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Oxford Green Belt Study

Final Report
Prepared by LUC
October 2015

Project Title: Oxford Green Belt Study

Client: Oxfordshire County Council

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by Director
V1	14/08/2015	Draft Report	Josh Allen Sarah Young Ben Miller Richard Swann Philip Smith Chris Green	Philip Smith Richard Swann	Philip Smith
V2	28/09/2015	Draft Final Report	Sarah Young Richard Swann Philip Smith	Philip Smith Sarah Young	Philip Smith
V3	7/10/2015	Second Draft Final Report	Sarah Young Richard Swann Philip Smith	Philip Smith Sarah Young	Philip Smith
V4	27/10/2015	Final Report	Sarah Young Richard Swann Philip Smith	Sarah Young	Philip Smith

Contents

1	Introduction	1
	Study objectives and scope	1
	Background	1
	Report structure	2
2	Context	3
	National Green Belt policy	3
	The Oxford Green Belt	4
	Oxfordshire planning policy	8
3	Methodology	12
	Project inception	13
	Review of study context and background	13
	Defining the land parcels for review	13
	Preparing and agreeing the assessment criteria	14
	Rationale behind the assessment criteria	21
	Assessing the parcels	25
	Site assessment	25
	Reporting and review	26
4	Findings	27
	Presentation of findings	27
	Summary of findings	30
	Assessment of land not currently in the Green Belt	31
	Assessment of findings compared with completed Green Belt studies	32
5	Conclusions and next steps	35
	Meeting the duty to co-operate	35
	Making changes to the Green Belt	35
	Positive use of land in the Green Belt	36

Figures

Figure 2.1– Oxford Green Belt

Figure 3.1 – Methodological Flow Diagram

Figure 4.1 - Performance against Green Belt Purpose 1 - Criterion 1a

Figure 4.2 - Performance against Green Belt Purpose 1 - Criterion 1b

Figure 4.3 - Performance against Green Belt Purpose 2

Figure 4.4 - Performance against Green Belt Purpose 3

Figure 4.1 - Performance against Green Belt Purpose 4

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed assessments for broad areas

Appendix 2: Detailed assessments for individual parcels.

Extract from the poem *Thyrsis*, by Matthew Arnold (1865)

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!

In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same;

The village street its haunted mansion lacks,

And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,

And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks—

Are ye too changed, ye hills?

See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men

To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays!

Here came I often, often, in old days—

Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,

Past the high wood, to where the elm-tree crowns

The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?

The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,

The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames?—

This winter-eve is warm,

Humid the air! leafless, yet soft as spring,

The tender purple spray on copse and briers!

And that sweet city with her dreaming spires,

She needs not June for beauty's heightening,

1 Introduction

Study objectives and scope

- 1.1 LUC was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council (on behalf of the Oxfordshire Local Authorities¹) to undertake an assessment of the Green Belt within the County. The Study was overseen by a Steering Group comprising officers of the local authorities.
- 1.2 The overall aim of the Study was to assess the extent to which the land within the Oxford Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green Belts, as set out in paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):
 - to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 1.3 The brief indicated that the Study should examine the case for including within the Green Belt any additional areas of land that currently lie outside it.
- 1.4 The NPPF attaches great importance to Green Belts and stresses that their essential characteristics are 'openness and permanence'. It also advises that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of a local plan.
- 1.5 The brief emphasised that the Study will **not advise on the suitability or potential of land in the Oxford Green Belt for development**. However, the outputs of the study, alongside other assessments will assist local authorities in considering the extent to which some existing Green Belt land could be used to accommodate sustainable forms, patterns and types of new development. Should the local authorities conclude that there are exceptional circumstances for making alterations to the existing Green Belt boundaries, these changes, including any allocations of land for development, will be taken forward through the Local Plan-making process.
- 1.6 The brief also noted that the Study should not have regard to environmental, policy or land-use constraints and designations that may exist within the Oxford Green Belt, such as landscape areas, SSSIs, and floodplains - except insofar that these are considered to be relevant to the purposes of Green Belts.

Background

- 1.7 The Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), published in April 2014, identified a need for the provision of around 5,000 homes per annum over the period 2011-31 across the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area.
- 1.8 The need within the administrative area of Oxford City Council was identified as between 24,000 and 32,000 homes up to 2031. There is general agreement between the local authorities that the capacity of the City is limited and that there will in consequence be a significant shortfall that will need to be met within neighbouring districts.

¹ Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

- 1.9 To address this challenge, and taking account of the Duty to Co-operate, the Oxfordshire Growth Board agreed a collaborative and joined up approach to provide a county wide spatial picture and strategy. A strategic work programme has been developed, which comprises a number of inter-related projects and milestones around the preparation and appraisal of long-term strategic development options for the county and the identification of associated infrastructure requirements. These projects, including this Green Belt Study, will culminate in the agreement of a new housing distribution for Oxfordshire. That agreed distribution will then be taken forward in subsequent Local Plan Reviews by the individual District Councils.
- 1.10 Section 110 of the Localism Act (2011) describes English Local Authorities' 'duty to co-operate'. The duty:
- Relates to sustainable development or use of land that would have a significant impact on at least two local planning areas.
 - Requires that councils and public bodies '*engage constructively, actively and on an on-going basis*' to develop strategic policies to address such issues.
 - Requires councils to consider joint approaches to plan making.
- 1.11 Paragraph 156 of the NPPF sets out the strategic issues where co-operation might be appropriate, and includes a number of cross boundary issues that are closely linked to Green Belt (such as the provision of homes and jobs etc.).

Report structure

- 1.12 The remainder of this report is structured in the following Chapters:
- **Chapter 2** sets out the context to the Study, in terms of planning policy and the evolution and character of the Oxford Green Belt.
 - **Chapter 3** describes the Study methodology, including the criteria used to assess the Green Belt.
 - **Chapter 4** reports the findings of the Study.
 - **Chapter 5** sets out the conclusions of the study and recommended next steps.

2 Context

National Green Belt policy

- 2.1 The principle of maintaining a ring of open country around cities can be traced back to the 16th century when Elizabeth I forbade any building on new sites within three miles of the city gates of London. This was motivated by public health reasons, to prevent the spread of the plague, and to ensure a constant supply of food for the metropolis.
- 2.2 The importance of these considerations was later recognised by Ebenezer Howard, a pioneer of British town planning, in his book of 1898 *Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in which he referred to *'an attractive setting within the town could develop and which would maintain, close at hand, the fresh delights of the countryside- field, hedgerow and woodland'*.
- 2.3 The only mechanism available at the time to realise this vision, however, was the acquisition of land by public authorities. In 1935 the London County Council Regional Planning Committee therefore put forward a scheme *'to provide a reserve supply of public open spaces and of recreational areas and to establish a Green Belt or girdle of open space lands, not necessarily continuous, but as readily accessible from the completely urbanised area of London as practicable'*. This arrangement was formalised by the 1938 Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act.
- 2.4 In 1955, Government Circular 42/55 codified Green Belt provisions and extended the principle beyond London. This was replaced by Planning Policy Guidance 2 in 1988 and in 2012, the Government replaced PPG2 with paragraphs 79–92 of a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This has since been supplemented by relevant National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).
- 2.5 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that *'the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'*. This is elaborated in NPPF paragraph 80, which states that Green Belts should serve five purposes, as set out below. The NPPF does not infer that any differential weighting should be applied to the five purposes.

The purposes of Green Belt

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

- 2.6 The NPPF emphasises in paragraph 83 that local planning authorities should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. It goes on to state that *'once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period'*.

- 2.7 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF suggests that Local Planning Authorities may wish to identify areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt to accommodate long-term development needs well beyond the plan period. New boundaries must have regard for the permanence of the designation by redefining boundaries which endure beyond the Local Plan period. New boundaries should be defined clearly, using readily recognisable, permanent physical features.
- 2.8 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF indicates that, if proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:
- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
 - set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
 - show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
 - demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
 - show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.
- 2.9 Current guidance therefore makes it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning tool designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas. To this end, land should be designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use. However, the NPPF states "*local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land*" (Paragraph 81).

The Oxford Green Belt

Origins and evolution of the Oxford Green Belt

- 2.10 Thomas Sharpe, a pioneer of British planning, first presented the idea of a Green Belt to protect Oxford's special physical and architectural character in 1948². A decade later in 1958, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the former Berkshire County Council, with advice from amenity groups that included the Oxford Preservation Trust, instigated Green Belt policies. A tight inner Green Belt boundary was drawn around the city, and the Green Belt extended outwards for some five to six miles in every direction. Within it were a number of villages, most of which were 'washed over', meaning that Green Belt constraints on development applied equally within the village as outside it. Some of the largest villages, including Kidlington, were excluded from the Green Belt, as 'inset villages'. A public inquiry into the proposals was held in 1961 and in 1975 the Green Belt was approved. This confirmed the 'outer' boundaries of the Green Belt but the 'inner' part was left as interim, pending the outcome of structure and local plans.
- 2.11 In 1979 the first Structure Plan for Oxfordshire provided for the continuation of Green Belt around Oxford "*to preserve the special character*" of the City. The 1987 Structure Plan continued the Green Belt policy in policy EN5 which set out the purposes of the Oxford Green Belt more fully:
1. "*Protect the special character of Oxford and its Landscape Setting,*
 2. *check the growth of Oxford and prevent ribbon development and urban sprawl,*
 3. *prevent the coalescence of settlements*"³
- 2.12 Final approval of the alterations to the Structure Plan was announced by the Secretary of State on 15 April 1987. This included provision for the inner boundaries of the Green Belt to be decided through Local Plans⁴.

² Oxford Replanned, Thomas Sharpe (1948).

³ Topic Paper on the Oxford Green Belt, Cherwell Local Plan (1996) Cherwell District Council.

⁴ Local Plans such as The Oxford Fringe and Green Belt Local Plan (adopted March 1991), Central Oxfordshire Local Plan -Cherwell (1992) etc.

- 2.13 By the early 1990s, a variety of rationales for using Green Belt to protect the setting and special character of historic towns had been developed in different places. Green Belt was being used to:
- “protect the green and open fabric of such cities, keeping open extensive belts of land which form important parts of the setting of town centres, neighbourhoods or groups of buildings;
 - protect gateways, by keeping open approaches to a city, and providing a clear definition of town and country;
 - protect the wider setting of a city. This may comprise keeping open areas of higher ground which provide a green background to a City, and help give it a distinctive character; and
 - seek control over the size of a city, with a view to influencing the level of activity which requires to be accommodated in its historic core, thus protecting the character.”⁵
- 2.14 In approving the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 1992 the Secretary of State agreed with his predecessors (from 1979 and 1987) “that the unique, historic character of Oxford and its setting in its natural environment should be conserved and protected, and the growth of the City should not continue indefinitely.”⁶
- 2.15 From the 1992 Oxfordshire Structure Plan up to the final Oxfordshire Structure Plan in 2011, Oxfordshire has combined the special character rationale for Green Belt with some of the other purposes. Paragraph 3.9 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 stated that:
- “The special character of Oxford and its landscape setting means not just the University and the views of the dreaming spires, but a much broader concept including the countryside around the City, the Cherwell and Thames floodplains and the relationship of nearby settlements to Oxford. Its character also includes the overall scale of activity in the City, since any considerable growth of the City will generate more activity, since significant growth will generate more traffic and pressures for further development, which could threaten the nature, character and setting of the City.”⁷*
- 2.16 More recently, in the City Council’s Core Strategy and Sites and Housing Plan Development Planning Documents (published in 2011 and 2013), Green Belt is described as “an area of undeveloped land, where the planning policy is to keep it open to (amongst other purposes) prevent urban sprawl and preserve the setting and special character of Oxford and its landscape setting.”⁸ Paragraph 3.3.23 of the Core Strategy goes on to say, “protection of the Green Belt therefore helps to retain the distinctive physical form of the city, where the river corridors running either side of Oxford’s historic core are an essential part of its special character and landscape setting.”⁹
- 2.17 It is generally regarded that the Green Belt around Oxford has served the City and County well, providing an open, landscape backdrop to the urban area and preventing coalescence with neighbouring towns and villages. On the other hand, the Green Belt has been regarded as a major constraint on the City’s growth and development, alongside the constraint of the floodplain and sensitive ecological and historical areas. Indeed, the County and District Councils have been debating the spatial distribution of development for over 50 years.

