards Green Belt purposes. This task will be undertaken separately by each planning authority.

2. Green Belt and National Policy Context

2.1. Green Belt Context

National Context

- 2.1.1. The Green Belt is one of the oldest and most powerful planning policy instruments; although the role and function of the Green Belt, and supporting policy mechanisms have evolved over time.
- 2.1.2. The Metropolitan Green Belt now covers almost half a million hectares and 92% is undeveloped. The Hertfordshire Structure Plan (1998) stated that approximately 63% of the County (excluding urban areas) is covered by Green Belt. Of the total 90,000 hectares, almost 35,000 hectares of Green Belt is designated in Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield. The Metropolitan Green Belt, including the study area, is set out in Figure 2.1.
- 2.1.3. The principle of the Green Belt originates back to the late 19th century when Ebenezer Howard demonstrated the potential role of a rural belt to preserve the countryside around free-standing Garden Cities. These ideas were further developed by Raymond Unwin in the 1930s and by Patrick Abercrombie through the Greater London Plan which in 1944 first designated a 'Green Belt Ring' around London, in response to urban expansion. As far as the study area is concerned, this covered a ring around the Capital south of a line roughly from Hemel Hempstead to St Albans and Hertford.
- 2.1.4. This created the Metropolitan Green Belt which today is the largest of England's 14 Green Belts. Circular 42/55 went onto set the three main functions of the Green Belt as:
 - 1) Checking growth of large built-up areas;
 - 2) Preventing neighbouring settlements from merging; and,
 - 3) Preserving the special character of towns.
- 2.1.5. Housing Minister, Duncan Sandys, encouraged local authorities to consider designating Green Belts around towns and cities.
- 2.1.6. The Government produced further Green Belt guidance in 1962 emphasising the strict control of development and the presumption against building in the Green Belt except in special circumstances. Subsequently, Circular 14/84 further stated that the essential characteristic of Green Belts is permanence and that boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.1.7. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) 'Green Belts' was first issued in 1988 (and subsequently replaced in 1995 and further amended in 2001). It provided the policy

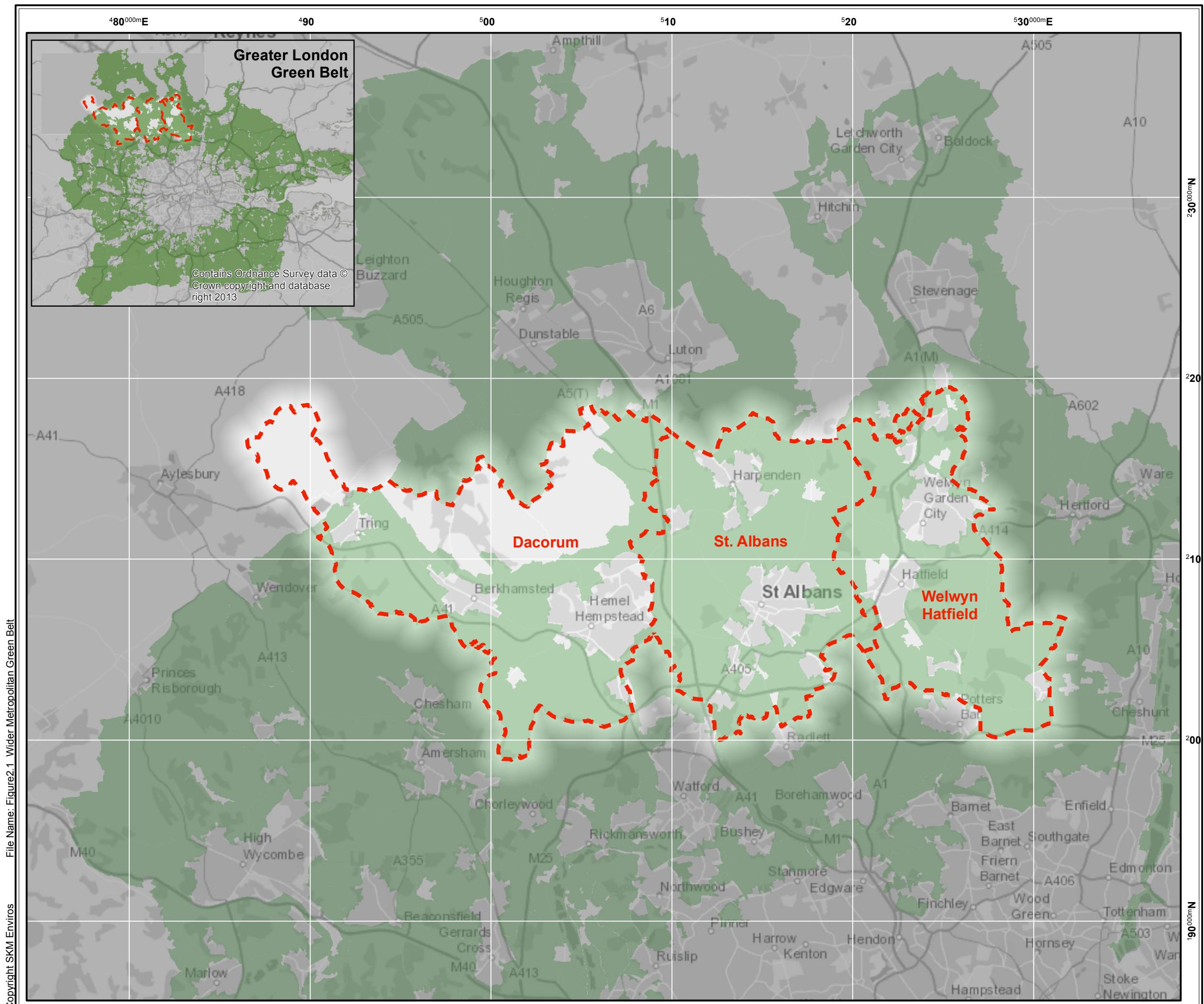


framework to protect the Green Belt over the following two decades. PPG2 (1988) added two purposes of the Green Belt:

- 4) To safeguard the countryside; and,
 - 5) To assist urban regeneration.
- 2.1.8. The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012 replaced PPG2 and provides current national Green Belt policy. The policy approaches taken by PPG2 and the NPPF are summarised and compared below.

Hertfordshire Context Summary

- 2.1.9. In response to Government policy on strategic Green Belt issues and pressure for an expansion of towns in the County, the Hertfordshire County Development Plan (1958) designated the area in the south of the County as Green Belt. Similarly, the Southern Bedfordshire Green Belt was designated at land to the north around settlements including Luton and Dunstable by Bedfordshire County Council in 1960. Green Belt was designated around Stevenage by the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan First Review (1971). Structure Plan Reviews went onto add to the Hertfordshire Green Belt along main communication corridors: the northern part of Welwyn Hatfield was designated in the late 1970s; and, other northern additions were designated through the 1980s, including land around Markyate. As a result, the Hertfordshire Green Belt extended the Metropolitan Green Belt outwards and joined the South Bedfordshire Green Belt to the north. From the first County Development Plan the general policy approach clearly intended the Green Belt to prevent further coalescence and preserve historic settlement patterns within the overall Belt around London. This demonstrates that maintaining the existing settlement pattern is one of the core and founding objectives of the Hertfordshire Green Belt.
- 2.1.10. The most recently adopted Structure Plan (1998) did not recommend a countywide Green Belt review, stating: '*An essential characteristic of the Green Belt is its permanence and its protection in Hertfordshire must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead, with the Structure Plan providing the strategic policy framework for planning at local level*'. The Structure Plan continued to emphasise that one of the objectives for land use planning was to '*maintain the settlement pattern of small to medium sized towns through the location of development and maintenance of a Green Belt*'. In recent years, only small changes to the Green Belt have been approved through the development plan process.
- 2.1.11. A more detailed description of the Hertfordshire context and policy framework provided in subsequent Structure Plan Reviews is provided in Appendix 1.



Key:

- Study Area (Red dashed line)
- Metropolitan Green Belt (Green area)

Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilometres

REVISION: D

Green Belt Review for St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield

FIGURE 2.1
Wider Metropolitan Green Belt

| SCALE | PROJECT CODE |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1:200,000@ A3 | JE30761 |
| CONTENT | DRAWN |
| OS OpenData | KW |
| CHECKED | DATE |
| RB | 30/11/2013 |

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2.2. PPG2 Green Belts

- 2.2.1. PPG2 Green Belts was first issued in 1988, replaced in 1995 and then amended in 2001. PPG2 (1988) added two purposes to the existing Green Belt policy: 4) to safeguard the countryside; and, 5) to assist urban regeneration. Below all reference to PPG2 concerns the most recently published version of the document.
- 2.2.2. In addition, to help the long-term protection of the Green Belt beyond the plan period, PPG2 also advocated that safeguarded land or 'white land' should be allocated between the urban area and Green Belt which may be required to meet long-term development requirements (para 2.12). Such land should be genuinely capable of development when needed (Annex B). Safeguarded land has only been used in the past in some districts of Hertfordshire in response to particular circumstances. In the study area, only Welwyn Hatfield has safeguarded land intended for housing. Dacorum has an area originally safeguarded for special employment uses but subsequently reallocated for housing. Only a very limited area of safeguarded land has been designated in Hertfordshire previously. This has been due to the fragile nature of the Green Belt, the dispersed and scattered settlement pattern and continuous development pressures. The possibility of allocating safeguarded land will need to be re-examined in new Local Plans. More detail on safeguarded land in Welwyn Hatfield is set out in Appendix 2. The approach taken was carefully considered through a series of Structure Plans and supported by Examination Panels and Government. More detail on countywide planning is set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.2.3. PPG2 also explained that proposals for new Green Belts should be first considered in Regional or Strategic Guidance or Structure Plans¹. Local authorities must then demonstrate why normal policy would not be adequate, whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption necessary and the consequences for sustainable development (para 2.14). This criteria is discussed in more detail in respect of the NPPF in 2.3 below.
- 2.2.4. PPG2 additionally sought local planning authorities to consider the future of Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt. These sites were defined as including airfields, factories, hospitals, power stations, water and sewage treatment works which often pre-dated Green Belt designation. The guidance explained that these sites remain subject to Green Belt policy: however infilling and redevelopment is not considered inappropriate when the purposes of the Green Belt are not impacted upon and when the scale, height and size of proposals do not exceed existing conditions (Annex C). The reference to Major Developed Sites has now been replaced by 'brownfield' sites in the Green Belt in the NPPF. It is considered this alteration has been made to reflect a more flexible approach and recognises opportunities for a wider range of previously developed sites.

¹ The regional and county tiers of the planning system have subsequently been abolished through changes to primary legislation.



- 2.2.5. PPG2 also made the following key points in relation to quality and scale of the Green Belt, which are important to understanding the evolution of NPPF Green Belt policy. Firstly, ‘the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a Green Belt’ (para 1.7). This is an important consideration for Green Belt reviews. Secondly, ‘wherever practicable the Green Belt should be several miles wide’ (para 2.9). This reference is not included in the NPPF, and this change is considered to reflect the varied characteristics of Green Belt land and its various functions.

