

# SH2: EAST OF WIMBLEBURY ROAD, HEATH HAYES - SITE SPECIFIC GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

Prepared for Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land

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## REPORT

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**Prepared by:**

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**Prepared for:**

**Taylor Wimpey**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 RPS Consulting Services LTD (“RPS”) are instructed by Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land (Taylor Wimpey) to represent their interests in the context of the pre-submission consultation on the emerging Cannock Chase Local Plan (“the Plan”) regarding the Land East of Wimblebury Road (“The Site”) which is in their sole ownership. This assessment considers land proposed to be allocated as site SH2 East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes. In addition, Taylor Wimpey also controls land proposed to be safeguarded by the plan to accommodate growth requirements of the District beyond the plan period or following a review of the plan and has been assessed separately.
- 1.2 The consideration of this assessment is the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel. The two Parcels will be referred to in this document as:
- The Proposed Allocated Parcel – Proposed Allocation SH2: East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes
  - The proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel - Site Allocation S1- East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes
- 1.3 This Site-Specific Green Belt Assessment (the Assessment) has been prepared to assess the potential harm of releasing the Site from the Green Belt through the Plan for Development for residential development. The Assessment forms part of the representations prepared by RPS on behalf of Taylor Wimpey to the preferred options consultation on the Plan.
- 1.4 The plan has been subjected to three rounds of public consultation over several years. The plan most recently underwent a public consultation in August 2022. Several elements of the evidence base have since been updated; including the publication of a new Green Belt Topic Paper which was published alongside the Regulation 19 Preferred Options 2024 consultation.
- 1.5 In preparing the Assessment regard has been given to the Cannock Chase Green Belt Harm Assessment February 2021 (the 2021 LUC Assessment) prepared by Land Use Consultants Ltd on behalf of Cannock Chase District Council (the Council). In particular, this Assessment follows the same methodology as the 2021 LUC Assessment to allow for comparison of its findings.
- 1.6 The 2021 LUC Assessment assessed the land currently in the Green Belt that is proposed for allocation by the Plan under policy SH2 (The Proposed Allocation Land Parcel). The 2021 LUC Assessment identifies this area as WI12. However, the area of land in the South East referred to by the 2021 LUC Assessment as OS9 (the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel) was only assessed at a high level as an outer area. An earlier assessment also prepared by LUC in 2016, the Cannock Chase Green Belt Study (the 2016 LUC Assessment), assessed the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel in detail, but only assessed the Proposed Safeguarded Parcel as part of a broad area. Where appropriate we have drawn upon the findings of the 2016 LUC Assessment to inform the Assessment of the Site.
- 1.7 This assessment is structured in the following manner:

- Overview of the Site;
- Approach to Green-Belt Assessment;
- Findings of the site-specific Green Belt Assessment;
- Review of the additional Findings of the Green Belt Topic Paper.
- Conclusions.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE SITE & PARCELS

### Location

- 2.1 The proposed allocation SH2: Land East of Wimblebury Road (“The Site”) is located on the eastern edge of Cannock at Heath Hayes and Wimblebury in the Cannock Chase District of Staffordshire. Wimblebury is a former mining village, and the surrounding landscape around it to the east has been shaped by this former industrial activity.
- 2.2 The Proposed Allocated Land is located to the North of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel.
- 2.3 Alongside the northern boundary of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is Wimblebury Mound, a striking former spoil heap, now vegetated with mature pines, which is managed as a countryside access area by Staffordshire County Council. The mound lies on the summit of a low hill which falls north and north west towards Wimblebury and south across the site to Heath Hayes and beyond to Chasewater (a large canal feeder reservoir).
- 2.4 The most northern part of the land within the control of Taylor Wimpey is separated from the proposed allocation SH2 by a public right of way that runs along the northern boundary of SH2 into the adjacent Wimblebury Mound. This area is also heavily wooded and so in terms of land cover is more closely associated with Wimblebury Mound than SH2. As such RPS agree with the 2021 LUC Assessment which identifies this most northern part of the land within the control of Taylor Wimpey as forming a combined parcel with Wimblebury Mound for the purposes of the Green Belt Assessment. RPS has not undertaken a detailed assessment of this most northern part of the Site as we broadly agree with the findings of the 2021 LUC Assessment.
- 2.5 An area of established wet woodland to the east of Wimblebury mound connects to another pine-covered mound which frames the eastern edge of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel with a continuous strip of established wet birch woodland (the Woodland) at its base along the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel boundary. This Woodland extends to the south and forms the northern and eastern boundaries of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel.
- 2.6 Wimblebury Road forms the western Proposed Allocated Land Parcel boundary. Development along the road includes housing of various ages and styles together with the local primary school. The road is traffic-calmed with speed bumps, and for the most part has a footway only on the western side, although there is a length of footway immediately opposite to the school. Development to the north of the school is set back by 11-12 m from the road and properties have direct access to the road with on-plot parking.
- 2.7 The southern boundary of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel abuts Heath Hayes Park, which is an informal park with many natural areas. It contains a children’s play area, two football pitches, changing accommodation and a stoned car park accessed off Wimblebury Road, as well as an area of allotments. The Heath Hayes War Memorial Gates mark the park’s main entrance at its southern end.