⁵ The Effectiveness of Green Belts, Department of Environment, London, (1993).

⁶ Topic Paper on the Oxford Green Belt, Cherwell Local Plan (1996) Cherwell District Council.

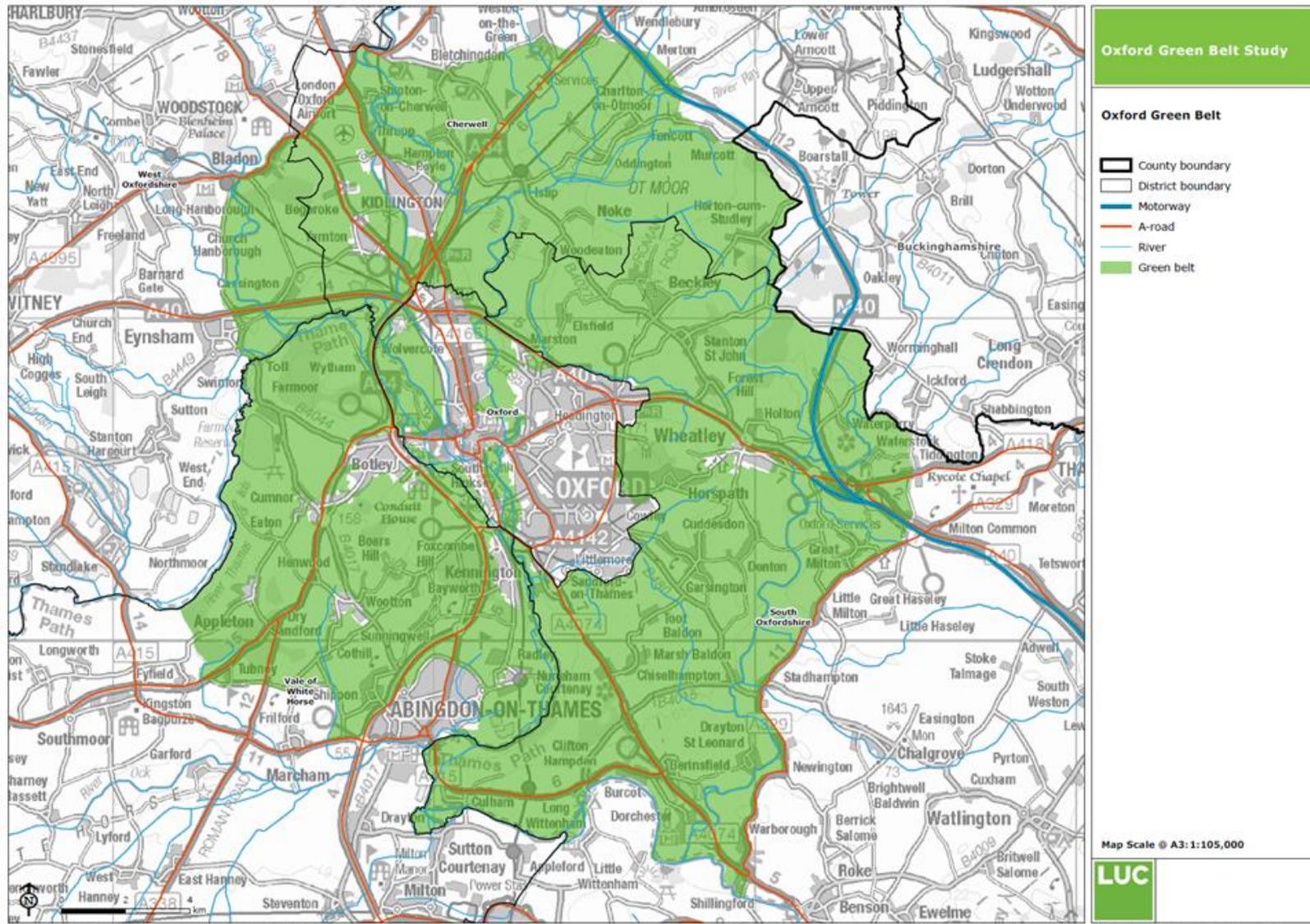
⁷ Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, Oxfordshire County Council (2005).

⁸ Sites and Housing Plan (2011 – 2026), Oxford City Council (2013).

⁹ Core Strategy 2026, Oxford City Council (2011).

- 2.18 Since the designation of the Oxford Green Belt, the most significant alterations to its boundary occurred in the mid-1990s around the edges of Oxford. Oxford City Council released areas of Green Belt land and safeguarded it for future housing, e.g. Barton West, and employment uses, e.g. 'Northern Gateway'. Since then, there have only been very minor alterations to the Green Belt in Oxfordshire. South Oxfordshire's Core Strategy policy CSEN2 South Oxfordshire includes provision for a local review of the Green Belt at Berinsfield. It is proposed that the status of Berinsfield will be changed from Green Belt to an inset settlement. .
- 2.19 The current extent of the Oxford Green Belt is shown in **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1– Oxford Green Belt



The character of the Oxford Green Belt

- 2.20 The Oxford Green Belt covers around 66,000 hectares (660 square kilometres). Nearly 250 hectares are open access land, including 100 hectares of Country Parks. Roughly 75% of the Green Belt is under agricultural use. More than 20% is at significant risk of flooding, being located in Flood Zones 1 and 2. The more significant flood plains are located along the banks of the rivers Thames, Cherwell and Ray and on Otmoor. Many of these floodplains are also important ecological habitats designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), for example, Cothill Fen and Oxford Meadows.
- 2.21 Oxford has an international reputation as an historic centre of learning. It has hundreds of Listed Buildings, many of which are Grade I and Grade II*, many Scheduled Monuments from a range of archaeological and historical periods and several Registered Parks and Gardens. The World Heritage Site at Blenheim Palace lies adjacent to the north western edge of the Oxford Green Belt, in West Oxfordshire.
- 2.22 Oxford's historic development has been much influenced by its landscape setting. The development of settlement in this location reflects the benefits of a location associated with major rivers: the rich, flat alluvial land was good for farming and water meadows provided grazing pasture. Oxford rose to prominence in Saxon times, being positioned on an important trade route at the boundary between the Kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, with the elevated river terraces providing locations for settlement to develop.
- 2.23 The Thames and Cherwell floodplains have constrained the expansion of the City over time, leading to the pattern of development seen today in which outlying settlements have developed beyond the floodplains but central riverside areas have retained openness and rural characteristics.
- 2.24 The surrounding hills, such as Shotover and Cumnor, provided defensible sites around the City in medieval times. They now afford views into the City and form part of the 'green backdrop' when looking out from the City. The physical continuity provided by the river valleys that penetrate to the heart of the city is also an important landscape characteristic.
- 2.25 Considering the above, there are some areas of significant environmental sensitivity within the Oxford Green Belt. Examples include (amongst others):
- Otmoor due to its biodiversity interest and flood risk.
 - The flood plain of the river Thames as it passes through the City of Oxford due both to the flood risk and the biodiversity and historic interest of the meadows (including Port Meadow with Wolvercote Common and Green; Pixey and Yarnton Meads; and Cassington Meadows).
 - The area between Eynsham and the City due to the ancient woodland of Wytham Woods SSSI (with associated parkland) and wetlands at Farmoor Reservoir.
 - Nuneham Courtenay due to its large Registered Park and Garden of Historic Interest.
 - Bagley Wood west of Kennington due to its ancient woodland and priority biodiversity status.

Oxfordshire planning policy

The Districts' Local Plans

- 2.26 This section contains a brief summary of the current status of the Local Plans within the five Districts, including reference to their respective spatial strategies.

Cherwell District Council

- 2.27 The Cherwell District Council Local Plan (Part 1) was submitted to the Secretary of State for formal Examination on 31st January 2014. Proposed modifications, including an increase in housing provision in the district in line with the SHMA 2014, were submitted for formal Examination on 21st October 2014. Following Examination Hearings in December 2014, the Inspector's report was received in June 2015. Part 1 of the Local Plan was formally adopted on 20th July 2015.

- 2.28 The spatial strategy for how the District will manage its growth can be summarised as:
- Focusing the bulk of the proposed growth in and around Bicester and Banbury.
 - Managing growth in the rural areas and directing it towards larger and more sustainable villages.
 - Aiming to strictly control development in open countryside.
- 2.29 Cherwell Council is commencing work on Part 2 of the Cherwell Local Plan (Development Management Policies and Sites) containing detailed planning policies for considering planning applications and non-strategic site allocations. The Council has invited views on what that document should contain and plans to publish an issues and options document later in 2015, with adoption in the spring of 2017.
- 2.30 The Local Plan Part 2 will include a small scale local review of the Green Belt boundary at Langford Lane/London Oxford Airport and Begbroke Science Park, to accommodate identified employment needs, consistent with Policy Kidlington 1 in the adopted Local Plan Part 1.

Oxford City Council

- 2.31 The Oxford City Council Local Plan 2001-2016, setting out a detailed framework for its land use policies, was adopted on 11th November 2005. However, most of its policies have now been superseded by more recent DPDS.
- 2.32 The Oxford City Council Core Strategy, containing the policies against which all planning applications are judged, was adopted by the City Council on 14th March 2011.
- 2.33 The Oxford City Council Sites and Housing Plan, allocating sites for housing, employment and other uses and setting out detailed planning policies, was adopted by the City Council on 18th February 2013.
- 2.34 The spatial strategy and strategic locations for development in Oxford aim to:
- Ensure that new developments are in accessible locations, to minimise overall travel demand.
 - Maximise regeneration and the reuse of previously developed land and make full and efficient use of all land, having regard to the distinct character of each neighbourhood.
 - Provide the development required to meet Oxford's needs, ensuring an appropriate balance of housing and employment growth in the context of other competing land uses.
- 2.35 The Council is currently in the process of drafting a new Local Development Scheme due for publication in 2015.