2.3. National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.3.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in 2012. It replaced and consolidated planning policy statements and guidance notes into a single framework. References to NPPF paragraphs are set out in brackets.
- 2.3.2. The NPPF seeks continued protection of Green Belts (17) and states that *‘the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open’*(79). It continues to identify openness and permanence as essential characteristics of the Green Belt. Green Belts serve five purposes (80), as originally set out in PPG2 (1988):
1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
 3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.3.3. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances (87). Similarly, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, which might arise during the preparation or review of Local Plans (83). This current Green Belt review is part of that wider review process. Furthermore, Green Belts should be permanent and capable of enduring beyond the plan period, and set a framework for the Green Belt and settlement policy in Local Plans. The NPPF re-affirms the approach taken in PPG2 towards the definition of Green Belt boundaries, in stating that, when doing so, local authorities should (84):
- Ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
 - Not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
 - Where necessary, identify areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
 - Make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land

- should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;
 - Satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and,
 - Define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 2.3.4. The NPPF also continues to encourage Local Authorities to plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt (81). This can be achieved by providing opportunities for access, outdoor sport and recreation, and enhancing landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity or improving damaged and derelict land. These land uses have been interpreted as exhibiting open characteristics which are an essential component of the Green Belt.
- 2.3.5. With regard to sustainable development, the NPPF states that when reviewing Green Belt boundaries, local planning authorities should take into account the need to promote sustainable patterns of development (84). Sustainable patterns of development are not defined in policy. However, today they are considered to relate to taking into account a range of additional factors beyond contribution towards Green Belt purposes. These factors might include local development needs and transport issues. Any other issues required to inform the local plan preparation process to produce a long-term spatial growth strategy could be seen as relevant. With regard to sustainability, it is necessary to recognise the wider and updated context of how sustainable development is defined in the NPPF. Updated policy states it should contribute towards social, economic and environmental objectives. However, what is significant is that, as demonstrated in planning decisions and appeals, the weight given to each objective varies on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.3.6. The NPPF also states that new Green Belt should only be established in exceptional circumstances; for example, when planning for new settlements or major urban extensions (82). Local authorities need to justify any proposals in accordance with the criteria set out in the NPPF. This expanded policy reference has been subject to wider debate at the national level in relation to the potential provision of compensatory Green Belt in response to permitting development on Green Belt land. Furthermore, the NPPF promotes the principles of Garden Cities, which historically have included establishing Green Belts (52).
- 2.3.7. In summary, the NPPF supports the long-standing principles of Green Belt protection. The core principles of the national framework effectively remain the same; however the objectives of the planning system have continued to evolve, reflecting current land use pressures and social trends. The Government's priority is to deliver growth and sustainable development through harmonising, wherever and whenever possible, the economic, environmental and social processes that deliver functioning places. Policy also reinforces the plan-led system which gives planning authorities the power to



undertake Green Belt reviews to help inform emerging spatial strategies for Local Plans and Core Strategies. The role and function of the Green Belt needs to be considered within this overarching context.

- 2.3.8. Most importantly, the five Green Belt purposes, plus recognition of openness and permanence as essential characteristics, remain the basis of national policy for the Green Belt.
- 2.3.9. Finally, it must be acknowledged that the Localism Act (2012) has significantly impacted on the way local authorities plan for the Green Belt. As noted above with the abolition of regional planning, local authorities have responsibility for Green Belt planning without strategic guidance through County or Regional Plans. The parallel introduction of the Duty-to-Cooperate requires an element of strategic ('greater than local') planning and co-ordination between local authorities on cross boundary issues such as Green Belt review. This study provides an example of such cross boundary working.

2.4. Role and Effectiveness of Green Belt Policy

Effectiveness of Green Belt Policy

- 2.4.1. The effectiveness of Green Belt policy has been considered in previous work for the Countryside Agency (2003)². Drawing on prior studies, it concluded that whilst policy was generally successful in checking unrestricted sprawl and preventing towns from merging, the other three purposes were more difficult to evaluate. In particular, the third purpose (to safeguard the countryside) was considered to overlap with the first two and it was not clear whether Green Belt restraint in peripheral town areas necessarily protected historic centres. This work illustrated that the five functions overlap and are certainly not discrete, sometimes making assessments of policy efficacy difficult. This has been addressed in the assessment methodology for the study as set out in Chapter 6.
- 2.4.2. Although the 2003 Countryside Agency study noted above concluded that Green Belt policy achieves specific success in checking unrestricted sprawl and preventing towns from merging, a growing number of voices have questioned the broader value of the policy. Christine Whitehead - a professor of economics at the LSE - has suggested that London's Green Belt should be scrapped so policy makers can '[...] concentrate on what is worth saving and use what is not appropriately' (2003: 27)³. Her statement draws attention to the quality of some of the protected Green Belt land (but see Paragraph 2.2.7 and the PPG2 (2001) affirmation that quality is not a consideration in designation: the argument here is that quality should count). Currently all land within designated Green Belt areas enjoys the same protection, but as some commentators have pointed out,

² Bartlett School of Planning (2003) Urban Fringe: Policy, Regulatory and Literature Research, Countryside Agency: Cheltenham

³ Whitehead, C. (2003) Interview Material, in Urban Regeneration: The New Agenda for British Housing, Creating new Communities, London, Building for Life and English Partnerships.



some of it is of little amenity value in itself: '[...] some is derelict and most is intensively farmed at considerable expense to the taxpayer, while the public has no general rights of access' (Smith, 2001: 7)⁴. Bovill has argued that the Green Belt policy should be kept under review like other planning policies: 'such a review process would probably result in a reduction in the quantity of green belt land with a consequent increase in the quality of the land remaining' (Bovill, 2002: 12⁵). Therefore Bovill's view is that reviews of boundaries are likely to have positive consequences. Another common criticism of Green Belt policy has been that the designations are too rigid and permanent and that a more flexible approach is needed. This view seems to sit well with the subtle shift in policy philosophy set out in the NPPF (see above). Ron Tate, former convenor of the Royal Town Planning Institute's planning policy panel (and the Institute's President in 2005), has suggested that: 'we are stuck in a time warp, with the assumption that Green Belts have a life of their own regardless of the planning context' (Dewar, 2002: 8⁶).

- 2.4.3. Further to this, over recent years the impact of Green Belt designation on sustainable patterns of development has been a subject of academic and professional debate. It has been argued that the Green Belt can shift development pressures beyond the edges of urban centres further away from central employment areas, which has the effect of increasing commuting flows. This increased level of travel is considered to be unsustainable. The counter-argument is that Green Belt can assist urban renewal, promoting principles of the compact city by focusing higher density development in central areas to reduce the need to travel. However the key issue, which is especially prominent today, is that urban land supply is limited, and therefore there is increased pressure for development within the Green Belt. This debate is discussed as part of the Review of Green Belt Policy in Scotland⁷.

Over the last decade, some of these ideas have entered Government thinking on Green Belt. The NPPF opens the door more clearly to boundary change during the plan review process and it also draws attention to the ways in which local authorities should plan for beneficial use, providing opportunities for access and recreation. Government appears to remain committed to maintaining the broad functions of the Green Belt and, specifically to designating new Green Belt in instances where local reviews result in the deletion of existing Green Belt designations. This is further demonstrated by recent Ministerial Statements and speeches which are reviewed below.

⁴Smith N. (2001) 'Green belt policy in need of update for public spaces', *Planning* 1419, 18.5.01, 7

⁵Bovill P. (2002) 'Loosening the green belt', *Regeneration and Renewal*, 17 May, 12.

⁶Dewar D. (2002) 'Is it time to loosen the belt?', *Planning* 1470, 24.5.02, 8.

⁷ Review of Green Belt Policy in Scotland (2004) Glen Bramley, Cliff Hague, Karryn Kirk, Alan Prior, Jeremy Raemaekers and Harry Smith (School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University) with Andrew Robinson and Rosie Bushnell (Robinson Associates).

Ministerial Statements and Speeches on Green Belt Policy

- 2.4.4. Since the publication of the NPPF, there has been a great deal of parliamentary debate, reported in Hansard and in the professional and popular press, but which has not yet been subject to broader independent scrutiny. Since his appointment as the new Planning Minister in Autumn 2012, Nick Boles has issued five Ministerial Statements on the Green Belt. His key messages reflect national policy and emphasise the protection of the Green Belt. The fundamental aim remains to protect 'against urban sprawl' and provides a 'green lung' around towns and cities (18 September 2012). Statements reiterate the content of the NPPF and clearly explain that 'openness and permanence are essential characteristics' of the Green Belt (18 September 2012).
- 2.4.5. Most forms of new development are inappropriate in the Green Belt (15 January 2013) and brownfield land in the Green Belt should be better used in a way which is consistent with Green Belt policy (15 January 2013). Any change of use of existing buildings in the Green Belt should be assessed in the light of all material considerations, including Green Belt policy. It is the intention to allow redundant and empty buildings to be brought back into productive use, increasing rural housing for local people and promoting regeneration (10 April 2013). Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances (18 September 2012). Any changes to Green Belt boundaries must be made through the local plan process which involves consultation with local people and formal examination in public (18 September 2012).
- 2.4.6. Besides issuing Ministerial Statements, Nick Boles has made several other remarks concerning the Green Belt. At all times, it is important to acknowledge the Government's overriding objective is to boost economic growth. Firstly, in September 2012, he controversially said that the Green Belt is safe 'for now' during his first House of Commons speech as Planning Minister. However, this is considered to predominantly reflect and promote the potentially more responsive planning system introduced by the NPPF generally, rather than a signal that Green Belt land is no longer protected.
- 2.4.7. At the same time, Chancellor George Osborne called for speedier planning and more Green Belt land swaps to help boost house building (in September 2012). He called for increased flexibility through greater use of existing powers to swap Green Belt land, enabling development on some sites in exchange for new land being categorised as Green Belt. An early example of such a swap proposal is provided in Cheshire East, where the Chancellor's Tatton constituency lies.
- 2.4.8. In late 2012, the Government highlighted an example of de-allocating Green Belt land in Cambridgeshire. The local plan, which was adopted in 2006, saw 215 hectares of green belt land released for development. Key lessons learned as part of the process include



the joint-working between councils, early public consultation and preparing a comprehensive evidence base to support plans.

- 2.4.9. Nick Boles then went on to directly tackle the problem of housing delivery in November 2012 by stating that the amount of developed land across England should increase from nine to 12 per cent. Importantly, and subsequently, he confirmed that development should take place on 'open land', not the Green Belt. During the same month, a survey⁸ claimed that in response to the NPPF 42 local authorities were preparing to release over 3,500 hectares of Green Belt land for development and only designate less than 700 hectares of new Green Belt. Above all, this appears to confirm that planning authorities are undertaking Green Belt reviews to help inform future growth strategies. In May 2013, Nick Boles commented that building homes on Greenfield land will create more 'human happiness' than preserving fields and that Councils refusing to sanction more house building were 'deeply irresponsible'.
- 2.4.10. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) continues to play an important role in responding strongly to the above remarks and have argued that the NPPF is being used to impose unnecessary greenfield development in the face of local opposition. In August 2013, a briefing from CPRE stated that ministers 'need to go further' to protect the Green Belt, and planning policy on the Green Belt needs clarifying to protect it from over-development. It was commented that 'hard decisions are needed to help ensure both urban regeneration and protection of the Green Belt'. In July 2013, an all-party parliamentary group set up by MPs concerned about protecting the Green Belt from development held its first meeting with Nick Boles to express concerns about development on Green Belt land. The group is made up of about 50 MPs and has the support of campaigning charities Civic Voice and CPRE.
- 2.4.11. Other bodies have also referred to the role of Green Belt in recent reports. The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR)⁹ has argued for a need to re-classify 'low-grade' Green Belt land to enable the construction of new towns and garden cities, echoing the remarks made by Whitehead and others a decade ago. Furthermore, the European Commission (June 2013) has suggested that the Green Belt is hampering the UK's economic recovery by acting as a brake on the supply of new housing.
- 2.4.12. Finally, it should be acknowledged that the Green Belt is clearly a controversial and emotive topic. This is because, understandably, people and communities greatly value the green or open land that sometimes envelopes their communities. This attachment means that any potential threats to the future of the Green Belt can be expected to be met by strong and passionate responses.