- 2.8 An unsurfaced footpath within a hedged track, runs alongside the southern boundary of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel at the edge of the playing fields and provides access to the Woodland along the eastern edge of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel. Beyond the Woodlands to the east lies an extensive area of former opencast mining which is now restored as a mixture of heath and farmland with public access across it.
- 2.9 **Figure 2.1** shows the land controlled by Taylor Wimpey edged in red.

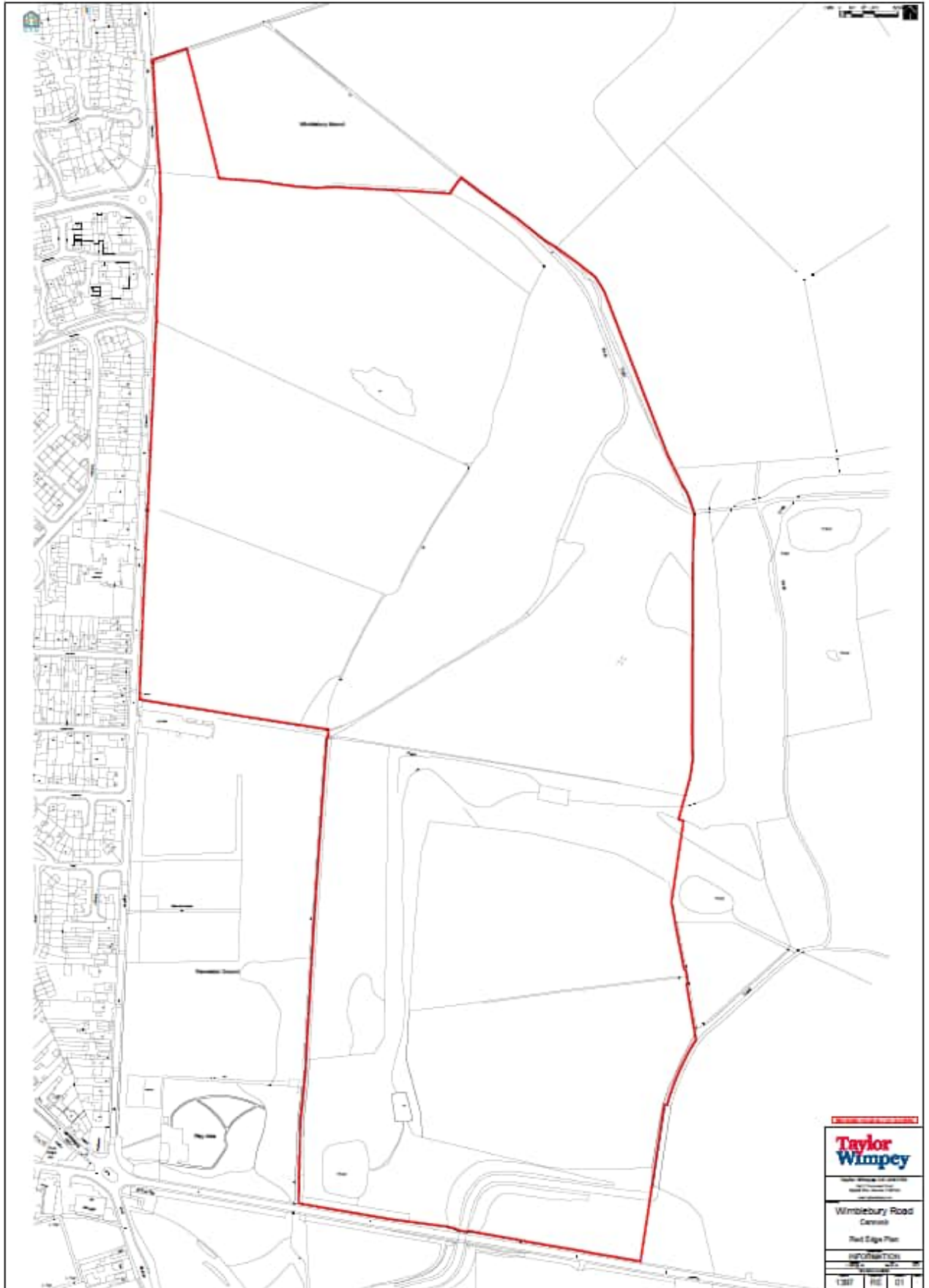
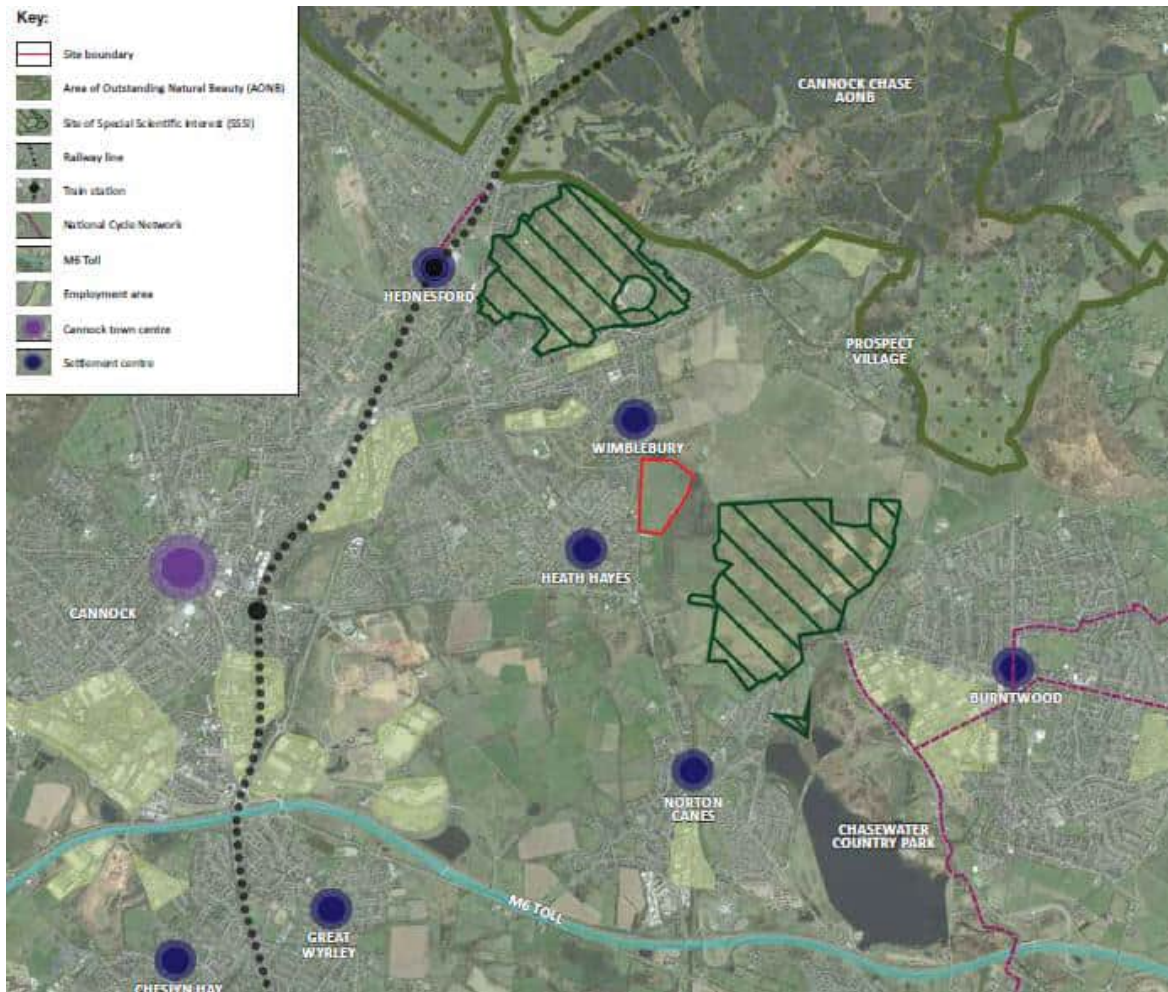


Figure 2.1 Land controlled by Taylor Wimpey (Both Parcels Included)



2.10 **Figure 2.2** shows the Site context with the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel which has been promoted to the early stages of the Cannock Local Plan edged in red.