South Oxfordshire District Council

- 2.36 The South Oxfordshire District Council Core Strategy, identifying issues and directions of growth for new development up to the year 2027, was adopted in December 2012.
- 2.37 Policy CSS1 of the adopted core strategy outlines the District's adopted spatial strategy to:
- Focus major new development at the growth point of Didcot.
 - Support the roles of Henley, Thame and Wallingford by regenerating their town centres and by providing new houses, employment, services and infrastructure.
 - Support and enhance the larger villages of Berinsfield, Benson, Chalgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley and Woodcote as local service centres.
 - Support other villages in the rest of the district by allowing for limited amounts of housing and employment and by the provision and retention of services.
 - Change outside these towns and villages and other major developed sites needs to relate to very specific needs such as those of the agricultural industry or enhancement of the environment.

- Since then, the Council has been working on a new local plan, known as the Local Plan 2031. The main goal of the new plan is to find a positive way to plan for the updated housing need figures (up to 2031). These were identified in a County-wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment (April 2014).

- 2.38 Consultation documents on the 'Issues and Scope' of the Local Plan 2031 were published in the summer of 2014, followed by some 'Refined Options' in spring 2015. In the 'Refined Options' consultation document have reemphasises the Council's strategic commitment to "*protect and enhance what is best about South Oxfordshire, whilst supporting economic growth, delivering new homes and promoting healthy and vibrant communities.*" The Council seeks "*to promote a network of sustainable settlements across the district to ensure that everybody has access to a basic range of services...*"
- 2.39 The Council plans to adopt the Local Plan 2031 in the spring of 2017, followed by a development management DPD in the autumn of 2017.

Vale of White Horse District Council

- 2.40 The Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2011 was adopted in July 2006. Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, the Council published an assessment of how the saved Local Plan 2011 policies are consistent with the NPPF.
- 2.41 The Council submitted Part 1 of a new Local Plan 2031 to the Secretary of State on 18th March 2015 for formal examination. Part 1 of the new Local Plan 2031 deals with the larger, 'strategic' sites and policies in the Vale.
- 2.42 The spatial strategy in the new Local Plan 2031 makes provision for growth of around 23,000 new jobs, 219 hectares of employment land, and at least 20,560 new homes, to be delivered during the plan period from 2011 to 2031. It:
- Focusses sustainable growth within the Science Vale Area.
 - Reinforces the service centre roles of the main settlements across the district.
 - Promotes thriving villages and rural communities whilst safeguarding the countryside and village character.
- 2.43 It is hoped that Part 1 will be adopted in late 2015. Until Part 1 is adopted, saved policies in this Local Plan 2011 that are consistent with the NPPF are being used alongside the Framework.
- 2.44 Preparation of Part 2 of the Local Plan 2031, containing smaller site allocations and detailed planning policies is due to begin in early 2016, with a view to adoption in the summer of 2018.

West Oxfordshire District Council

- 2.45 The West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan 2011 was adopted on 16th June 2006. The planning policies that are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) have been saved and still form the basis for local planning decisions until such time as they are replaced by a new Local Plan.
- 2.46 The new Local Plan 2011-2031 sets out an overall strategy to guide development across the District up to 2031. Policy 'OS2 – Locating Development in the Right Places' outlines the proposed spatial strategy of the new plan. In summary it:
- Focusses new homes, jobs and supporting services on the edge of the main service centres of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton.
 - Will allow development in the smaller rural service centres of Bampton, Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham, Long Hanborough and Woodstock of appropriate scales and types.
 - Will allow limited development in the villages where it respects the village character and local distinctiveness and would help to maintain the vitality of their communities.
 - Development in the small villages, hamlets and open countryside will be limited to that which requires and is appropriate for a rural location and which respects the intrinsic character of the area.

2.47 Following several periods of public consultation, a pre-submission draft was published for consultation between 27th March and 8th May 2015. The Local Plan 2011-2031 was formally submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in July 2015 and will be subject to independent examination in late November 2015, with a view to adopting the plan in the spring of 2016.

Recent Green Belt studies undertaken by the Local Authorities

2.48 Three Green Belt studies have been completed in Oxfordshire as follows:

- **Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review (2014):** A full Green Belt review comprising two key stages, and reported in three phases, was undertaken by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd on behalf of the Vale of White Horse District Council. The principal purpose of the review was to assess the extent to which the Oxford Green Belt land meets the five purposes of the Green Belt. Stage 1 of the review identified land parcels and assessed land parcels on the edge of settlements. Stage 2 included an assessment of land parcels not covered in Stage 1, an assessment of opportunities to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, and a review of the Green Belt boundary to examine whether it should be extended.
- **Oxford City Council's Investigation into the Potential to Accommodate Urban Extensions in Oxford's Green Belt – Informal Assessment (2014):** In May 2014 Oxford City Council published an assessment investigating the potential to accommodate urban extensions in Oxford's Green Belt. The assessment appraised the potential of sites for an urban extension in the Green Belt to be developed to meet housing need. The assessment began by considering the implications that development of an urban extension in different parts of the Green Belt would have on the function of the Green Belt. The second part of the assessment gave further consideration to the potential of areas of search in less sensitive parts of the Green Belt to deliver housing development. The assessment concluded that the approach of providing for housing need in an urban extension in the Green Belt merits further investigation.
- **Local Green Belt Study for South Oxfordshire (September 2015):** A local Green Belt study was undertaken by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council. The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which the land within the Green Belt meets the five purposes of the Green Belt in the context of the need to identify additional land for housing in the District. The study included two key stages. Stage 1 of the study involved an initial assessment of land at the edge of settlements. Consultation was also undertaken with Neighbourhood Planning Groups from six villages to identify land outside of the built up areas that could meet housing requirements. Stage 2 included a review of selected inset villages and previously developed land and a detailed assessment Green Belt land parcels. It set out conclusions regarding land that should be considered further for potential release from the Green Belt, or as Rural Exception sites (around washed over villages).

2.49 A comparison of the methodologies used in the Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review, the Oxford City Informal review, the South Oxfordshire Green Belt Review and this study, is provided in **Chapter 4** of this report.

3 Methodology

- 3.1 There is no definitive national guidance on how to undertake Green Belt studies. Documents prepared by the Planning Officers Society (POS)¹⁰ and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS)¹¹ provide a useful discussion of some of the key issues associated with assessing Green Belt and reviewing/revising Green Belt boundaries.
- 3.2 The key points from these documents and from Inspectors’ decisions were reflected in the methodology employed here. **Figure 3.1** provides a summary of the overall method of approach, which is described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

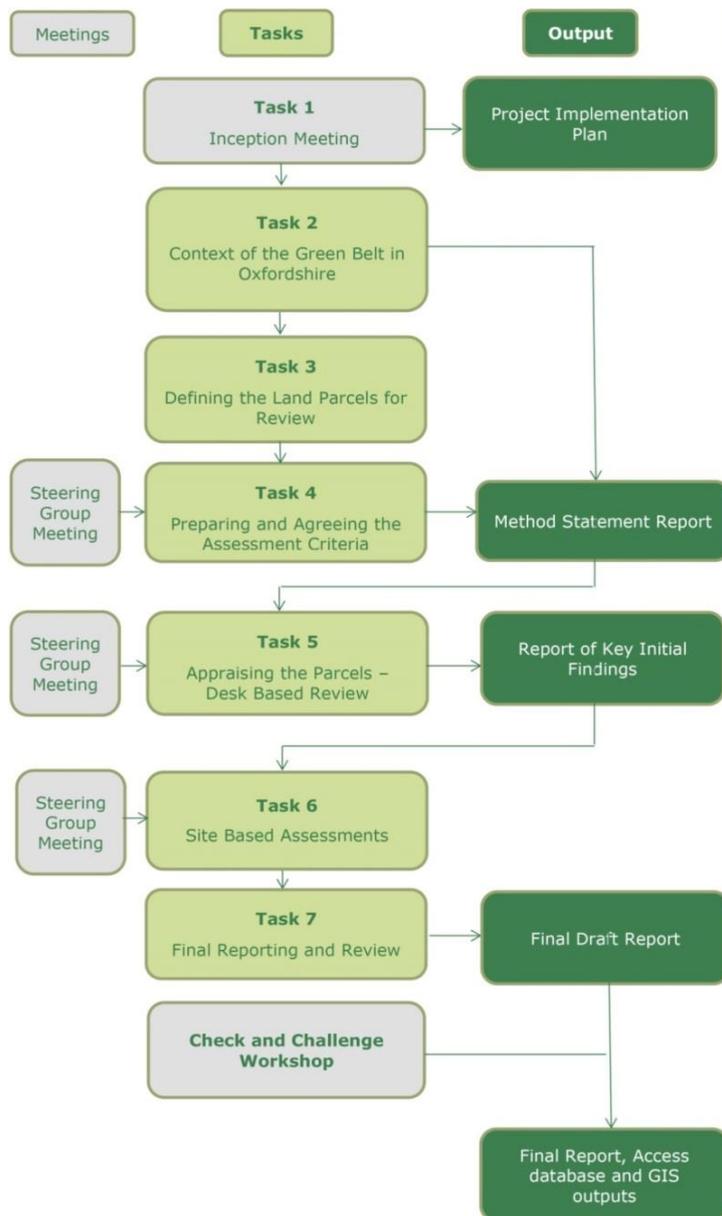


Figure 3.1 – Methodological Flow Diagram

¹⁰ Approach to Review of the Green Belt, Planning Officers Society.

¹¹ Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt, Planning Advisor Service (2015).

Project inception

- 3.3 The core LUC project team and the Oxfordshire Councils' Steering Group met on Tuesday May 5th 2015 to finalise the project scope, objectives and work plan, including agreeing key meeting and reporting dates. Discussions began on the methodology for identifying the land parcels and broad areas and on the detailed criteria for assessment. A list of required GIS data and other information was provided by LUC to the local authorities and arrangements were made for its collation and transfer. Council officers provided an update on the progress of the other Green Belt studies being undertaken in the County and the key issues of relevance to this study.
- 3.4 Following the inception meeting, a meeting note and project implementation plan, setting out the agreed methodology and key deliverable dates, were prepared and circulated to the Steering Group for approval.

Review of study context and background

- 3.5 To inform the development of the assessment methodology, most notably the detailed criteria for assessment of the parcels and broad areas against the Green Belt purposes, a review of relevant contextual information relating to the history and evolution of the Oxford Green Belt was undertaken. A summary of this context and background to the study is provided in **Chapter 2** of this report.