⁸ Undertaken by The Telegraph (article from 24 Nov 13)

⁹IPPR (2012) No Place to Call Home, IPPR: London



Implementation of the NPPF: Expectation of Comprehensive Green Belt Review and Idea of Compensatory Green Belt Provision

- 2.4.13. Local Plan Examination Inspector's Reports provide useful pointers on the implications of national policy. Following the publication of the NPPF a number of Inspector's Reports have recommended the undertaking of comprehensive Green Belt reviews, but to date none have referenced the process for potential compensatory provision.
- 2.4.14. Post NPPF, PINS Inspectors Reports on Local Plan Examinations, have commented that comprehensive Green Belt reviews are required to be undertaken as part of the plan-making process. Inspectors findings from Rushcliffe and Dacorum examinations (set out below) clearly highlight the need for strategic and comprehensive reviews to be undertaken as part of the plan preparation process.
- 2.4.15. The explanatory note to support the Planning Inspectors Letter¹⁰ on the Rushcliffe Core Strategy (March 2012, submitted for examination November 2012) states that '*given the strategic nature of Green Belts, they should be established in Local Plans and only altered in exceptional circumstances. Hence, a Green Belt Review, if necessary, should have taken place as the Core Strategy was being prepared and before it was finalised and submitted*' (para 5.3). It also confirms that 'on-going' revisions to Green Belt boundaries are not acceptable and '*the Green Belt should not be reviewed on an ad hoc basis through future DPDs*'.
- 2.4.16. Further to this, the Inspectors Report (2013) into the Dacorum Core Strategy states that '*The NPPF confirms that great weight should continue to be attached to the protection of the green belt and it is clear that boundaries should be established in the local plan. However, at the time a local plan is being prepared or reviewed consideration should be given to the boundaries, so that they are capable of enduring beyond the plan period. Among the considerations to be addressed are the level of consistency between the green belt and meeting requirements for sustainable development; whether or not the five purposes of the green belt are being fulfilled; the need to identify safeguarded land; and the need to be confident that the boundaries will not have to be altered at the end of the plan period*' (para 19).
- 2.4.17. Significantly this recommends that over the course of the boundary review sustainability factors need to be considered in addition to national purposes. Para 21 goes onto acknowledge a comprehensive Green Belt review is currently being undertaken '*in order to ensure that a justifiable balance between meeting housing need and protecting the green belt can be secured. Without such comprehensive evidence a robust conclusion on the potential for the identification of additional housing sites, either for the medium/long term (as potential sites within the urban areas decrease) or for beyond the plan period,*

¹⁰ Dated 27 November 2012



cannot be satisfactorily drawn'. This emphasises the importance of a strong evidence base to underpin local plans or core strategies.

- 2.4.18. Any proposals for new or compensatory Green Belt designations still need to satisfy a comprehensive set of criteria to ensure long-standing objectives justify a new area of Green Belt. There are limited examples of such compensatory Green Belt provision in emerging Local Plans. This practice is in its early stages and has been monitored throughout this study. The two examples below reveal how new policy is beginning to be applied in practice and that the option of compensatory Green Belt should be stated as part of emerging policy if appropriate.
- 2.4.19. An early example is Cheshire East Council which proposed to swap part of its Green Belt for new settlements whilst creating new Green Belt elsewhere in the Borough¹¹. The draft Local Plan proposes to release up to 80 hectares of Green Belt land for 1,800 new homes on council-owned farmland east of Handforth, near Wilmslow, as well as two new 1,000 home villages to the south east of Crewe. At the same time, Policy CS3 designates a new area of Green Belt totalling approximately 800 hectares around Nantwich to preserve the character of the historic town and prevent it merging with Crewe and surrounding villages. The Council is currently preparing the Core Strategy for submission in 2013. Another example is set out in the emerging Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire whereby '*as part of a future review of the Development Strategy, Central Bedfordshire Council will consider the option of Compensatory Green Belt. This is the process of identifying and allocating suitable land that meets the 5 Green Belt criteria, in order to offset the loss of Green Belt in one location by providing new Green Belt elsewhere*'¹². (para 2.29).

Conclusion

- 2.4.20. In conclusion, any Green Belt review and local policy related to the Green Belt needs to be prepared directly in accordance with national policy as set out in the NPPF. This policy continues to advocate the five purposes of the Green Belt and states openness and permanence as essential characteristics. However, overall it does suggest a more flexible approach in the context of sustainable development and economic growth. Analysis shows that the five purposes overlap to a significant extent and therefore any Green Belt review needs to set clear and well-defined assessment criteria to reflect national policy. Also, the responsibility for Green Belt designation now lies with local planning authorities following the revocation of regional strategies and the dismantling of the regional planning apparatus.
- 2.4.21. Given the uncomfortable combination of Government objectives to boost the economy and stimulate house building on the one hand, and people's attachment to the Green Belt

¹¹ East Cheshire Draft Local Plan (January 2013)

¹²Development Strategy – Green Belt Technical Note (January 2013)



on the other, it is inevitable that the future of the Green Belt will continue to prompt a mix of responses. The NPPF provides a balanced framework, founded on long-standing objectives to protect the Green Belt.

- 2.4.22. However, there is presently a significant and unresolved plan-making issue in terms of the way in which the Inspectorate applies or interprets the NPPF in light of local circumstances. This has particular significance for restraint policies such as Green Belt. In August 2013, research (by Planning Magazine) revealed that there had been a post-NPPF rise in Green Belt appeal success. There was a 5% increase to 36% of successful appeals on all types of development in the Green Belt from the 12 months prior to March 2012 compared to the following 12 months to March 2013. The figure for housing projects rose to 34% from 26%. This evidence could be interpreted in a number of ways, however most significantly it does suggest that the NPPF provides a slightly more flexible approach towards development management decisions in the Green Belt.
- 2.4.23. The Government remains strongly committed to the Green Belt. However the NPPF view of sustainable development and the emerging local interpretation by the Planning Inspectorate as evidenced through Local Plan inspector's reports, suggests a greater degree of flexibility over boundary adjustments and land swaps through the local plan process than previously under PPG2. This combined with the Duty to Co-operate clearly indicates a greater role for (expectation of) comprehensive and strategic Green Belt Reviews within the context of overall (cross boundary) development requirements than has previously been the case. It also implies greater geographical flexibility in terms of the location of compensatory provision.

3. Local Policy

3.1. Local Plan Review

- 3.1.1. Both adopted Local Plans and emerging Core Strategies have been reviewed. The local policy review is summarised below in light of the NPPF. More detailed reviews for each planning authority are set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.1.2. For the three planning authorities, all adopted Local Plans were prepared in the context of and in accordance with the principles of the version of PPG2 which was extant at the date of their respective adoption. Core Strategy documents published since March 2012, published by Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield (for the latter as consultation versions only) have been written in light of policy set out in the NPPF.
- 3.1.3. The role of the Green Belt in maintaining the existing settlement pattern as a network of towns and villages scattered across the study area which are separated by stretches of countryside in the Green Belt is prominent in all existing and emerging Local Plans in the study area.
- 3.1.4. Each Local Plan gives attention to the five Green Belt purposes set out in national policy and emphasises openness as an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. Key messages from the interpretation of each national purpose in relation to local circumstances are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Interpretation of National Policy

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas</i> | 'Urban sprawl' is defined by Welwyn Hatfield as the uncontrolled or unplanned extension of urban areas into the countryside. The Green Belt performs a key role in checking sprawl from London and other major settlements. |
| <i>To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another</i> | A range of key local gaps to prevent coalescence are also identified in local policy. However, text references to specific gap locations are not considered to be exhaustive. |
| <i>To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment</i> | The relationship between the Green Belt and the countryside is close, however not synonymous. Countryside land uses include agriculture, forestry, recreation and wildlife conservation. |
| <i>To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns</i> | The historic environment is referenced throughout local policy and the role of the countryside to provide setting is identified. Conservation areas contain historic features. |
| <i>To assist in urban regeneration</i> | This purpose is generally recognised as applicable in creating an urban focus for development. |

- 3.1.5. Spatial strategies accord with Government objectives by targeting development at primary settlements with limited growth permitted in settlements within the Green Belt. To undertake the Green Belt review, this study has combined the settlement hierarchies from each planning authority and classified each settlement into one of three tiers. All 1st and 2nd tier settlements are excluded from the Green Belt, whereas 3rd tier settlements are washed over by the Green Belt (with the exception of those beyond the outer boundary in Dacorum). This settlement classification is set in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. Interpretation of Local Settlement Hierarchy

| Tier | Dacorum | St Albans | Welwyn Hatfield |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1st tier – Primary settlements, key urban areas | <i>Main Centre for Development and Change</i> | Towns | <i>Main Town</i> |
| | Hemel Hempstead | St Albans, Harpenden | Welwyn Garden City |
| | <i>Market Towns</i> | | <i>Town</i> |
| | Berkhamsted, Tring | | Hatfield |
| 2nd tier – Secondary settlements, large villages | <i>Large Villages</i> | <i>Specified Settlements / Large Villages</i> | <i>Large excluded Villages</i> |
| | Bovingdon, Kings Langley, Markyate | Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, How Wood, London Colney, Park Street / Frogmore, Redbourn, Wheathampstead | Brookmans Park, Cuffley, Welham Green and Welwyn |
| | | | <i>Small excluded Villages and Settlements</i> |
| | | | Digswell, Oaklands & Mardley Heath and Woolmer Green, and Little Heath |
| 3rd tier – Other settlements, small villages | <i>Small Villages in Green Belt</i> | <i>Green Belt Settlements</i> | <i>Green Belt Villages</i> |
| | Chipperfield, Flamstead, Potten End, Wigginton | Annables, Kinsbourne Green, Colney Heath, Folly Fields, Gustard Wood, Lea Valley Estate, Radlett Road, Frogmore, Sandridge, Sleafhyde, Smallford | Essendon, Lemsford, Newgate Street and Northaw. |
| | <i>Small Villages in rural area</i> | All other settlements | <i>Small Green Belt Villages and Settlements</i> |
| | Aldbury, Long Marston, Wilstone | | Ayot Green, Ayot St Lawrence, Ayot St Peter, Bell Bar, Bullens Green, (part of) Burnham Green, Mill Green, Stanborough, Swanley Bar, Wild Hill and Woodside. |
| | All other settlements | | All other settlements |

- 3.1.6. New Green Belt and potential compensatory Green Belt provision is not referenced in local policy. This is because the designation of new Green Belt has not generally been encouraged in national policy in recent years. New and emerging Local Plans are currently facing this issue. However, this area of policy is uncertain in respect of



interpretation of the restrictive wording in the NPPF. Opportunities in the study area are limited to Dacorum.

- 3.1.7. In the past, safeguarded land has only been sparingly used by some districts in Hertfordshire and has been a response to particular site circumstances. In the study area, Welwyn Hatfield and Dacorum have used safeguarded land policies in a limited way (see para. 2.2.2 above for context).
- 3.1.8. Dacorum's Core Strategy does not propose any safeguarded land in the Green Belt however open land outside of the Green Belt is reserved to meet future development needs. The Council's view at Examination was that the concept of safeguarding land is difficult to apply effectively in areas of high development pressure, and there is also generally poor public understanding and acceptance of the idea of setting aside land for very long term development. Welwyn Hatfield's emerging Local plan work does envisage use of safeguarded land. The approach adopted by Dacorum reflects the history of Green Belt policy development in Hertfordshire (see Appendix 1). It encapsulates the issues now faced by the three planning authorities in the study area in responding to current interpretations of policy and guidance on Green Belt boundary changes and safeguarded land. The possibility of allocating safeguarded land in the future will be need to be carefully re-considered as part of the future Plans.
- 3.1.9. Overall, the key messages from the local policy review show that Green Belt performs a range of roles in accordance with national policy. However it has also fulfilled a very important local purpose; to maintain the existing settlement pattern by protecting the gaps between settlements and the open land that is part of the character of those settlements. All three authorities now face the challenge of interpreting the NPPF in a local context and thereby having to review the role that Green Belt plays alongside other policy considerations in promoting sustainable development.