Defining the land parcels for review

- 3.6 Given the overall size of the Green Belt, it was necessary to divide it into appropriate parcels for assessment. Parcels were defined using GIS maps (based on Ordnance Survey and Mastermap), local proposals maps and aerial images. No maximum or minimum sizes were used for the land parcels. The aim was to define parcels that contain land of the same or very similar land use or character, bounded by recognisable features including:
- **Natural features**; for example, substantial watercourses and water bodies.
 - **Man-made features**; for example, motorways, A and B roads and railway lines, and established infrastructure and utilities such as sewage treatment works.
- 3.7 Parcels were defined independently from the previous or ongoing Green Belt studies in Oxfordshire. This ensured independent, comprehensive, and consistent approach. The Inspector's Report to Leeds City Council noted that Green Belt studies should be "*fair, comprehensive and consistent with the Core Strategy's aim of directing development to the most sustainable locations*". *Green Belt reviews should be 'comprehensive' rather than 'selective'*.¹² All of the Green Belt was therefore divided into parcels.
- 3.8 Two distinct types were identified:
- **Smaller parcels** adjacent to Oxford City and the inset settlements¹³. Identifying land parcels at the edge of the Green Belt is important as it is these areas which are most likely to be considered for either retention or removal from the Green Belt.
 - **Broad areas** which represent the main 'body' of the Green Belt, rather than land at the edges of Oxford City and the inset settlements enclosed by the Green Belt. It was agreed with the Steering Group, that smaller parcels would be identified around the 'inset settlements' as identified in the relevant Local Plans. Smaller parcels were not identified around settlements 'washed over' by Green Belt; however, commentary considering these settlements in relation to the Green Belt purposes is provided in the assessment of the broad areas.

¹² Inspector's report (A Thickett) to Leeds City Council (September 2014).

¹³ Including Berinsfield which is proposed to be inset and the Green Belt land to the east of Eynsham which sits outside the Green Belt.

3.9 **Table 3.1** lists the inset settlements in the study area agreed by the Steering Group to be appropriate for 'parcelling'.

Table 3.1 – Inset settlements

Cherwell District
Begbroke, Kidlington (including Oxford Spires Business Park), Yarnton
Oxford City Council
Oxford (including urban villages and settlements within Oxford (e.g. Summertown, Marston & Northway, West Oxford, East Oxford, Rose Hill, Littlemore, Grandpont, New Hinksey etc.))
South Oxfordshire District
Berinsfield, Wheatley (including Littleworth)
Vale of White Horse District
Abingdon-on-Thames, Botley, Cumnor, Kennington, Radley, Wooton, Appleton
West Oxfordshire District
Eynsham*

* Eynsham is not an 'inset' settlement as it lies adjacent to the edge of the Green Belt. However it was agreed by the Steering Group that the land within the Green Belt (adjacent to the settlement) should be assessed in detail.

Preparing and agreeing the assessment criteria

- 3.10 A key part of the method involved the development of an assessment framework based on the five purposes of Green Belts set out in the NPPF. A draft set of assessment criteria was drawn-up based on LUC's extensive experience of undertaking Green Belt reviews, information collated on the context and background of the Oxford Green Belt (see **Chapter 2**) and good practice elsewhere.
- 3.11 Through discussion with the Steering Group, the criteria were refined to ensure that the judgements reflected the context and priorities for Oxfordshire, whilst remaining true to the five purposes of the Green Belt. Green Belt studies should be clear "*how the assessment of 'importance to Green Belt' has been derived*" from assessments against the individual purposes of Green Belt.¹⁴
- 3.12 **Table 3.2** summarises out the final criteria used to assess the relative performance of the Green Belt parcels and broad areas and the ratings applied to each criterion. This is followed by a description of the rationale for the assessment criteria adopted.
- 3.13 For Green Belt Purposes 1-4, **Table 3.2** sets out:
- The **key settlements** considered relevant for the assessment of the purposes (not all of the settlements listed in Table 3.1 are considered to be large built-up areas (under P1), towns (under P2) or historic towns (under P3)).
 - The **key issue(s)** considered.
 - The assessment criteria used.

¹⁴ Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015).

- The **ratings** that were applied to each criterion, as follows.

High	Parcel performs well.
Medium	Parcel performs moderately well.
Low	Parcel performs weakly.
No Contribution	Parcel makes no, or a negligible contribution.

- **General comments** on the assessment method. This provides further detail about how each criterion / rating was interpreted. This helped ensure consistency was achieved throughout the assessment of the land parcels.

3.14 The Table also includes a summary of the approach used in relation to Purpose 5. Purpose 5 focuses on assisting urban regeneration through the recycling of derelict and other urban land. This study does not include a parcel by parcel assessment of Purpose 5, as it is not possible to distinguish the extent to which each Green Belt parcels delivers against this purpose. Discussions with the project Steering Group did not identify any evidence available that would enable such an assessment to be undertaken.

Table 3.2 – Detailed criteria used to assess the Green Belt within the smaller land parcels adjacent to Oxford City and the inset settlements

A) NPPF Green Belt Purposes	B) Relevant Settlements	C) Issue(s) for consideration	D) Criteria	E) Ratings		F) Comments on assessment
1 To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	The large built up area is considered to be Oxford, Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote	a Protection of open land from urban sprawl.	Does the parcel exhibit evidence of urban sprawl and consequent loss of openness?	High	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel contains no or very limited urban sprawl (in the form of ribbon or non-compact development) and has a strong sense of openness.	<p>Urban sprawl is the spread of urban areas into the neighbouring countryside. This could be in the form of ribbon development or non-compact development which doesn't relate well to the existing urban area.</p> <p>Key issue – the extent to which urban sprawl has already occurred and whether the land is open or not. Parcels which have already been compromised by urban sprawl, as a result of urbanising influences, may play a weaker role than those where the Green Belt is more open in character. However it is acknowledged that parcels which have been significantly affected by urban sprawl could be considered to play a valuable in preventing further sprawl.</p> <p>Development means any built structure.</p>
				Medium	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel contains limited urban sprawl (in the form of ribbon or non-compact development) and has a relatively strong sense of openness.	
				Low	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel already contains urban sprawl (in the form of ribbon or non-compact development) compromising the sense of openness.	
				N/C	Land parcel makes no, or a negligible contribution to preventing urban sprawl – i.e. not adjacent to urban area.	
		b		High	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel has a high potential for urban sprawl to occur.	The features that that are considered relevant to the assessment of potential include:
				Medium	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel has moderate potential for urban sprawl to occur.	

A) NPPF Green Belt Purposes	B) Relevant Settlements	C) Issue(s) for consideration	D) Criteria	E) Ratings		F) Comments on assessment
				Low	Adjacent to large built-up area and land parcel has low potential for urban sprawl to occur.	<p>Significant and durable boundary features - Readily recognisable and permanent features are used to define the borders of Green Belt parcels. The presence of features which contain development and prevent urban sprawl can, in certain limited locations, reduce the potential role of a Green Belt parcel in performing this purpose. The significance of a boundary in preventing urban sprawl is judged based on its relative proximity to the existing urban edge of a settlement and its nature. Only motorways, dual carriageways, railway lines and rivers which have not been breached within the relevant land parcel, or close by, are considered to constitute a very significant and durable boundary that may prevent urban sprawl.</p> <p>The nature of the settlement form - An urban edge that is uneven, rather than 'rounded off', is more vulnerable to urban sprawl.</p> <p>Presence of roads - the presence of roads (apart from motorways and dual carriageways) provides greater opportunities for urban sprawl to occur, because of the potential for ribbon development and the wider access they provide. Where such roads exist, the Green Belt is considered to play a strong role in preventing urban sprawl. These roads are distinct from those considered as boundary features as they will not form part of the existing settlement edge.</p>
				N/C	Land parcel is not adjacent to urban area and therefore makes no, or a negligible contribution to preventing urban sprawl.	

A) NPPF Green Belt Purposes	B) Relevant Settlements	C) Issue(s) for consideration	D) Criteria	E) Ratings		F) Comments on assessment
2 To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.	Vale of White Horse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abingdon on Thames Botley Cumnor Kennington Radley Wooton Appleton West Oxfordshire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eynsham Oxford City <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oxford (including urban villages and settlements within Oxford) Cherwell <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kidlington (including Oxford Spires Business Park) Begbroke Yarnton South Oxfordshire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wheatley (including Littleworth) Berinsfield 	a Reduction in visual or physical gaps between settlements.	Does the parcel prevent the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between neighbouring settlements?	High	The parcel plays an essential role in preventing the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between settlements. Loss of openness would cause visual or physical coalescence or substantially reduce the gap.	This purpose seeks to prevent settlements from merging to form larger settlements. The PAS guidance states that distance alone should not be used to assess the extent to which the Green Belt prevents neighbouring towns from merging into one another. Two key elements have therefore been used – the extent of the actual or perceived visual and physical gap.
				Medium	The parcel plays some role in preventing the reduction of the visual or physical distances between settlements. Loss of openness would, or would be perceived as, reducing gap between settlements.	
				Low	The parcel plays a very limited role in preventing the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between settlements. Loss of openness would not be perceived as reducing gap between settlements.	
				N/C	Land parcel makes no, or a negligible contribution to preventing the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between settlements.	

A) NPPF Green Belt Purposes	B) Relevant Settlements	C) Issue(s) for consideration	D) Criteria	E) Ratings		F) Comments on assessment
3 To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	Applies to the countryside around all settlements – i.e. all Green Belt parcels.	a Significance of existing urbanising influences and sense of openness. ¹⁵	Does the parcel have the characteristics of countryside and/or connect to land with the characteristics of countryside?	High	The land parcel contains the characteristics of countryside, has no or very little urbanising development, and is open.	Encroachment from urbanising influences is the intrusion / gradual advance of buildings and urbanised land beyond an acceptable or established limit.
			Has the parcel already been affected by encroachment of urbanised built development?	Medium	The land parcel contains the characteristics of countryside, has limited urbanising development, and is relatively open.	Urbanising influences include any features that compromise 'openness', such as roads lined with street lighting and pavements, large areas of hard standing, floodlit sports fields, roads, pylons etc. They do not include development which is commonly found within the countryside, e.g. agricultural or forestry related development, isolated dwellings, historic schools and churches. Countryside is land/scenery which is rural in character, i.e. a relatively open natural, semi-natural or farmed landscape.
				Low	Land parcel does not contain the characteristics and/or is not connected to land with the characteristics of countryside, or contains urbanising development that compromises openness.	
				N/C	Parcel makes no, or a negligible contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	

¹⁵ The significance of existing urbanising influences has a direct influence over the relative openness of Green Belt parcels. We have therefore used the presence of urbanising influences as a proxy for assessing the degree of openness within the parcel.

A) NPPF Green Belt Purposes	B) Relevant Settlements	C) Issue(s) for consideration	D) Criteria	E) Ratings		F) Comments on assessment
4	To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. Oxford (including the urban villages and settlements within Oxford)	a	Significance of historical and/or visual setting to the historic town. Does the parcel contribute to the setting and 'special character' of Oxford?	High	The parcel plays a major role in the setting of Oxford in terms of its physical extent and degree of visibility and/or its significant contribution to Oxford's special character.	<p>Topographic mapping, Zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) analysis and site visits were used to inform judgements regarding intervisibility between the historic core of Oxford and its open surroundings.</p> <p>Landscape Character Assessments (District and County), Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans and other specific studies including (amongst others):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the Oxford View Cones (Oxford City Council, Draft Report March 2014) • A Character Assessment of Oxford City in its Landscape Setting (LUC, 2002) • Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation <p>were used to inform the assessment of the contribution of setting to 'special character'.</p>
Medium	The parcel plays a moderate role in the setting of Oxford in terms of its physical extent and degree of visibility and/or its contribution to Oxford's special character.					
Low	The parcel plays a minor role as it lacks any significant visual relationship with Oxford, and is not visible in the context of views to it. It does however contribute in some way to the wider setting					
N/C	Parcel makes no, or a negligible contribution – i.e. does not form part of the setting or contribute to the special character of Oxford.					
5	To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.			Green Belt has the potential to make a strategic contribution to urban regeneration by restricting the land available for development and encouraging developers to seek out and recycle derelict / urban sites. It is considered that it is not possible to distinguish the extent to which each Green Belt parcels delivers against this purpose and therefore the parcels have not been individually assessed against Purpose 5.		

Rationale behind the assessment criteria

- 3.15 National Planning Policy and Guidance provides limited information on how the five purposes of the Green Belt should be interpreted. Based on the review of relevant guidance, recently adopted Local Plans, and detailed discussions with the Steering Group, this section sets out LUC's rationale and local interpretation of the purposes of the Green Belt for the Oxford Green Belt study.

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

- 3.16 It is possible to argue that all Green Belt prevents the unrestricted sprawl of large built up urban areas, because that is its principal purpose as a strategic planning designation. However, the study requires us to distinguish one area (or parcel) from another in terms of the extent to which they perform this purpose. This requires a detailed, site specific assessment against this strategic purpose.
- 3.17 Having reviewed good practice guidance documents, other Green Belt studies and the comments from the Steering Group, conclusions were drawn on the following key issues:

Oxford's 'Large Built-up Area'

- 3.18 There is no definition provided in the NPPF or a standard definition for a 'large built up area.' The Office for National Statistics defines a 'large' built up area as a settlement with between 0.5-1 million people; much larger than Oxford itself. All five local planning authorities have their own settlement hierarchies, each with their own definition of 'large' settlements. It was therefore necessary to decide on what constitutes the 'large built up area' for the purposes of the study.
- 3.19 In reaching this decision, it was noted that the original purpose of the Oxford Green Belt was to prevent the sprawl of the City of Oxford into the surrounding countryside and to protect the City's setting. While Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote can be regarded as separate settlements, they are in very close proximity to, and almost contiguous with the City of Oxford. They are no more than 300m from the built up area of Oxford and have a sense of being part of the City. Abingdon, Kidlington, Wheatley and even Horspath, on the other hand, are further away and have greater physical and visual separation from Oxford and cannot be considered to form part of the 'large built-up area' of Oxford.
- 3.20 With these points in mind, LUC concluded that, for the purposes of this study, the 'large built up area' should comprise Oxford, Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote. The land parcels adjacent to these four settlements were therefore assessed against criteria 1a and 1b, as they collectively were considered to form the 'large built-up area'.

Definition of 'Sprawl'

- 3.21 There is no clear definition of what constitutes urban sprawl. The PAS guidance¹⁶ states in relation to Purpose 1:

"The terminology of 'sprawl' comes from the 1930s when Green Belt was conceived. Has this term changed in meaning since then? For example, is development that is planned positively through a local plan, and well designed with good masterplanning, sprawl?"

¹⁶ Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt, Planning Advisor Service (2015).

3.22 The guidance emphasises the variable nature of the term 'sprawl' and questions whether positively planned development constitutes 'sprawl'. The RTPI Research Briefing No. 9 (2015) on Urban Form and Sustainability is also not definitive on the meaning of sprawl:

"As an urban form, sprawl has been described as the opposite of the desirable compact city, with high density, centralised development and a mixture of functions. However, what is considered to be sprawl ranges along a continuum of more compact to completely dispersed development. A variety of urban forms have been covered by the term 'urban sprawl', ranging from contiguous suburban growth, linear patterns of strip development, leapfrog and scattered development."

3.23 For the purpose of this study, it was concluded that well-located and planned urban extensions do not constitute 'urban sprawl'. Rather, this study defines urban sprawl as uncompact and/or ribbon development which does not relate well to the existing urban form of the 'large built-up area' as defined above.

3.24 Given this definition, land immediately adjacent to the large built up area is likely to contribute to this purpose, as it provides the boundary and zone of constraint to urban expansion. Nevertheless it should be recognised that sprawl as described can be equally damaging to the overall integrity of the Green Belt, wherever it may arise.

Definition of methods for assessing the role of the Green Belt in maintaining openness around the 'large built-up area'

3.25 Criterion 1a considers whether land has already been affected by sprawl and whether it retains an open character. Parcels which have already been compromised by urban sprawl as a result of urbanising influences may be considered to make a weaker contribution to purpose 1 than those parcels where the Green Belt is more open in character. It is important to note that a high rating against criterion 1a does not necessarily imply that Green Belt is performing a more valuable role. The remaining open land in a parcel significantly affected by sprawl could be considered more valuable in preventing further incursions, or less valuable because it has already been compromised. It was agreed with the Steering Group that it is not appropriate for this study to place value judgements on interpreting the ratings. A further, more detailed stage of assessment would be needed to consider such judgements.

3.26 Equally important in assessing the role of Green Belt in checking unrestricted sprawl is the extent to which the land parcel has the potential for urban sprawl to occur in the future. Criterion 1b considers the role of the following in affecting the potential for urban sprawl to occur in the absence of a Green Belt designation:

- **The strength of boundary features** – i.e. where there is a very strong and defensible boundary – such as a motorway which may prevent urban sprawl from occurring.
- **The nature of the settlement form** - i.e. an urban edge that is uneven, rather than 'rounded off', is more vulnerable to urban sprawl. This vulnerability is evidenced by the number of the developer proposals to 'round off' and 'fill gaps', even though this may not be desirable from a wider planning perspective (e.g. green wedge/ fingers into the urban area can be desirable from a green infrastructure viewpoint), or to create a 'better edge' to the urban area.
- **The presence of roads** – i.e. roads allow for greater opportunities for urban sprawl to occur, because of the potential for ribbon development and the wider access they provide. Motorways and dual carriageways are not usually relevant in these terms. These roads considered under this criterion are also distinct from those identified as boundary features as they will not form part of the existing settlement edge.

Definition of boundary features considered able to check the sprawl of the 'large built-up area'

3.27 While all boundary features can play some role in preventing urban sprawl, in the context of Oxford with its huge pressures for development it was considered that the ability for boundary features to check sprawl was considered to be less significant. Therefore, only motorways, dual carriageways, railway tracks and rivers adjacent to the existing urban edge, which have not been breached by the large built-up area within the immediate vicinity of a parcel and are therefore demonstrably strong and defensible, are considered to be significant in relation to purpose 1.

- 3.28 Other boundaries, such as streams, and lesser roads are not for the purposes of this study considered to be strong enough to prevent urban sprawl. However, such boundary features may form an important part of the landscape and/or pose a physical barrier to unplanned sprawl, albeit one that can more easily be breached. Floodplains are a major factor in restricting the development of Oxford, however as outlined in Chapter 1 of this report, the presence of environmental constraints such as SSSIs and Floodplains have not been considered in this study.

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

- 3.29 For this purpose, it was concluded that the 'neighbouring towns' should include all 'inset settlements' i.e. settlements that are set within the Green Belt, but not covered by it. Berinsfield was added to this list, as it is proposed to be inset in the Green Belt. Eynsham and Abingdon-on-Thames were also included, as they are neighbouring towns that abut the Oxford Green belt.
- 3.30 In addressing the potential for merger of these towns, consideration was also given to the contribution that smaller settlements make to the sense of openness experienced between the larger ones, both in terms of visual setting and physical distance between built-up areas when travelling through the landscape. The detailed assessment of parcels in Appendices 1 and 2 also considers the role that the Green Belt plays in preventing the coalescence of 'washed over' settlements, as it is acknowledged that the Green Belt does play a role in preventing the merging of these smaller settlements. This was not however taken into account in the assessment ratings.
- 3.31 Rather than simply measuring the size of the gap between settlements, the assessment considered both the physical and visual role that parcels of land play in preventing the merging of settlements. This accords with the PAS guidance which states that distance alone should not be used to assess the extent to which the GB Green Belt prevents neighbouring towns from merging into one another.

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 3.32 For this purpose, the first consideration was whether the land can be described as countryside (i.e. a relatively open natural, semi-natural or farmed landscape), rather than urban land. Very little land within the Oxford Green Belt is fully urban, but there are differences in the extent which parcels have been urbanised and the sense of openness has been eroded.
- 3.33 Urbanising influences were considered to include any features that compromise the countryside character, such as roads lined with street lighting and pavements, large areas of hard standing, floodlit sports fields, roads, pylons etc. They did not include development which is commonly found within the countryside, e.g. agricultural or forestry related development, isolated dwellings, historic schools and churches.
- 3.34 The criterion differs from Criterion 1a as it focuses on the extent to which the countryside characteristics of the Green Belt have been compromised by encroachment from urbanising influences.

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

- 3.35 In considering this purpose, it was LUC's view following discussion with the Steering Group, that the role of the Green Belt in preserving the setting and special character of the City of Oxford (as opposed to all conservation areas/ historic towns within the Green Belt) should be the key consideration. There were three main reasons for this.
- 3.36 Firstly, as outlined in **Chapter 2** of this report, the original impetus for the Oxford Green Belt was the strategic role it would play in protecting the special character and setting of the City. The role of the Green Belt in protecting other major historic cities, such as Bath, has also been noted.
- 3.37 Secondly, the smaller historic towns such as Abingdon and Woodstock lie at the edge of the Green Belt and are not surrounded by it. If the intention had been to protect the historic setting of Abingdon, it is reasonable to assume that the town would have been encircled by Green Belt. The Green Belt to the North of Abingdon has little relationship with the historic core of the town.
- 3.38 Thirdly, and related to the second point, there are other local planning mechanisms to protect the setting and character of these other towns and smaller settlements within the Green Belt.

- 3.39 The Green Belt Reviews undertaken for the Vale of White Horse District Council (2014) and South Oxfordshire District Council concur with this approach and apply Purpose 4 in relation to the setting and special character of Oxford City.
- 3.40 The study started from the premise that, to assess the contribution of parcels of land to the setting and special character of Oxford requires an appreciation of City's distinctive qualities. These qualities most obviously relate to the City's historic built environment, which has evolved principally through its role as a leading university, but they also relate to the physical characteristics of the landscape. The landscape led to the City's early evolution and then later provided a backdrop to the City's prominent buildings, and viewpoints from which to appreciate them in their landscape context. This landscape setting has been extensively depicted in literature and the visual arts.
- 3.41 LUC's 2002 study 'A Character Assessment of Oxford City in its Landscape Setting' and the draft 2014 'Assessment of the Oxford View Cones' were used to inform the assessment of contribution to Oxford's setting and special character. Reference was also made to landscape character assessments prepared for Oxfordshire as a whole (the 2004 Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study) and for the different Districts.
- 3.42 A visual connection with Oxford, in which a parcel forms part of the City's distinctive green backdrop and/or from which there are views into the City, particularly the historic centre, makes the highest contribution to Purpose 4. As part of the 2002 Character Assessment, a Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the 'dreaming spires' was modelled to identify the extent of the visual setting of the City. Key views of the spires from the surrounding landscape were identified and mapped. This ZVI data was used within our study to inform the desktop assessment of the extent to which land parcels form part of the visual setting of Oxford.
- 3.43 In considering views into or out from Oxford, the Central (University and City) Conservation Area is taken to be the most important in terms of 'special character', but some weight is also attached to the presence of other conservation areas within the large urban area. This is because the special character of Oxford as a historic city does not relate solely to the central area.
- 3.44 Consideration of conservation areas in this way does not extend beyond Oxford, because Green Belt policy is not aimed at protecting the historic character of conservation areas elsewhere within the Green Belt. Paragraph 86 of the NPPF notes that, whilst an open character can justify a village's inclusion in the Green Belt, the protection of other aspects of village character should be achieved through other means, such as the designation of conservation areas. The role of Green Belt with regard to historic character can therefore be seen to relate only to the 'historic towns' referenced in Purpose 4.
- 3.45 Regardless of direct intervisibility, a parcel can contribute significantly to Oxford's setting if it forms an element in views of the City, such as from the surrounding hills. Beyond this visual envelope a parcel can contribute if it has landscape characteristics or elements which have some linkage to Oxford. Physical links are the most evident, and weight is added where these have a strong historic characteristic: the Thames and Cherwell river valleys; road and rail links into the city that have retained their historic character; long distance footpaths; local routes between Oxford and surrounding villages; and the Oxford Canal. These all offer sequential views which contribute to an appreciation of Oxford's wider setting through a sense of arrival or departure.
- 3.46 Further from the City, landscape with a pervading rural character can still make some limited contribution to Oxford's countryside setting, but if there is an absence of any sense of a relationship with Oxford, either through distance or through the presence of other towns or landscapes with which a parcel has a dominant sense of connection, then no contribution is made to this Green Belt purpose.