4. Best Practice Review

- 4.1.1. Previous Green Belt studies have taken a variety of approaches to assessing the functionality of green belt against the national purposes. It is useful to reflect on what can be learnt from a sample of these studies. To that end, the following pre and post-NPPF studies have reviewed:
 - Broxbourne (Scott Wilson, 2008);
 - Coventry (SSR, 2009);
 - Redbridge (SKM, 2010);
 - Gloucester, Cheltenham & Tewkesbury (AMEC, 2011);
 - Stevenage (AMEC, 2013); and,
 - Bath & North East Somerset (Arup, 2013).
- 4.1.2. Each study is different, has been devised in response to a specific brief and is tailored to assess the characteristics of a specific part of the Green Belt. For example, Coventry and Stevenage are centred on a dominant urban area, Redbridge and Broxbourne are more dominated by urban fringe characteristics, and Bath & North East Somerset relate to more scattered settlement patterns. In spite of differences, common themes are evident.
- 4.1.3. With regard to interpretation of national purposes into measurable assessment criteria, the most important finding is that the Green Belt review needs to present clear definitions of terms as part of the interpretation of national policy, as this informs the specific questions. For example, it is vital to define terms such as 'sprawl', 'built-up areas', 'neighbouring towns', 'the countryside', 'encroachment' and 'historic towns'. The reviewed studies apply a range of interpretations to these terms, linked to local circumstances.
- 4.1.4. All studies reviewed sought to fully understand the local role and purpose of the Green Belt, developing assessment criteria to reflect local circumstances. In other words it is important to view national purposes in the local context, developing a view of how Green Belt delivers against localised objectives for example by preventing villages or separated neighbourhoods from coalescing rather than just major urban areas. For example in Redbridge each national purpose was underpinned by an interpretive local purpose, and in Bath & North East Somerset a local purpose was defined to supplement the five national purposes.
- 4.1.5. In all studies reviewed the criteria used to assess the Green Belt were thoroughly justified and written in accordance with national policy. Studies demonstrate that the criteria to be used to undertake the Green Belt assessment need to take the form of a set of clear but specific questions for each purpose. The Cheltenham and Stevenage studies provide

good examples of such questions. The approach to scoring assessments varies. Some studies apply various versions of a traffic light system (such as Stevenage) to grade performance of parcels whereas others apply more complex scoring systems (such as Broxbourne). These key findings indicate that for this current Green Belt review a more qualitative approach to scoring using the traffic light approach should be implemented.

- 4.1.6. The approach to defining boundaries is consistent throughout studies and accords with national policy, whereby recognisable natural and physical features are used where possible.
- 4.1.7. The fifth purpose has been discounted from a number of studies. The notion that the presence of Green Belt assists regeneration is a generalisation. Fulfilment of this purpose can be inferred where nearby development projects have occurred on previously development land, but this inference raises two questions.
 - Firstly, would that development have otherwise occurred in the part of the Green Belt being assessed (i.e. if it were not Green Belt), or on another part of the Green Belt? (i.e. Is this specific part of the Green Belt performing the fifth function?)
 - Secondly, if there have been no nearby projects on previously developed land, does this mean that the Green Belt designation does not assist regeneration, or that other factors (for example, the land market) are preventing land recycling opportunities from coming forward for development?
- 4.1.8. Therefore it is impossible to judge how a specific part of the Green Belt contributes to local regeneration even though it might be assumed that preventing development on greenfield sites (across an area) will result in more development being directed, necessarily, to brownfield sites
- 4.1.9. In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that the characteristics of the Green Belt vary throughout the country and therefore it is essential that any Green Belt review takes account of local circumstances to help create clear, specific (well-defined) and measurable assessment criteria, which should be justified in accordance with national policy.

5. Green Belt Purposes Assessment Criteria

5.1. Role and Purpose of the Green Belt

- 5.1.1. Before setting and explaining the detailed purposes assessment criteria appropriate to this study, it is important to take account of the study findings on the role and purpose of the Green Belt in the study area at both a strategic and local level.
- 5.1.2. The metropolitan Green Belt was first established as a ring around London in 1944. From 1958, the Hertfordshire Green Belt was created through outward expansion of the Green Belt from London and new designation of Green Belt around expanding settlements to the north, including Luton and Dunstable and Stevenage (originally a planned new town beyond the Green Belt). Therefore the original role of the Green Belt was to predominantly prevent sprawl. In the southern part of the study area, the Green Belt contributes to preventing the uncontrolled expansion of the capital and in the north it was to prevent the spread southwards of large built-up areas such as Luton and Dunstable and Stevenage.
- 5.1.3. Further to this, and taken as a whole at the local level, the Green Belt acts an important tool for maintaining the existing settlement pattern across Hertfordshire. The need to preserve this special element of environmental character and quality is currently referenced in the Welwyn Hatfield Emerging Core Strategy (2012) and was previously a key objective of the 1998 Structure Plan. The scattered network of all settlements separated by different sized gaps is evident across Hertfordshire. Most clearly 1st tier settlements including Tring, Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead, St Albans, Harpenden, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City are separated by strategic gaps of Green Belt land. This pattern extends along key route corridors both east-west across the study area and north-south, particularly in St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield.
- 5.1.4. The existing settlement pattern is also maintained as a result of the spacing of smaller settlements, with Green Belt land providing local gaps.

5.2. Defining Purposes Assessment Criteria

- 5.2.1. A Green Belt review has to differentiate the function and relative value of the Green Belt on an area specific basis. The study will therefore examine the function of a series of parcels of Green Belt land defined at a strategic level.
- 5.2.2. This section explains the assessment criteria for the Green Belt Review. The first task, prior to the assessment, has been to divide the whole study area (including Green Belt and non-Green Belt land) into strategic parcels. Each parcel will then be assessed against the assessment criteria. Non-Green Belt land is included in accordance with required of the study Brief. The parcel plan is set out in Chapter 6. The criteria primarily relate to the first four national Green Belt purposes set out in the NPPF:
 1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
 3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and,
 4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- 5.2.3. Each of the four national purposes has been assessed in light of how they are expressed in national policy. Therefore interpretations of national policy wording are clearly set out in Table 5.1 to inform the assessment criteria.
- 5.2.4. In addition, careful consideration of local objectives and the role of the Green Belt within the Hertfordshire context justify the assessment of a local purpose which relates to maintaining the existing settlement pattern. The Green Belt performs an important local separation function.
- 5.2.5. For the local purpose additional definitions of terms taken from local planning policy are presented in Table 5.2. The existing settlement pattern in the study area is complex and dispersed. This represents a particular characteristic of Hertfordshire whereby there is no dominant town but instead many towns in close proximity and spread along main routes of communication that radiate from London. There are also numerous large and small villages scattered across the area. This local purpose assessment reflects the conclusion discussed above.
- 5.2.6. Additional definitions applied to the purposes assessment overall are set out in Table 5.3.

Table 5.1. Definition of Terms for National Purposes

| Purpose | Definition of Terms to be applied in Assessment |
|--|---|
| <i>To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas</i> | <p>Sprawl – ‘spread out over a large area in an untidy or irregular way’ (Oxford Dictionary online).</p> <p>Large built-up areas – in the context of this study are London, Luton & Dunstable and Stevenage, where outward expansion (particularly to the south) was controlled as an original purpose of the Green Belt.</p> |
| <i>To prevent neighbouring towns from merging</i> | <p>Neighbouring towns – 1st tier settlements (see Table 3.2 Settlement Hierarchy)</p> <p>Merging – this can be by way of general sprawl (above) or;</p> <p>Ribbon development – ‘the building of houses along a main road, especially one leading out of a town or village’ (Oxford Dictionary Online). This includes historical patterns of, or current pressures for, the spread of all forms of development along movement corridors, particularly major roads.</p> <p>Strategic gap – provides the space between 1st tier settlements to 1st tier settlements only.</p> |
| <i>To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment</i> | <p>Encroachment – ‘a gradual advance beyond usual or acceptable limits’ (Oxford Dictionary online).</p> <p>The countryside¹³ – open land with an absence of built development and urbanising influences, and characterised by rural land uses including agriculture and forestry. Relevant landscape character or quality designations will be taken into account in assessing the role of the Green Belt in safeguarding countryside.¹⁴</p> <p>Openness – absence of built development or other urbanising elements (not openness in a landscape character sense - topography and woodland / hedgerow cover).</p> |

¹³Countryside is the land and scenery of a rural area (Oxford Dictionary Online)

¹⁴ This is very much a 'functional' view of the countryside inferring that development is generally inappropriate. Indeed, 'Functional' conceptions of rural spaces point to the inappropriateness of development and give legitimacy to particular pastoral and primary land-uses such as farming and forestry. Conceptions centred on ideas of 'political economy' tend to view the countryside as a space of low consumption and economic inactivity. And a dominant 'social construction' of rural areas is of places linked to nature and of communities that should reject the pace of change associated with cities (see Cloke, P., Mooney, P.H. and Marsden, T. (2006) The Handbook of Rural Studies, Sage: London, pp. 20-21). The functional view, qualified by landscape character measures, provides the working definition for this review.

| Purpose | Definition of Terms to be applied in Assessment |
|--|---|
| <i>To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns</i> | Historic town – settlement or place ¹⁵ with historic features identified in local policy or through conservation area or other historic designation(s). |

Table 5.2. Definition of Terms for the Local Hertfordshire Purpose

| Purpose | Definition of Terms to be applied in Assessment |
|--|--|
| <i>To broadly maintain the existing settlement pattern</i> | <p>Settlement pattern – this pattern is created as a result of the location and separation of all settlements including main towns, market towns, large villages, small villages and other villages and hamlets within the Study area. A particular characteristic of the area is the physical and visual separation of many smaller settlements by gaps that vary in width.</p> <p>Primary local gap – provides the space between 1st tier settlements to 2nd or 3rd tiers settlements only.</p> <p>Secondary local gap – provides the space between 2nd or 3rd tier settlements to 2nd or 3rd tier settlements only.</p> |

Table 5.3. Definition of Additional Terms applied in the assessment

| Definition of Terms to be applied in Assessment |
|--|
| Well-maintained gap – absence of built development from the spaces between settlements. |
| Concealed – landscape features such as planting / hedgerows / trees which hide physical features including settlements and roads, railway lines. |
| Major transport corridors – M25, M1, A1(M) and railway lines. |
| Level of built development – built-up areas or buildings as a % of total land area within a parcel (based on 1:10 000 OS mapping). |
| Urban Fringe / Peri-urban environment – land or [...] that zone of transition which begins with the edge of the fully built up urban area and becomes progressively more rural whilst still remaining a clear mix of urban and rural land uses and influences before giving way to the wider countryside' (Countryside Agency, 2002: no page number ¹⁶) |
| Green wedge – open land which runs into urban area, rather than around urban area. |

5.2.7. A series of standard questions in Table 5.4 below provide a consistent framework for assessment. Interpretations made utilise the definitions above.