Assessment criteria for the Broad Areas

- 3.47 Following the definition of parcels of land adjacent to the large built up area and neighbouring towns, the remaining, mainly outlying areas of Green Belt were divided into broad areas. The boundaries of the broad areas were drawn along significant linear features, such as motorways and dual carriageways. They also took account of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) of the historic core of Oxford, as this is a 'proxy' for the visual setting of Oxford (see paragraph 3.42, above). The broad areas represent the largely open and undeveloped countryside which extends from the large built-up area to the outer edge of the Green Belt.
- 3.48 The same criteria for assessment were used for the broad areas as for the smaller parcels.

Assessing the parcels

Desk-based assessment

- 3.49 Each land parcel and broad area was assessed using OS maps, aerial images and relevant GIS data to gain a clear understanding of how they performed against the five purposes. A rating system was used. Ratings and detailed notes on the judgements for each land parcel and broad area were input into an Access database. All ratings were rigorously cross-checked and reviewed to ensure consistency, clarity and transparency in all judgements.
- 3.50 Clear, colour-coded GIS maps linked to the Access database were prepared illustrating the defined land parcels and broad areas, the key environmental and cultural considerations and the overall assessed contribution of each land parcel and broad area to each of the five purposes of Green Belt.
- 3.51 There are several primary environmental constraints within Green Belt areas that could render any significant development proposal within the Green Belt inappropriate. These are:
- Internationally designated wildlife sites: Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar sites, Sites of Community Importance.
 - Nationally designated wildlife sites: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or National Nature Reserves (NNRs).
 - Scheduled Monuments.
 - Areas at high risk of flooding (Flood Zone 3b).
- 3.52 These constraints and issues were referred to where they provided valuable context; however, their presence did not influence any ratings or judgements as they do not relate to the purposes of the Green Belt. While landscape quality is not directly included in the purposes of Green Belt, there are aspects of landscape quality and character that are indirectly incorporated – i.e. in relation to safeguarding the countryside. The importance of landscape issues in the original designation of the Oxford Green Belt was also noted.

Site assessment

- 3.53 Following the completion of the desk based assessments, all parcels and broad areas were visited to check and verify the judgements and conclusions reached in the assessment. The Access database included a 'flag' field against each assessment test, to highlight any particular points for the field assessor to address. Site visits were particularly important in assessing: the perception of settlement gaps; the extent to which parcels exhibit countryside character; and the nature of any relationship with Oxford's historic character or setting. Fieldwork included driving many of the roads within each parcel and walking along public rights of way, with particular attention given to locations providing recreational views.
- 3.54 The information obtained in the field was input directly into the Access database with a commentary provided on any changes made to the judgements and ratings.

- 3.55 If as part of the detailed assessment process it was observed that a parcel of land has very distinct attributes within different sections of the parcel, this was recorded in the assessment database. Where this was the case, ratings were applied, to reflect the assessment relevant to the larger part of a parcel.

Reporting and review

- 3.56 Three drafts of the final report were prepared, each responding to the Steering Group's comments received on the previous draft.
- 3.57 The third draft was the subject of a 'check and challenge' workshop, held on 15 October 2015. The workshop was attended by the Steering Group, together with other senior officers from the local authorities. LUC presented the report at the workshop and the local authority representatives raised any outstanding issues. These issues were then discussed and it was agreed that, subject to final changes to the report to respond to the comments, the authorities would accept the report as an important piece of evidence for the Growth Board's Strategic Options study and for Local Plans. This report is the fourth and final draft, which responds to comments made at the check and challenge workshop.
- 3.58 A separate note was also prepared of the comments received in relation to the assessment of individual parcels and broad areas, and how these were taken into account¹⁷.

¹⁷ Oxford Green Belt study: Review of comments on the individual land parcels, LUC, October 2015

4 Findings

Presentation of findings

- 4.1 The main aim of the study was to provide a robust, transparent and clear understanding of how the land in the Oxford Green Belt performs against the purposes of the Green Belt. A total of 13 broad areas and 83 parcels of Green Belt land were defined in the Study area. A series of maps present the overall results of the assessment for the broad areas and smaller parcels for each of the assessed Green Belt purposes (i.e. Purposes 1-4) (**Figures 4.1 to 4.5**). **Appendices 1 and 2** contain all the assessment sheets for all broad areas and parcels, respectively. The assessment sheets contain the detailed judgements behind the ratings against each Green Belt purpose including any variations in the performance of a land parcel. **It is therefore essential that the detailed commentaries on the parcels (as set out in Appendices 1 and 2) are read alongside Figures 4.1-4.5 and/or Table 4.1 below.**
- 4.2 The information in these Figures and Appendices essentially fulfils the Study's overall aim. However, the Steering Group requested that the findings should be brought together in some way so that it is possible to see how parcels rate against each purpose. The findings are presented in **Tables 4.1 (Smaller Parcels)** and **4.2 (Broad Areas)**.
- 4.3 **Tables 4.1 and 4.2** do not present an aggregation of the parcels' and broad areas' ratings against all the purposes. Indeed, not all the parcels were assessed against all purposes and no weighting was applied to the purposes. As noted earlier, the NPPF does not require all the purposes of Green Belt to be met simultaneously and a High rating against any Green Belt purpose could be sufficient, on its own, to indicate an important contribution. Equally, even if an area of Green Belt scores highly against one or more purposes, the NPPF does not suggest that a review of its boundaries would not be appropriate, if exceptional circumstances were demonstrated.

Table 4.1: Assessment ratings for smaller parcels

Order	Unique Reference	Purpose 1 - Issue 1a	Purpose 1 - Issue 1b	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4
1	AP1	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Low
2	AP2	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	N/C
3	AP3	N/C	N/C	Low	High	N/C
4	AP4	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	N/C
5	AP5	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	N/C
6	AP6	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	Low
7	AT1	N/C	N/C	Low	High	N/C
8	AT2	N/C	N/C	Medium	Low	N/C
9	AT3	N/C	N/C	Low	Low	Low
10	AT4	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	Low
11	AT5	N/C	N/C	High	Medium	Low
12	AT6	N/C	N/C	High	Medium	Low
13	AT7	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
14	BE1	N/C	N/C	High	Low	Low
15	BE2	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	Low
16	BF1	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
17	BF2	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low

Order	Unique Reference	Purpose 1 - Issue 1a	Purpose 1 - Issue 1b	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4
18	BF3	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	Low
19	BF4	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
20	BF5	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
21	BF6	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
22	BO1	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
23	BO2	High	High	High	High	High
24	BO3	Medium	High	Medium	High	Low
25	BO4	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium
26	BO5	Low	High	N/C	Low	Medium
27	BO6	High	High	High	Medium	Low
28	CU1	N/C	N/C	Low	High	Medium
29	CU2	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Low
30	CU3	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Low
31	ES1	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	Low
32	ES2	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	Medium
33	KE1	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High
34	KI1	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Medium
35	KI2	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
36	KI3	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Low
37	KI4	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	Low
38	KI5	N/C	N/C	High	Medium	Low
39	KI6	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
40	KI7	N/C	N/C	High	Medium	Medium
41	KI8	N/C	N/C	High	Low	N/C
42	KI9	N/C	N/C	Low	Medium	N/C
43	OX1	High	High	High	Medium	Medium
52	OX10	High	High	Medium	High	Medium
53	OX11	High	High	Medium	High	High
54	OX12	High	High	Low	High	High
55	OX13	Medium	High	High	Medium	Low
56	OX14	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
57	OX15	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium
58	OX16	Low	High	N/C	Medium	Low
59	OX17	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High
60	OX18	Medium	High	High	Medium	High
61	OX19	Medium	High	High	Medium	High
44	OX2	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
62	OX20	High	High	Medium	High	High
63	OX21	High	High	High	Medium	High
64	OX22	High	Low	High	Medium	Medium
45	OX3	Medium	Medium	N/C	Medium	Medium
46	OX4	High	High	High	High	High
47	OX5	High	High	High	High	High
48	OX6	High	High	High	High	High

Order	Unique Reference	Purpose 1 - Issue 1a	Purpose 1 - Issue 1b	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4
49	OX7	Medium	High	Medium	Low	High
50	OX8	High	High	N/C	High	High
51	OX9	High	Medium	N/C	High	Medium
65	RA1	N/C	N/C	High	High	Medium
66	RA2	N/C	N/C	High	High	High
67	RA3	N/C	N/C	N/C	High	Medium
68	WH1	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Medium
69	WH2	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	N/C
70	WH3	N/C	N/C	N/C	Low	N/C
71	WH4	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	N/C
72	WH5	N/C	N/C	N/C	Medium	N/C
73	WH6	N/C	N/C	Low	High	Low
74	WH7	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Medium
75	WH8	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Low
76	WH9	N/C	N/C	High	Medium	Medium
77	WT1	N/C	N/C	Medium	Medium	Medium
78	WT2	N/C	N/C	Low	High	Medium
79	WT3	N/C	N/C	Low	High	N/C
80	WT4	N/C	N/C	Low	High	Low
81	YA1	N/C	N/C	High	High	Low
82	YA2	N/C	N/C	Medium	High	Low
83	YA3	N/C	N/C	Low	High	Medium

Table 4.2: Assessment ratings for broad areas

Order	Unique Reference	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3	Purpose 4
1	Broad area 1	N/C	N/C	High	Low
2	Broad area 2	N/C	Low	High	High
3	Broad area 3	N/C	N/C	High	Low
4	Broad area 4	N/C	N/C	High	Low
5	Broad area 5	N/C	Medium	High	High
6	Broad area 6	N/C	Low	High	High
7	Broad area 7	N/C	N/C	High	Low
8	Broad area 8	N/C	Low	High	Low
9	Broad area 9	N/C	Low	High	High
10	Broad area 10	N/C	Medium	High	Low
11	Broad area 11	N/C	N/C	High	Medium
12	Broad area 12	N/C	Low	High	High
13	Broad area 13	N/C	Low	High	High

4.4 This chapter provides a summary of the findings. Further detail can be found in **Appendices 1 and 2**. References in the detailed assessments to variations of performance within a parcel/ broad area are informative rather than rigorous. No methodology was defined for dealing with such variation and more detailed analysis will be required if the Local Authorities intend to remove areas of land from the Green Belt.

Presentation of findings in relation to Criterion 1b

- 4.5 Criterion 1b relates to Green Belt Purpose 1 (To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas). It was designed to complement Criterion 1a, by considering the extent to which parcels protect open land from the *potential* for urban sprawl to occur. In particular Criterion 1b considers whether existing significant and durable boundary features, such as major roads and railways, play a role in preventing urban sprawl and thereby reduce the role of the Green Belt in these locations.
- 4.6 On completing the assessment, LUC took the view that, while Criterion 1b is helpful in terms of the overall aim of the Study, the findings against this criterion should be presented separately (see **Figure 4.2**) and not combined with Criterion 1a. Criterion 1b, relates to defensibility (or vulnerability) of an area that has been defined as Green Belt. This requires consideration of the direction from which development is likely to come (hence we only consider urban-edge parcels), and the strength of barriers to development. It doesn't relate to characteristics of the parcel itself; it relates to the characteristics of linear boundary features rather than of an area of land.
- 4.7 If the findings of the assessment against Criterion 1b were combined with Criterion 1a, it would suggest that the parcel in question has additional value in Green Belt terms when in fact it is the barrier feature, where one exists, that has the value in protecting the Green Belt. If a parcel performs poorly against other criteria, it could be misleading to suggest that it is valuable just because it is not bounded by a railway line or major road. It is therefore important that it is considered separately.

Summary of findings

- 4.8 **Table 4.3** summarises the assessment findings, drawing attention to the spatial pattern of the performance of the parcels against the Green Belt purposes.

Table 4.3: Summary of Assessment Findings

Green Belt Purposes		Summary of Findings
1	To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only the smaller parcels immediately adjacent to the 'large built up area' (comprising Oxford, Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote) were assessed against this purpose. Higher rated parcels are those within the 'green wedges', including Port Meadow, within and very close to the urban area. These areas are subject to other protective designations and constraints (such as SSSI or floodplain) and remain open and unaffected by urban sprawl. Lower rated parcels are generally found to the south and south west of the built up area, where urban sprawl has already occurred to some degree. This does not imply that these areas are less valuable as Green Belt as the remaining open land in a parcel significantly affected by urban sprawl could be considered more valuable in preventing further development.
2	To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher rated parcels are found, not surprisingly, between the large built up area and surrounding relevant settlements (considered under Purpose 2). Higher ratings are also given in relation to gaps associated with smaller settlements between Oxford and Wheatley where these gaps, although not situated directly between settlements defined as towns, are considered to make an important contribution to the overall perception of the Oxford-Wheatley gap. Most of the broad areas are rated as making a limited contribution, or no contribution, to this purpose, apart from those that form part of the gap between settlements.

Green Belt Purposes		Summary of Findings
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parcels on the 'outer side' of the neighbouring towns tend to have a lower rating.
3	To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All parcels contribute to this purpose to a greater or lesser extent. • Higher rated parcels and broad areas are generally further away from the larger settlements, where there is a stronger sense of openness and countryside character.
4	To preserve the setting and special character of Oxford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller parcels close to the urban area, from which there are views into and out of the City are generally rated highly. • Smaller parcels on the 'outer side' of the surrounding towns and which tend to have weaker physical or visual links to the historic core of Oxford tend to rate lower. • Similarly, broad areas that are within the 'zone of theoretical visibility' and /or form part of the physical setting of the City are generally rated highly. Broad areas further away from the City, where the physical or visual connection is more limited, achieve lower ratings.

- 4.9 As well as these 'purpose and parcel specific' findings, it was noted that the Oxford Green Belt has helped to maintain the sense of openness and rural character of the 'washed over', rural settlements. This is broadly related to, and supports, Purpose 3 'To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'.

Interpretation and use of the study findings

- 4.10 The application of the agreed methodology results in a helpful and informative strategic overview of the performance of the Oxford Green Belt, on a parcel by parcel or broad area basis, against the purposes defined in the NPPF. Variations in performance against particular criteria within individual parcels are noted in the assessment text (Appendix 1). This cannot be reflected in a single parcel rating, and will need to be considered when interpreting the study findings. The parcel boundaries used in this study are not intended to reflect potential development areas and the study cannot be used as a means of allocating development land. There are a number of considerations (alongside the Green Belt) that need to be taken into account in deciding on where new development should be allocated.
- 4.11 There are also 'bigger picture' considerations that the methodology does not address, such as how to review Green Belt boundaries (to accommodate development) whilst minimising harm to the Green Belt as a whole. Options may include Green Belt release at the edge of the 'large built up area', or at the edge of surrounding towns, or indeed within the broad areas. The evaluation of options for development will need to be the subject of further work, drawing on the findings of this study alongside other considerations (such as infrastructure, environmental sensitivity) and related studies. Further discussion on making changes to the Green Belt boundaries is provided in **Chapter 5**.

Assessment of land not currently in the Green Belt

- 4.12 The Study brief required an assessment of whether any land not currently within the Green Belt fulfils Green Belt purposes and whether there is justification for including new areas within the Green Belt. It was agreed at the inception meeting, however, that no areas outside the Green Belt will be parcelled or assessed, as there is no clear rationale for doing so at this stage. This may be justified at a later stage, as a second phase of the Green Belt study.

- 4.13 Notwithstanding this, it was agreed that the report should comment on the appropriateness of the outer boundary of the Green Belt and on the settlements just outside the Green Belt (e.g. Woodstock), indicating whether there may be justification for amending Green Belt boundaries to secure their continued separation.
- 4.14 In this regard, it is important to note that the NPPF requirement that new Green Belt boundaries must have regard for the permanence of the designation by redefining boundaries which endure beyond the Local Plan period. In addition, new Green Belt should only be established in exceptional circumstances (para. 82), and subject to various criteria such as:
- demonstrating why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
 - setting out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
 - showing what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
 - demonstrating the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
 - showing how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.
- 4.15 In terms of the outer boundary of the Green Belt, the assessment revealed that the outer broad areas generally perform well, although not as well as the inner broad areas which contribute more to the setting of the City. Otherwise, the study did not produce evidence that would justify any changes to the outer boundary. It was observed, however, that Green Belt areas on the eastern side of the M40 are 'cut off' by the motorway, which itself could be regarded as a more defensible boundary.
- 4.16 With regard to the settlements at the edge of, or just outside the Green Belt, these have effectively been covered by the Study. Woodstock could be regarded as an exception to this. Given the findings of the Study and the NPPF requirements outlined above, however, there is currently no clear case for altering the Green Belt boundary between Kidlington and Woodstock, or to include Woodstock in the Green Belt. Normal planning and development management policies, together with the extent of existing Green Belt between Kidlington and Woodstock, are sufficient to maintain the separation of the settlements.

Assessment of findings compared with completed Green Belt studies

- 4.17 As outlined in Chapter 2, three main Green Belt studies have recently been completed in Oxfordshire:
- Vale of White Horse District Council Green Belt Review (Phase 1&2, February 2014) and Vale of White Horse District Council Green Belt Review (Phase 3, February 2014).
 - Oxford City Council - Investigation into the Potential to Accommodate Urban Extensions in Oxford's Green Belt: Informal Review (May 2014).
 - Local Green Belt Study for South Oxfordshire Green Belt Study (September 2015):
- 4.18 The findings of the studies are broadly comparable to the Oxford Green Belt Study. However there are some methodological differences which have led to some variations in the study findings. These variations relate to differences in the land parcels used for assessment and/or differences in the assessment criteria. A summary of the key differences are summarised below.
- 4.19 **Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review** - Phase 1 and 2 identifies 11 large land parcels within the Green Belt. These were identified using two key factors - landscape units of a well-defined character and linear boundaries which are readily visible on the ground. The study provides commentary on the relative performance against the Green Belt purposes of different sections of these parcels. Phase 3 identifies much smaller land parcels where it is suggested there is scope for amendment of the Green Belt boundary. The difference in size and boundaries of the land parcels used for the Vale study makes it difficult to directly compare the findings with this Study.

- 4.20 **Oxford City Informal Review** - The land parcel boundaries used in the Oxford City study are very similar to those used in this study with a few minor exceptions. The Oxford City study takes account of primary constraints such as European designations, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Registered Parks and Gardens, flood plain etc. prior to undertaking the assessment. Areas are also ruled out of further review if they have an existing development allocation. This means that not all land parcels are assessed for their performance against Green Belt purposes. This study does not take into account primary constraints before undertaking the Green Belt assessment.
- 4.21 **South Oxfordshire Local Green Belt Study** - Phase 2 of the study identifies 13 large land parcels within the Green Belt which are assessed. As per the Vale of White Horse Study, these were identified using two key factors - landscape units of a well-defined character and linear boundaries which are readily visible on the ground. The study provides commentary on the relative performance against the Green Belt purposes of different sections of these parcels. The difference in size and boundaries of the land parcels used for the South Oxfordshire study makes it difficult to directly compare the findings with this Study.

Purpose 1

- 4.22 **Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review** - The Vale study considers the 'large built up area' in the assessment of purpose 1 as Oxford. It assesses the land parcels against Purpose 1 based on extent to which they protect against contiguous development with Oxford City and prevent another settlements being absorbed into Oxford. This study defines Oxford, Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote collectively as the 'large built up area' and parcels adjacent to these settlements are assessed against purpose 1. They are however still considered to be separate settlements in this study and are treated accordingly in the assessment of Purpose 2. The Vale study considers the role of physical boundaries such as roads, railways, watercourses under Purpose 3, as opposed to the Criterion 1b in this study.
- 4.23 **Oxford City Informal Review** - All land parcels within the Oxford City Study are assessed against Purpose 1. This study defines the Oxford, Botley, Kennington and Wolvercote collectively as the 'large built up area' and therefore only parcels adjacent to these settlements are assessed against purpose 1. The Oxford City study defines unchecked urban sprawl, as irregular or straggling which occurs as ribbon development and non-compact development. This is the same as the definition used in this. This study considers the role of defensible boundaries under Criterion 1b. This is not directly referred to in the assessment criteria for the Oxford City study but is referred to under Purpose 1, 2 and 3 for some of the detailed land parcel assessments.
- 4.24 **South Oxfordshire Local Green Belt Study** - As per the Vale Study, the South Oxfordshire study considers the 'large built up area' in the assessment of purpose 1 as Oxford. It assesses the land parcels against Purpose 1 based on extent to which they protect against contiguous development with Oxford City and prevent another settlements being absorbed into Oxford. The South Oxfordshire study also considers the role of physical boundaries such as roads, railways, watercourses under Purpose 3, as opposed to the Criterion 1b in this study.