¹⁵ The term 'place' allows for the consideration of Historic Parks and Gardens

¹⁶Countryside Agency (2002) The state and potential of agriculture in the urban fringe, unpublished project brief, Cheltenham, CA

Table 5.4. Purposes Assessment Criteria Questions

| Purpose | Definition of Purpose to be applied in Assessment |
|--|---|
| <i>To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas</i> | 1) Does the parcel act, in itself, as an effective barrier against sprawl from large built-up areas outside of the study area specifically London, Luton & Dunstable and Stevenage? 2) Does the parcel contribute, as part of a wider network of parcels, to a strategic barrier against the sprawl of these built-up areas? |
| <i>To prevent neighbouring towns from merging</i> | 3) Does the parcel provide, or form part of, a gap or space between existing 1 st tier settlements (neighbouring towns)? 4) What is the distance of the gap between the settlements? 5) Is there evidence of ribbon development on major route corridors? 6) What is the visual perception of the gap between settlements from major route corridors? 7) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements in physical terms? 8) Would a reduction in the gap compromise the separation of settlements and the overall openness of the parcel visually? |
| <i>To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment</i> | 9) What countryside / rural characteristics exist within the parcel including agricultural or forestry land uses and how is this recognised in established national and local landscape designations? 10) Has there already been any significant encroachment by built development or other urbanising elements? (Specify the proportion (%) of built development in the parcel) |
| <i>To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns</i> | 11) What settlements or places with historic features exist within the parcel? 12) What is the relationship and connection (in the form of character, views and visual perception) between the parcel and historic feature? 13) Does the parcel provide an open setting or a buffer against encroachment by development around settlements or places with historic features? |
| Local Purpose | Assessment Criteria |
| <i>Maintaining existing settlement pattern</i> | 14) Same assessment as 2 nd purpose, applied to spaces and gaps between the tiers of settlement below 1 st to 1 st tier. |

Consideration of Landscape, Environment and Historic Features

- 5.2.8. The landscape characteristics and environmental and historic features of the study area have been recorded and used to inform the Green Belt assessment. They are mapped in Appendices 3 and 4. They provide baseline information about the study area and enable a good understanding of the relationship between the features and the purposes of the Green Belt in particular locations.
- 5.2.9. Environmental designations are important in relation to the third national Green Belt purpose as aspects of biodiversity, forestry and wildlife conservation can be viewed as constituent ingredients of the 'countryside'. Mapping historic features is clearly of relevance to understanding the role that Green Belt plays in relation to the fourth function to preserve the setting of historic towns. The unique built environment and heritage contributes towards shaping the local landscape and is an important part of the identity of each area.
- 5.2.10. Environmental features comprise primary environmental designations, including ancient woodland, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Local Nature Reserves, RAMSAR sites and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Historic places comprise Conservation Areas, historic parks and gardens and scheduled ancient monuments. One of the key criteria to drawing the strategic parcels states that parcel boundary should not divide existing designations, and therefore the location of such features is essential to the study.
- 5.2.11. Landscape character has been reviewed at a strategic level in Appendix 3 to help inform the assessment. In addition an assessment of built development, as a proportion within each parcel has also been calculated. These findings help inform all purposes. For example landscape features including the absence of built development can help maintain gaps between settlements, strengthen countryside character, help preserve historic setting and act as a barrier to sprawl, as well as contributing to levels of visual openness.
- 5.2.12. Overall consideration of landscape, environment and historic features underpins all aspects of the parcel assessment. The analysis is essential to evaluate the parcel against the individual purposes. It also has a central role in the judgement of where Green Belt land is identified which makes the least contribution towards the four national purposes and the local Hertfordshire purpose.
- 5.2.13. Further explanation of the approach to assessment is provided for each of the Green Belt purposes below.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

- 5.2.14. The first national purpose performs a barrier role. This purpose is assessed at the strategic level whereby it underpins the establishment of the Green Belt(s) in the sense that the original strategic purpose was to check sprawl from London, Luton and Dunstable and Stevenage¹⁷. In respect of this purpose, the need to create a barrier against the uncontrolled expansion of these large built-up areas located to the north and south of the study area was the main reason for creation of the Hertfordshire and South Bedfordshire Green Belts.

To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another

- 5.2.15. The second national purpose performs an interstitial role, whereby gaps or spaces between settlements exist and have a clear role in preventing coalescence. This purpose is considered to play the most significant role in maintaining the existing settlement pattern of towns (as referred to in the national definition). However this purpose can also be related to smaller settlements because it also ensures their separation. This second point is separated and examined under the additional local purpose identified. For the national purpose the assessment focuses on the spaces and gaps between 1st tier settlements (which are considered to be 'neighbouring towns'). Though not specifically defined as such in local policy, these spaces have been considered to represent 'strategic gaps'. A distinction is drawn between a strategic gap and a primary local gap according to whether the gap is to another town or to a 2nd tier settlement.

To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 5.2.16. The third purpose performs a protective role, to safeguard the countryside. The 'countryside' is defined as open land with an absence of built development and urbanising influences, and characterised by rural open land uses including agriculture and forestry. It is therefore closely connected to the assessment of the level of openness which is similarly defined as an absence of built development and urbanising influences. To support this analysis the percentage of built development per parcel has been calculated. Landscape characteristics also influence the perception of character and quality of countryside. The assessment therefore includes examination of topography, woodland and tree cover and presence of hedgerows / boundary planting which can define views and perceptions of openness in the landscape. This perception of openness is in turn influential in the way Green Belt area performs against the national functions. On the one hand landscape enclosure can conceal urban features and built development in close proximity and interrupt views of settlements and urbanised features. On the other hand it is also important to note that these areas can display high quality landscapes (which include smaller fields and spaces enclosed by changes of level or

¹⁷ An alternative or local interpretation of sprawl might consider built-up areas to include existing settlements excluded from the Green Belt.

planting including trees and hedgerows) adjoining inner Green Belt boundaries and urban edges, where the visual impact of the land is at a minimum. An attempt is therefore made to assess visual perception of openness in a landscape sense, which is important to the functional assessment. The calculation of the proportion of built development within each parcel also helps describe the level of visual openness, which is defined as an absence of built development. However it is acknowledged that this is a difficult concept to judge, particularly at strategic level.

- 5.2.17. Countryside, urban fringe and urbanising characteristics and influences have been taken into account as part of the assessment. It is important to note that some urban fringe land uses which are acceptable under Green Belt policy (e.g. outdoor recreational activities) may include elements of built development that have an urbanising influence and reduce openness.
- 5.2.18. Open land uses of a countryside character are considered to include agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation and areas of biodiversity in accordance with national policy. The assessment also considers environmental or landscape quality designations as part of the countryside analysis. However they are not the determining factors in respect of judgements on the extent to which the Green Belt fulfils this national purpose.

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- 5.2.19. The fourth purpose performs a girdle role, as a green ring around historic settlements or to provide the landscape context to historic features that preserves setting by keeping land open. This purpose goes beyond a simple definition of historic towns and relates to the identification of all the key historic places across the study area in both urban and rural settings. Existing designations of historic value and interest such as conservation areas, historic parks and gardens and scheduled ancient monuments have been used to identify historic 'places' relevant to this assessment. Both the physical and visual relationship between the Green Belt and these places has been assessed. Setting and character in context and, in particular, perceptions of openness, especially in relation to an absence of built development and / or integration with the wider countryside, are important factors.

To assist urban regeneration

- 5.2.20. The fifth national purpose has been screened out. Assisting urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land is considered to be more complex to assess than the other four purposes because the relationship between the Green Belt and recycling of urban land is influenced by a range of external factors including local plan policies, brownfield land availability and the land / development market. Due to the fact that the local policy review demonstrates that there is a limited supply of available or unallocated brownfield land in St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield it is considered that the Green Belt as a whole has successfully and uniformly

fulfilled this purpose. Therefore all parcels would perform equally well and any attempt to differentiate would be meaningless.

To maintain the existing settlement pattern

- 5.2.21. This local purpose was identified as a planning objective in the 1998 Hertfordshire Structure Plan and continues to be articulated within local policy. The Green Belt maintains the existing settlement pattern by providing a range of spaces and gaps between all settlements. Therefore the assessment criteria has followed those questions applied to the second purpose, but focuses on land between non-1st tier settlements. Though not specifically defined as such in local policy, these spaces have been considered to represent 'primary' or 'secondary' local gaps.

Non-Green Belt Land and Brownfield Land

- 5.2.22. The study has assessed non-Green Belt land (rural areas in Dacorum beyond the outer Green Belt boundary) against the same criteria as Green Belt land. All of this non-Green Belt land is identified in the strategic parcel plan in Chapter 6.

5.3. Desktop Review and On-site Assessment

- 5.3.1. The purposes assessment has been undertaken in two stages: as a desktop review and on-site inspection. This first stage of the assessment has been undertaken at a strategic level whereby mapping (including Local Plan proposals maps and environmental and historic features mapping as set out in Appendix 4) and aerial photography has been used to initially assess the contribution each parcel makes towards each of the four relevant Green Belt national purposes and the local Hertfordshire purpose.
- 5.3.2. Information gathered during desk-based activities has been used to provide the basis for the second stage of the assessment whereby each parcel was visited over a two-week period (17th June 2013 – 28th June 2013). This assessment enabled more detailed analysis of the contribution each parcel makes towards the four relevant Green Belt national purposes and local Hertfordshire purpose.

5.4. Land Contributing Least to Green Belt Purposes

- 5.4.1. The purposes assessment evaluates the contribution that Green Belt and non-Green Belt land makes towards each of the four national purposes and the local Hertfordshire purpose. From this start point, the assessment has then identified areas of land which contribute least to Green Belt purposes. The identification of these areas also relies heavily on consideration of local factors such as urban form, landscape characteristics and urbanising influences.
- 5.4.2. Land considered to contribute least has been recommended for further detailed assessment. This will involve more detailed analysis of the landscape in the assessment areas alongside consideration of wider issues required by the Local Plan but not

considered in this study (see Disclaimer in Chapter 1). It is therefore important to recognise that a decision for further assessment of land cannot be taken as a firm recommendation for a particular change to a Green Belt boundary.

- 5.4.3. Land identified as contributing least towards Green Belt purposes has been classified as strategic land or small scale sub-areas of parcels. In addition, Green Belt land which has already been subject to substantial development has been recommended for boundary adjustment, to reflect current development boundaries.

5.5. Presenting the Assessment

- 5.5.1. Each parcel has been assessed against each of the four national Green Belt purposes and local Hertfordshire purpose. A colour coding classification system has been used to summarise the assessment against each purpose. The classification denotes the outcome of the assessment of the contribution a parcel, or sub-divided section of a parcel, makes to each of the Green Belt purposes.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Dark green | Significant contribution to GB purposes |
| Mid green | Partial contribution to GB purposes |
| Light green | Limited or no contribution to GB purposes |

- 5.5.2. For each purpose, supporting text explains how the classification has been arrived at. The presentation of the classification for each purpose assists in understanding and assessing the value of the various roles performed by the parcel. This approach to individually assessing four national purposes, plus one well-justified local purpose, allows for a clear and transparent evaluation that sets out the information needed to judge the overall contribution of the parcel.
- 5.5.3. An overall assessment of the contribution the parcel makes to the Green Belt has been provided as a written evaluation only. There has been no overall classification at this point as this is considered too crude to capture the inter-relationship between performance against all the purposes.
- 5.5.4. This overall assessment has resulted in the sub-division of some parcels to reflect a finer grain assessment of parts of the parcel that contribute least against more than one of the purposes and are therefore the areas that may need to be considered for potential release from the Green Belt if development needs necessitate.