Purpose 2

- 4.25 **Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review** - The Vale study considers the role that is being played preventing the merging of inset settlements within the Oxford Green Belt. This is consistent with the approach used in this study.
- 4.26 **Oxford City Informal Review** - The Oxford City study considers the role that is being played preventing the merging of **all** settlements within the Oxford Green Belt (including inset and washed over settlements). A detailed assessment is provided in Appendices 1 and 2 of this study referring to the role that the Green Belt plays in preventing the merging of other settlements (which are not inset) but this is not taken into account in the ratings.
- 4.27 **South Oxfordshire Local Green Belt Study** - The South Oxfordshire study defines Wheatley as a 'town'. However it also includes Berinsfield, Clifton Hampden, Dorchester, Garsington, and Horspath in the assessment, as South Oxfordshire District Council state they do not wish to allow these settlements to merge.

Purpose 3

- 4.28 **Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review** – The Vale study considers Purpose 3 in relation to the extent to which landscape character of the land parcel impacts on the open countryside. This study in contrast assesses the extent to which the parcel contains the characteristics of countryside, has no or very little urbanising development, and is open.
- 4.29 **Oxford City Informal Review** - uses similar criteria to this study, as it assess whether there are any significant urbanising influences.
- 4.30 **South Oxfordshire Local Green Belt Study** – The South Oxfordshire study considers the proximity of the land to existing settlements and the extent to which the land is contained by physical barriers such as roads, railways, watercourses etc. It also provides an overview of the landscape character of the land parcel and the extent to which it impacts on the open countryside.

Purpose 4

- 4.31 **Vale of White Horse Green Belt review** – The Vale study assesses Purpose 4 specifically in relation to the setting and special character of Oxford City which is the same approach adopted by this study.
- 4.32 **Oxford City Informal Review** – The Oxford City study considers the role play by the Green Belt in preserving the setting and special character of all conservation areas in the Green Belt, which includes some villages, as well as the city of Oxford.
- 4.33 **South Oxfordshire Local Green Belt Study** – The South Oxfordshire Study considers Purpose 4 specifically in relation to the setting and special character of Oxford City which is the same approach adopted by this study.

Purpose 5

- 4.34 All three studies assume that all areas of the Green Belt contribute equally to this purpose and therefore the land parcels are not reviewed against it.

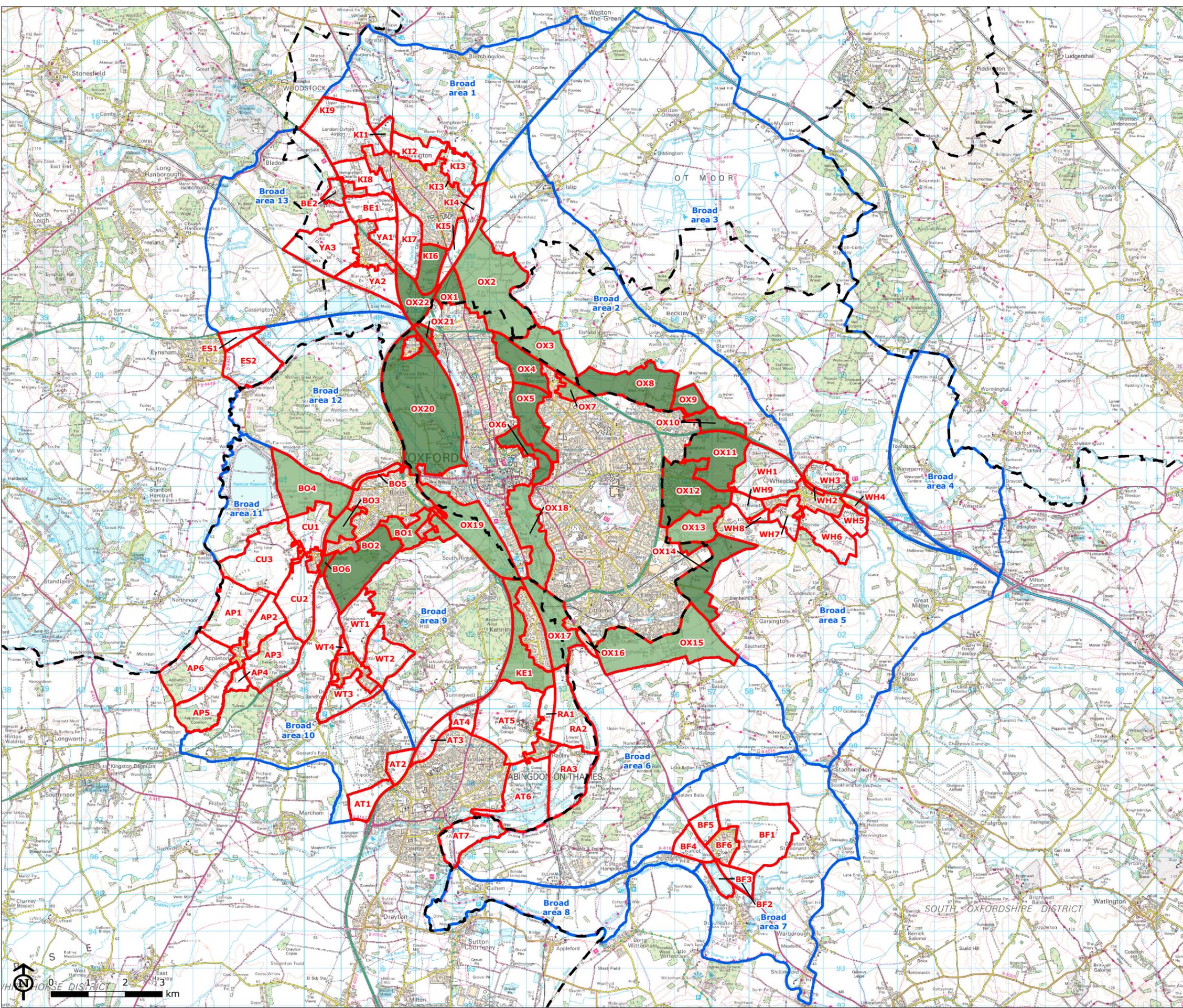
Summary

- 4.35 These methodological differences have led to some variations in the findings of the studies. The key differences have resulted from variations in the parcels assessed (i.e. particularly in the case of the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire Green Belt Studies) and which parcels have been assessed against which purposes (i.e. particularly in the case of the Oxford City Informal Review – where Purpose 1 and Purpose 4 were assessed against a much larger number of parcels).

Figure 4.1
Performance Against Green Belt Purpose 1 - To Check the Unrestricted Sprawl of Large Built-up Areas

Issue 1a - Protection of Open Land from Urban Sprawl

-  District boundary
-  Green Belt parcel
-  Broad area
- Performance**
-  High
-  Medium
-  Low
- N/C

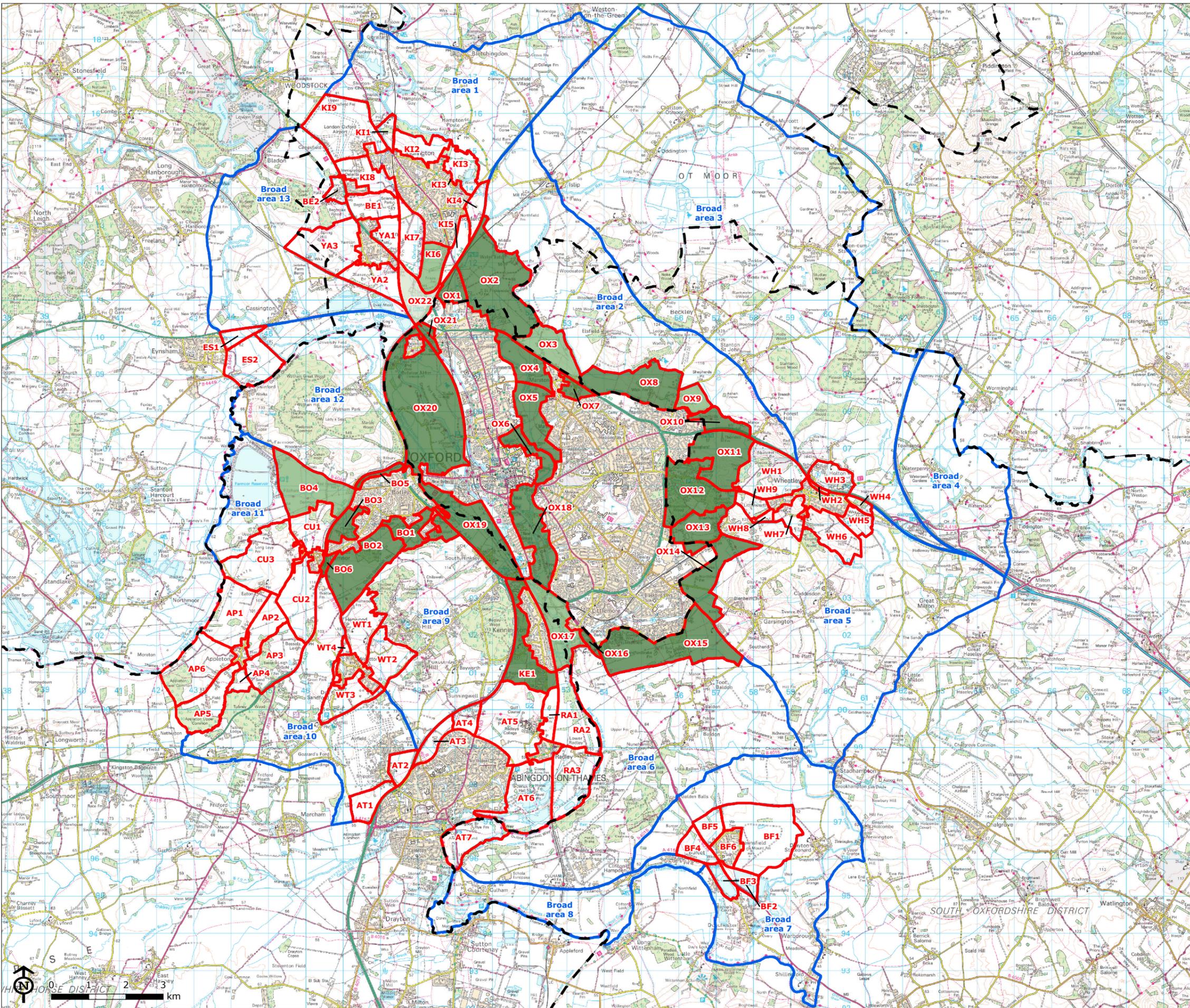


The broad areas are symbolised using their overall performance against Purpose 1, as they are not assessed separately under 1a and 1b.

Map Scale @ A3: 1:100,000



Figure 4.2
Performance Against Green Belt Purpose 1 - To Check the Unrestricted Sprawl of Large Built-up Areas
Issue 1b - Ability of Boundaries/Features to Contain Development and Prevent Urban Sprawl



District boundary
 Green Belt parcel
 Broad area

Performance

- High
- Medium
- Low
- N/C

The broad areas are symbolised using their overall performance against Purpose 1, as they are not assessed separately under 1a and 1b.

Map Scale @ A3: 1:100,000