Parcel Assessment Sheets

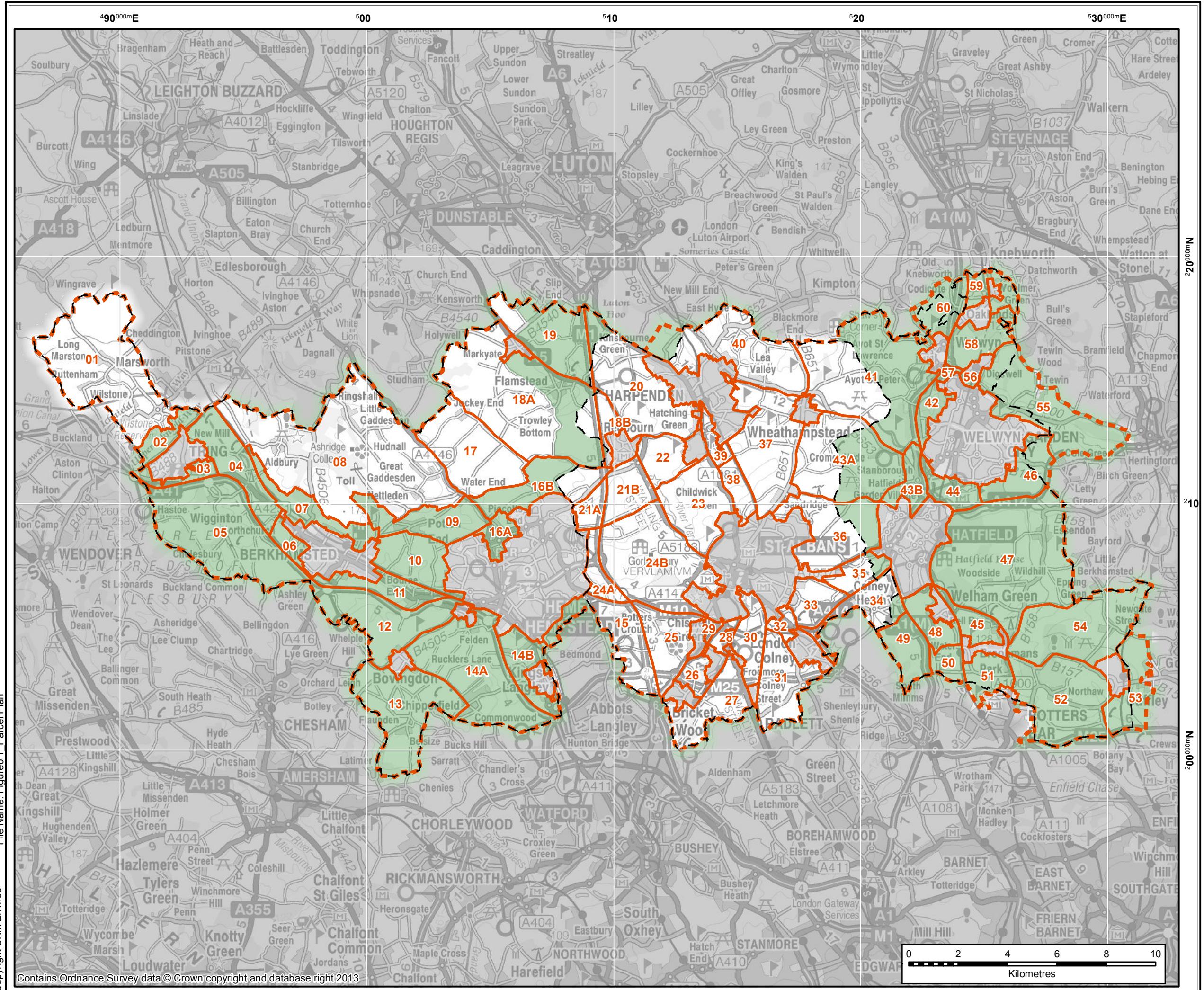
- 5.5.5. Parcel Assessment Sheets (set out in Annex 1, provided as a separate document) describe the level of contribution of each parcel towards each of the Green Belt purposes. They also consider the existing level of built development in the Green Belt, visual openness and countryside character. They conclude by summarising the principal function(s) of the parcel and next steps for land which is identified as contributing least towards Green Belt purposes. The analysis responds to each question set out in Table 6.3 but it has been produced in a concise manner to provide a strategic overview of the parcel that avoids repetition.

6. Strategic Parcel Plan

- 6.1.1. The Green Belt has been sub-divided into strategic parcels of land for assessment against the purposes criteria. The parcel boundaries generally follow well-defined physical features and the outer boundary of the study area generally follows the client authorities' administrative boundaries. In general parcel boundaries are based upon the following criteria:
- Boundaries should be aligned to natural or physical features where possible e.g. water courses, prominent hedgerows, roads, railway lines;
 - Boundaries should not split woodland or main areas of trees or existing settlements, existing housing or urban development; and,
 - Where large settlements, fully located within the study area, adjoin administrative boundaries the parcels fully wrap around the settlement to allow a complete assessment.
- 6.1.2. In total 66 strategic parcels have been identified as set out in Figure 6.1.
- 6.1.3. The desk-based review initially identified 60 strategic parcels and this total subsequently rose to 66 as a result of the on-site assessment, when refinements to boundaries were made in order to better reflect conditions on the ground. Five strategic parcels contain non-Green Belt designated land. This land has been included in the assessment in accordance with the Brief which requires potential compensatory Green Belt land to be considered. Where appropriate and especially through on-site examination, parcels have been sub-divided. Sub-division has taken place if part of a strategic parcel exhibits different characteristics and / or performs a different role or function to another part of the same parcel. This has helped enable more accurate description of Green Belt functions and how well land contributes towards the four national purposes and local Hertfordshire purpose.
- 6.1.4. In some cases the outer boundary of the study area crosses into adjoining local planning authorities. Land within adjoining local planning authorities (i.e. those outside the area covered by the three client authorities) is included within a strategic parcel when it meets one or more of the following criteria:
- where the administrative boundary is tightly drawn around a settlement which is entirely located within Dacorum, St Albans or Welwyn Hatfield – examples of such settlements and locations include the south and east of Welwyn Garden City (GB46 and 55), east of Cuffley (GB53) and northwest of Harpenden (GB40); and,
 - where the administrative boundary closely follows, but does not adjoin, the edge of settlements outside of the study area – for example at Potters Bar (GB51 and 52). In this case a full 360 degree assessment of Potters Bar has not been undertaken.



- 6.1.5. Strategic parcels have been allocated two digit GB codes. If a parcel has been subdivided the two digit code remains and a letter has been added. For example if GB01 is divided into two it comprises GB01A and GB01B. A description and rationale for each parcel is set out in Appendix 5.



N

Green Belt Review for St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield

FIGURE 6.1.
Strategic Parcel Plan

| SCALE | PROJECT CODE |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 1:145,000 @ A3 | JE30761 |
| CONTENT | DRAWN |
| London.Gov Ordnance Survey | KW |
| CHECKED | DATE |
| RB | 2/12/2013 |

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7. Key Findings

- 7.1.1. All parcels have been assessed against four of the national Green Belt purposes and one local purpose.
 - NPPF Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - NPPF Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
 - NPPF Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - NPPF Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and,
 - Local Purpose: To maintain the existing settlement pattern.
- 7.1.2. The local purpose has been added to reflect Hertfordshire planning policy and local characteristics of the study area.
- 7.1.3. As explained above the fifth national purpose; to assist regeneration, has not been assessed at a parcel level.
- 7.1.4. The Green Belt in the study area generally performs well against all four national Green Belt purposes and the local Hertfordshire purpose. Overall, the purposes assessment demonstrates that every parcel makes at least a partial contribution to one of the five Green Belt purposes assessed. All but two parcels make at least a significant contribution to one national purpose, when considering the four national Green Belt purposes only¹⁸. This shows that the vast majority of the Green Belt in Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield contributes towards achieving national Green Belt purposes as set out in the NPPF.
- 7.1.5. However analysis also demonstrates that levels of contribution differ across the study area and also within some strategic parcels. The assessment shows the different level of emphasis on the various purposes. Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment overlaps in many areas with preventing settlements from sprawling and merging and maintaining the existing settlement pattern. Preservation of historic places is a more limited role in some specific areas. This countryside in the study, a swathe of mainly arable farmland 50km wide and only 10km from the edge of London at its southern extreme, is well maintained in spite of development pressures and proximity to major urban areas. It contains and separates over 50 settlements¹⁹ ranging from large towns to small washed over villages. There are few environments so close to world cities which have been able to maintain such a clear distinction between built-up areas and

¹⁸ Discounting the local purpose 'to maintain the existing settlement pattern'

¹⁹ As set out in Table 3.2.

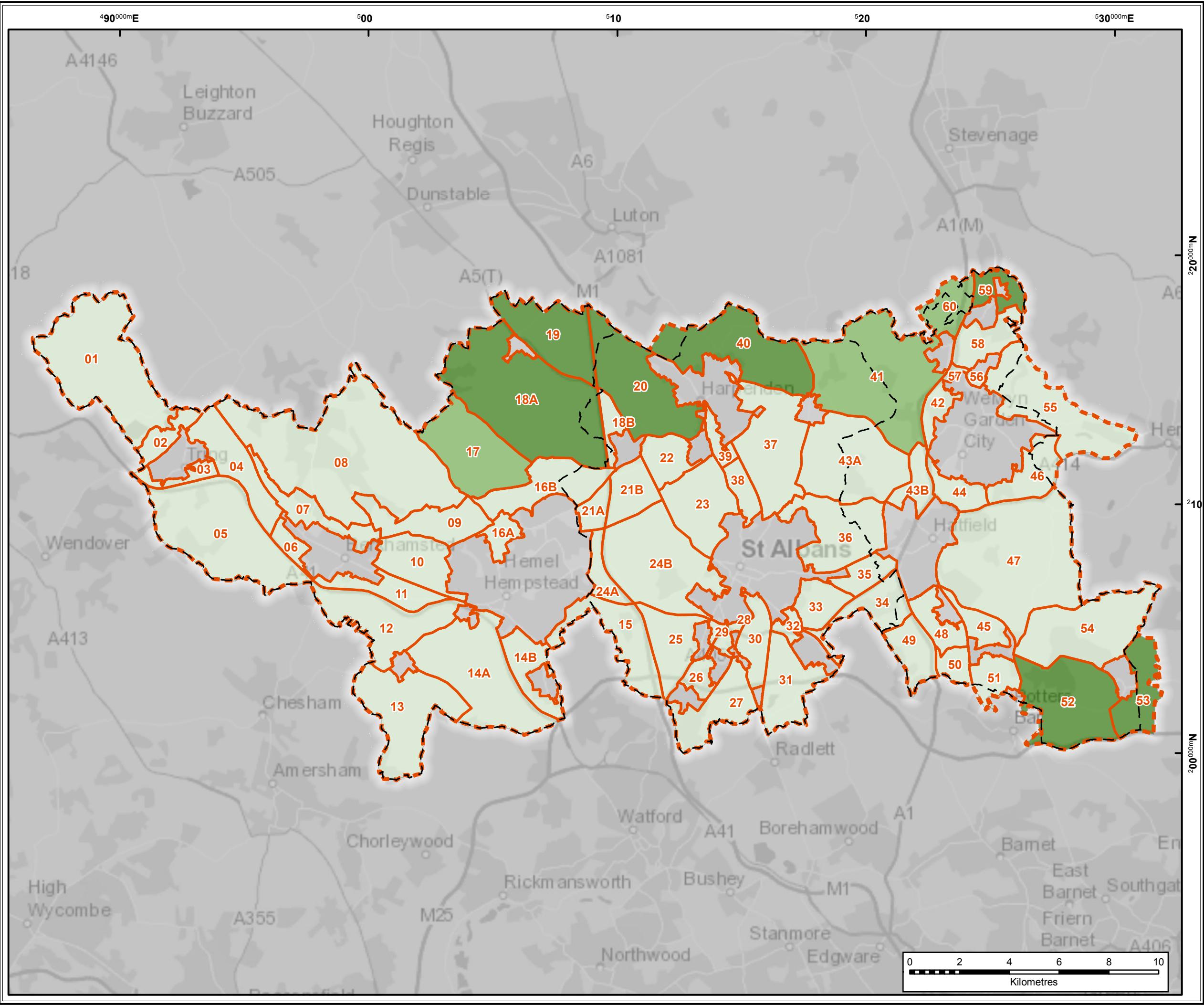


countryside. In spite of this general picture urban fringe, rather than countryside, characteristics are displayed in parts of the study area.

- 7.1.6. The Green Belt contribution to each of the four national purposes and local Hertfordshire purpose is analysed in more detail below. This analysis relates to all 66 parcels, including Green Belt and non-Green Belt land. It provides a review of the role that the parcels play towards achieving each Green Belt purpose assessed. The level of contribution towards each purpose is also mapped to enable the identification of networks of parcels which work together to achieve a particular purpose.
- 7.1.7. In general, the study area also exhibits high levels of physical openness, which is the essential characteristic that Green Belt seeks to maintain. This is illustrated through the analysis of levels of built development in the Green Belt which are very low overall. This is particularly telling at the strategic level whereby the absence of built development is clearly a cross-parcel feature of the countryside. The character and quality of the landscape in many parts of the study area means that visual perceptions of openness are also generally strong. This is because topography, hedgerows and woodland often screen settlement edges and urban fringe activities from view.
- 7.1.8. Contribution towards each of the Green Belt purposes is discussed in this chapter and maps showing the level of contribution towards each purpose are provided. As explained above it is important to emphasise that an overall performance classification /map is not provided. This is because such analysis might be misleading as the potentially variable contribution towards individual purposes might be masked by an average or aggregate rating.
- 7.1.9. Areas of Green Belt land which are evaluated as contributing least to the four national purposes and local Hertfordshire purpose are identified in Chapter 8.

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

- 7.2.1. Figure 7.1 shows the contribution of each parcel towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. The methodology defines large built-up areas, in this context, as London, Luton and Dunstable, and Stevenage.
- 7.2.2. It can be seen that there are two distinct areas of land which contribute most towards this purpose. The first runs along the north edge of the study area from the east of Dacorum through the north of St Albans to the north of Welwyn Hatfield. This land, located in Dacorum, is also covered by The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The second is located in the southeast corner of the study area in Welwyn Hatfield, where the study area is closest to the northern extent of London.
- 7.2.3. A network of parcels (including GB18A, GB19, GB20 & GB40) located to the west and east of Harpenden form an effective barrier to check the southwards expansion of Luton and Dunstable located to the north of the study area. Notably, this network of parcels includes GB18A, which is non-Green Belt land and is part of the Chilterns AONB. This national landscape designation minimises opportunities for development and has itself acted as an effective barrier to sprawl. This network continues eastwards (to include GB41, GB59 & GB60) to the west and north of Welwyn Garden City and to the north of Welwyn, Oaklands / Mardley Heath and Woolmer Green, to form a barrier to check the southwards expansion of Stevenage.
- 7.2.4. Sprawl northwards from London is primarily checked by GB52 & GB53 which are located to east of Potters Bar and around Cuffley. This land contributes towards the gap between London and the study area.
- 7.2.5. Because of the location of the study area, no parcel of land directly borders the urban areas of London, Luton and Dunstable or Stevenage. Rather, the parcels assessed for this review work in unison with other Green Belt land, beyond the boundaries of the three client local authorities, to provide effective barriers to sprawl.
- 7.2.6. The remaining parcels make only a limited contribution, or no contribution, towards checking the sprawl of the defined large built-up areas.



Green Belt Review for St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield

FIGURE 7.1.
Contribution towards
Checking Sprawl

| SCALE | PROJECT CODE |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1:145,000 @ A3 | JE30761 |
| CONTENT | DRAWN |
| Ordnance Survey | KW |
| CHECKED | DATE |
| RB | 30/11/2013 |

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7.3. NPPF Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging

- 7.3.1. Figure 7.2 shows the contribution of each parcel towards preventing neighbouring towns from merging. It can be seen that there is a clear central band of Green Belt land which runs from west-east through the heart of the study area, covering Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield, which makes a significant or partial contribution to this purpose.
- 7.3.2. This band of Green Belt forms a series of strategic gaps which separate the 1st tier settlements of Tring, Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead, St Albans, Harpenden, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City. The Green Belt also provides buffers facing 1st tier settlements outside of the study area including Luton and Dunstable, Stevenage, Watford (including Abbots Langley), Hertford and Potters Bar. Overall, almost half of all parcels make a significant or partial contribution towards maintaining strategic gaps. Table 8.1 below shows the networks of parcels which form each strategic gap.

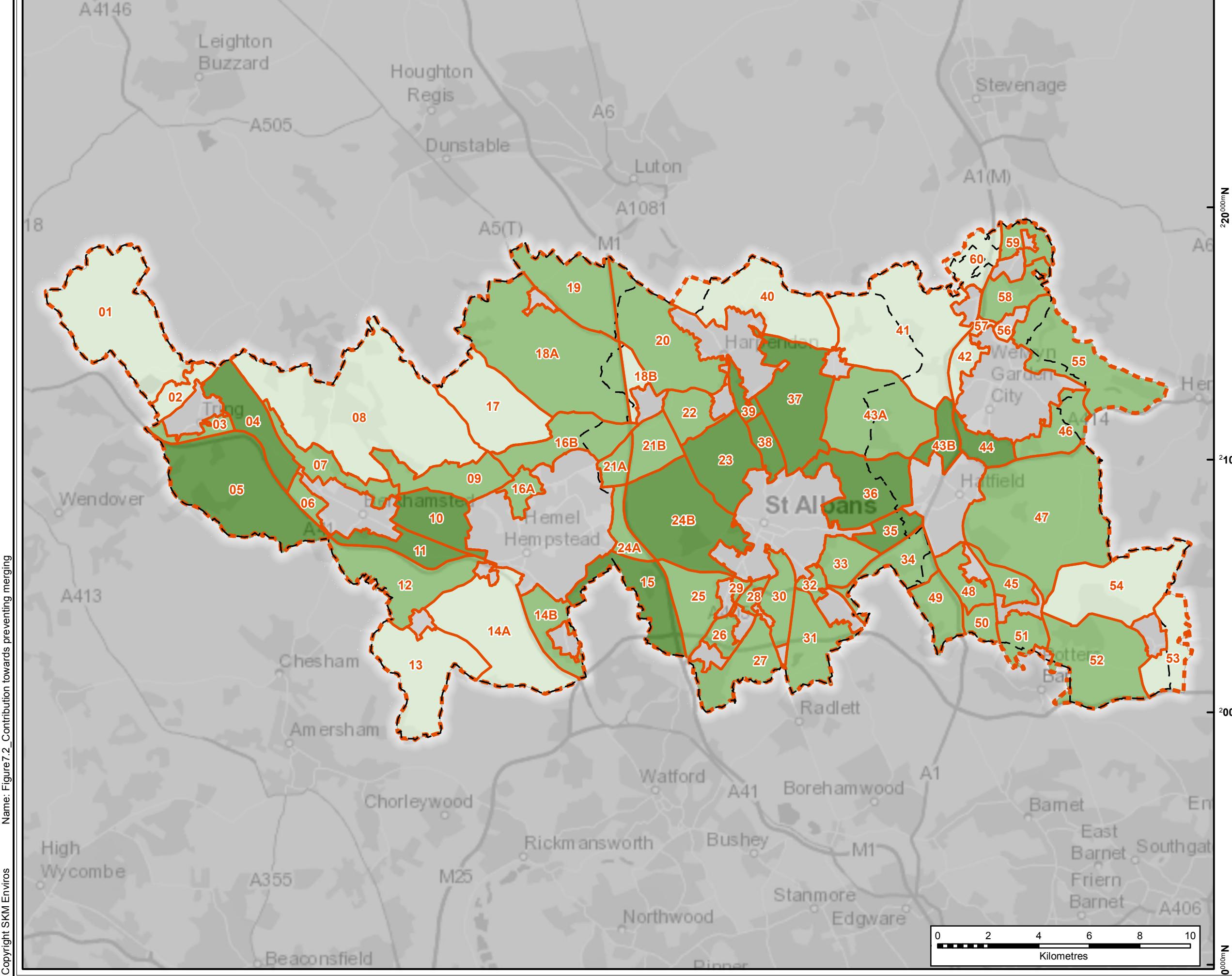
Table 8.1. Strategic Gaps

| Strategic Gap | Network of Parcels | Gap |
|--|---------------------------|-------|
| Within the Study Area | | |
| Tring - Berkhamsted | GB03, 04, 05, 06 & 07 | 4.5km |
| Berkhamsted - Hemel Hempstead | GB09, 10, 11 & 12 | 2.6km |
| Hemel Hempstead - St Albans | GB15, 21, 23, 24 & 25 | 4.2km |
| St Albans - Harpenden | GB23, 37, 38 & 39 | 2.5km |
| St Albans - Hatfield | GB33, 34, 35 & 36 | 1.3km |
| Hatfield - Welwyn Garden City | GB43A & B & 44 | 1km |
| Separating 1st Tier Settlements within the study area from settlements outside²⁰ | | |
| Hemel Hempstead - Watford (Abbots Langley) | GB14B &15 | 3.2km |
| Hemel Hempstead - Luton and Dunstable | GB16A & B, 18A & 19 | 10km |
| St Albans - Watford (including Garston) | GB25, 26, 27, 28, 29 & 30 | 4.8km |
| St Albans - Radlett | GB30 & 31 | 4.8km |
| St Albans - Borehamwood | GB31, 32, 33 & 34 | 8.2km |
| Harpenden - Luton and Dunstable | GB20 | 5km |
| Welwyn Garden City - Hertford | GB46 & 55 | 2.7km |
| Welwyn Garden City - Stevenage | GB56, 57, 58, 59 & 60 | 7km |
| Hatfield - Potters Bar | GB45, 47, 48, 50 & 51 | 4.8km |

²⁰ Strategic Gaps to London are not set out given the overall strategic role of the Metropolitan Green Belt around London.



- 7.3.3. Six strategic gaps are identified which separate 1st tier settlements located within the study area. In addition there are nine strategic gaps which separate 1st tier settlements within the study area from settlements outside of the study area (see above).
- 7.3.4. Strategic gaps display a range of characteristics. In the west of the study area (to the west of the city of St Albans), strategic gaps are relatively large, well-maintained and are largely free from significant development. In the east of the study area, on the other hand, gaps are either: i) generally narrower such as the one between St Albans and Hatfield and Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City, and / or ii) contain a greater amount of large-scale development including 2nd and 3rd tier settlements such as between St Albans and Watford, Hatfield and Potters Bar and Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage. The larger strategic gaps generally comprise a number of parcels whereas narrow strategic gaps are formed by only a single parcel. However, both small and large gaps play an important role in the prevention of merging.
- 7.3.5. This pattern of strategic gaps is a result of the spatial distribution of large settlements and urban areas across and around the study area, which is the result of growth around railway stations prior to the Green Belt boundaries being established.
- 7.3.6. There is significant development pressure on parcels which form narrower gaps as these are bounded by two potential sources of encroachment. As a consequence the narrower strategic gaps often display urban fringe characteristics (a hybrid of urban and rural uses). They are pressure points, and any reduction in their width may heighten that pressure and weaken the case for protection as physical and visual openness is eroded.
- 7.3.7. The perception or visibility of the Green Belt in strategic gaps, is variable, but relatively strong throughout the study area. Major transport corridors including the M25, M1 and A1(M) provide interspersed views of the Green Belt, and are in themselves generally well concealed by landscape features including planting. On the ground, strategic gaps are often enhanced by significant landscape buffering around settlements. Parcels which make a limited contribution, or no contribution, towards preventing merging of neighbouring town are not located between 1st tier settlements.



Key:

- Land Parcel Boundary
- District Borough Boundary
- Study Area Outer Boundary

Merging

- Limited or No Contribution
- Partial Contribution
- Significant Contribution



Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

REVISION: E

Green Belt Review for St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield

FIGURE 7.2.
Contribution towards
Preventing Merging

| SCALE | PROJECT CODE |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1:145,000 @ A3 | JE30761 |
| CONTENT | DRAWN |
| Ordnance Survey | KW |
| CHECKED | DATE |
| RB | 30/11/2013 |

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- 7.4. NPPF Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**
- 7.4.1. Figure 7.3 shows the contribution of each parcel towards safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Strong, rural and countryside characteristics are evident throughout Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield. The majority of parcels (over two-thirds) significantly contribute towards this purpose.
- 7.4.2. As set out in the methodology the countryside is open land with a general absence of built development and urbanising influences, and is characterised by rural land uses including agriculture and forestry. This is often reflected in existing landscape character or quality designations. This is a functional definition of the countryside and emphasises what the countryside is for and is not for. It is the definition most widely used in policy and in decision making and is often combined with measures of landscape quality. Open land uses are considered to include agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation and areas of biodiversity.
- 7.4.3. Countryside characteristics are generally strong across the Green Belt in the study area as agriculture is the main land use. Undulating open arable farmland, characterised by medium to large sized fields, is most common across the Green Belt and between settlements. Pastoral farmland is more common close to settlement edges on smaller field patterns, which display a greater sense of enclosure due to boundary planting.
- 7.4.4. There is also considerable woodland across the study area, including scattered pockets of ancient woodland. This is also very important for preserving historic setting, as set out in 7.5 below. Areas of woodland are most common in the east part of the study area, especially in Welwyn Hatfield.
- 7.4.5. Outdoor recreational activities such as large open sports facilities, parks and playing fields and golf courses are also common land uses in the Green Belt and are most frequent at settlement edges. As explained in the methodology, these land uses are acceptable uses within the Green Belt but represent typical urban fringe activities whereby there is a transition from built-up settlements to the open countryside.
- 7.4.6. National landscape designations in the form of The Chilterns AONB cover non-Green Belt land in the study area. This land is located in the north of Dacorum.
- 7.4.7. Overall the combination of agricultural land uses, scattered woodland, range of recreational activities and AONB clearly show that countryside characteristics are generally strong throughout the study area. Existing Green Belt boundaries play an important role in safeguarding this countryside land, including both open undulating farmland and more enclosed wooded areas. These countryside areas have been subject to relatively limited levels of encroachment.

- 7.4.8. In spite of this, some parcels and smaller areas of parcels display non-country side characteristics. These are evident in two forms, including: 1) urban fringe characteristics at the edge of settlements, and 2) ribbon development within the countryside.
- 7.4.9. Land exhibiting urban fringe characteristics (a hybrid of rural and urban uses) is located at settlement edges in close proximity to built-up urban development including housing, or commercial and industrial activities. In some cases this development spills over into the Green Belt in the form of encroachment or ribbon development, especially in the form of large single dwellings. Typical urban fringe land uses include recreational activities²¹ as well as horticulture, secondary schools, garden centres and sewage works. As a result of development in the Green Belt, this land is more likely to display lower levels of openness due to the presence of development but often there can be a greater level of landscape enclosure due to smaller field patterns. This has some impacts that are positive (trees and hedges conceal built development features) whereas fencing and walls act as more urban influences on visual perceptions of openness.
- 7.4.10. In order to clarify which parcels exhibit the strongest countryside characteristics and associated greatest levels of visual openness (as a result of an absence of development), the level of built development within each parcel has been estimated²². The percentage of total built development within each parcel taken as a proportion of total parcel area is mapped in Figure 7.4.
- 7.4.11. This map supports the findings of the on-site assessment in relation to the level of contribution that each parcel makes towards safeguarding the countryside from encroachment²³. Parcels contributing least towards this purpose are generally clustered around the city of St Albans. They include GB26 (located between Bricket Wood and Chiswell Green / How Wood), GB32 (located between St Albans and London Colney) and GB35 (located between St Albans and Hatfield, containing Smallford). Other parcels which are part of this network to the south of St Albans displaying high²⁴ levels of built development include GB26, 27, 31, 32 & GB33. Of note, other parcels displaying high level of built development are located around Kings Langley (GB14B), between Potters Bar and Brookmans Park (GB50) and to the east of Oaklands village (GB60).
- 7.4.12. In addition, some areas of the Green Belt within the study area have been subject to ribbon development, which can in certain locations dilute the strength of countryside character. The majority of ribbon development is along minor routes rather than major transport corridors. Such development also commonly extends from 2nd and 3rd tier

²¹However it should be noted that recreational activities are encouraged as beneficial uses in the Green Belt and are important as they help meet social infrastructure the needs of local communities.

²²Level of built development is based on GIS analysis of 1:10000 OS Mapping. It should therefore be noted that % are likely to be slightly lower than in reality as only buildings set out on OS Maps have been analysed.

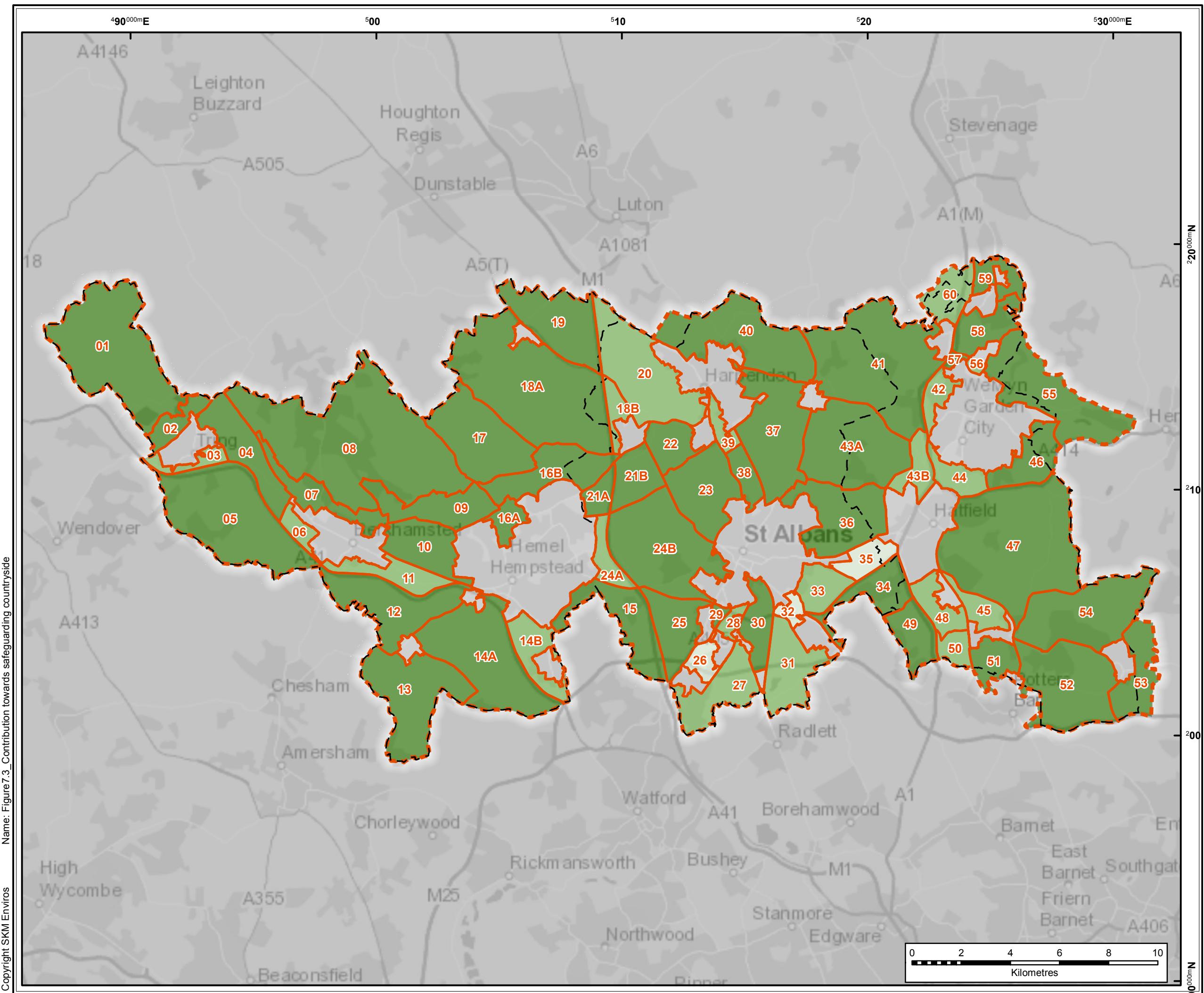
²³ However it is important to note that development might pre-date Green Belt designation

²⁴Parcel contains over 1% of built development



settlements (washed over by the Green Belt) as opposed to 1st tier settlements which generally exhibit stronger and more well-defined settlement boundaries. This is evident as detached homes on large plots are scattered across the study area mainly in more rural locations which display countryside characteristics. Development along minor roads extending from smaller settlements may sometimes be a key pressure facing the smaller strategic gaps (see Paragraph 7.3.6).

- 7.4.13. Major transport corridors and A-roads are also common and noticeable urban influences within the Green Belt. It is noteworthy that these routes are often well concealed by landscaping but remain audibly intrusive. Therefore they are often not seen but are frequently heard. The effect of this landscape buffering along routes, as well as around settlements, is to retain a strong visual connection across the countryside and a sense of openness. From the ground, the undulating nature of the landscape means that the rhythm of the countryside is strong across the study area. For example, this is demonstrated in the strategic gap between Tring and Berkhamsted where there is a strong visual connection between GB04, 05, 07 & 08 in spite of road and rail physical features on the ground.
- 7.4.14. The purposes assessment has also identified three sub-areas of Green Belt land which form green wedges into 1st tier settlements. Green wedges are linear in character and run into urban areas rather than around them. These are located at GB16A in Gadebridge Park to the north of Hemel Hempstead, GB39 in Harpenden Common to the south of Harpenden and GB24B in Verulamium Park to the west of St Albans.
- 7.4.15. A number of large scale and relatively recently-developed residential areas have also been identified in the Green Belt. These schemes represent encroachment into the Green Belt. The main examples are located at Highfield Park (in GB33) and Napsbury Park (in GB31). All of these areas are located in St Albans. When assessed in isolation they are considered to make a limited contribution towards Green Belt purposes.



Key:

- Land Parcel Boundary
- District Borough Boundary
- Study Area Outer Boundary

Countryside

- Limited or No Contribution
- Partial Contribution
- Significant Contribution

Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

REVISION: D

Green Belt Review for St Albans, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield

FIGURE 7.3.
Contribution towards
Safeguarding the Countryside

| SCALE | PROJECT CODE |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1:145,000 @ A3 | JE30761 |
| CONTENT | DRAWN |
| Ordnance Survey | KW |
| CHECKED | DATE |
| RB | 30/11/2013 |

SINCLAIR KNIGHT MERZ
SKM ENVIROS