**Figure 2.2 Site Context**

### Site Description

- 2.11 The whole Site consisting solely of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel, the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, the Woodland and a small section of the SSSI in the South Eastern corner is owned by Taylor Wimpey.
- 2.12 The Site presently consists of a mixture of agricultural land, mixed broadleaf and coniferous woodland, and associated access roads and ancillary buildings. The landholding abuts public highways and adjacent residential, agricultural, and commercial properties. There are several Public Rights of Ways that run along the northern boundary of the Site, and one that runs from Wimblebury Road, where the site abuts the existing public park to the South, and then runs through the wooded area within the eastern part of the Site. A shallow pond located is in the western part of the Site.
- 2.13 The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel covers 17.9ha and comprises three fields. The northern field, visible from the Wimblebury Mound, contains a shallow waterbody. It is separated from the two southern fields by a ditch with flowing water, which discharges into a watercourse at the edge of

the woodland to the east of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel. There are known to be some mineshafts within the north eastern corner of this field.

2.14 The southern fields slope to the south and South West and are separated by post and wire agricultural fencing with sporadic thorn bushes. A hedge along the roadside along the western boundary is becoming overgrown and filters the view into the site from the road.

2.15 There are no significant viewpoints overlooking the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel apart from those obtained from Wimblebury Mound, and the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is both physically and visually extremely well enclosed by landform and vegetation, road and parkland.

2.16 To the south of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel which comprises of an additional two fields. The parcel is located beyond the mature pine forest which acts as a boundary between the two. The relationship between the two parcels is shown in figure 2.3 below.

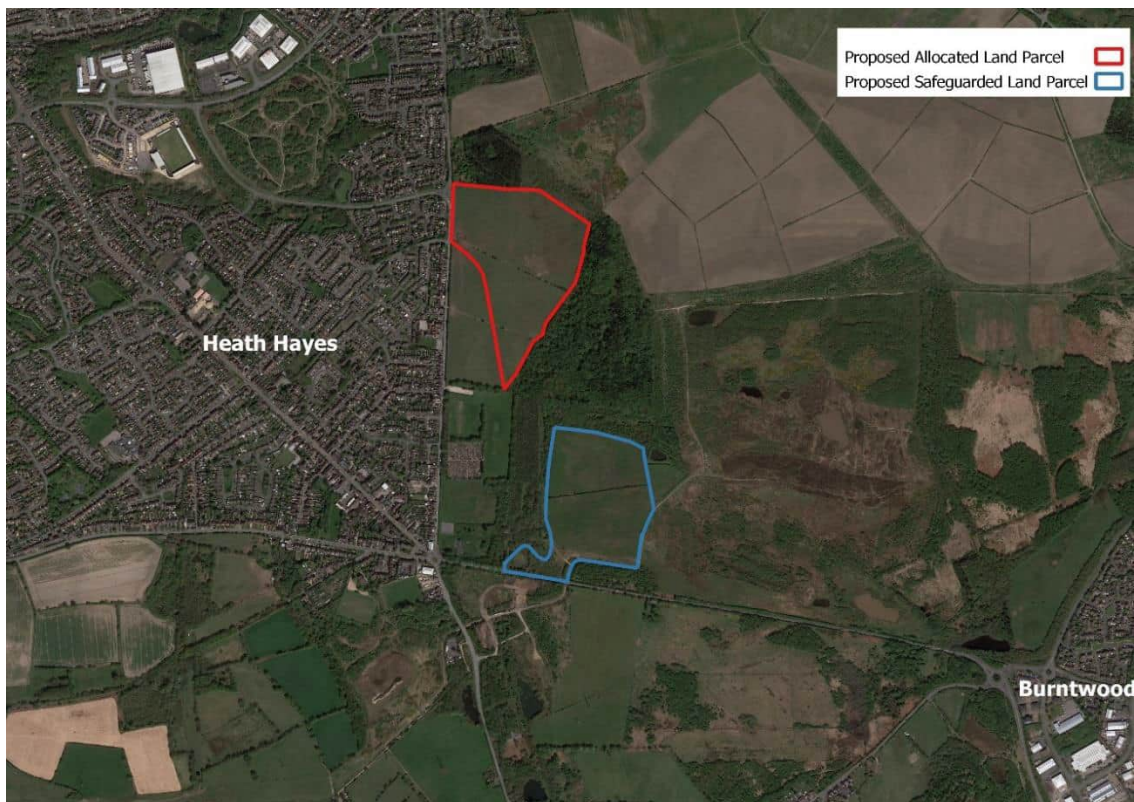
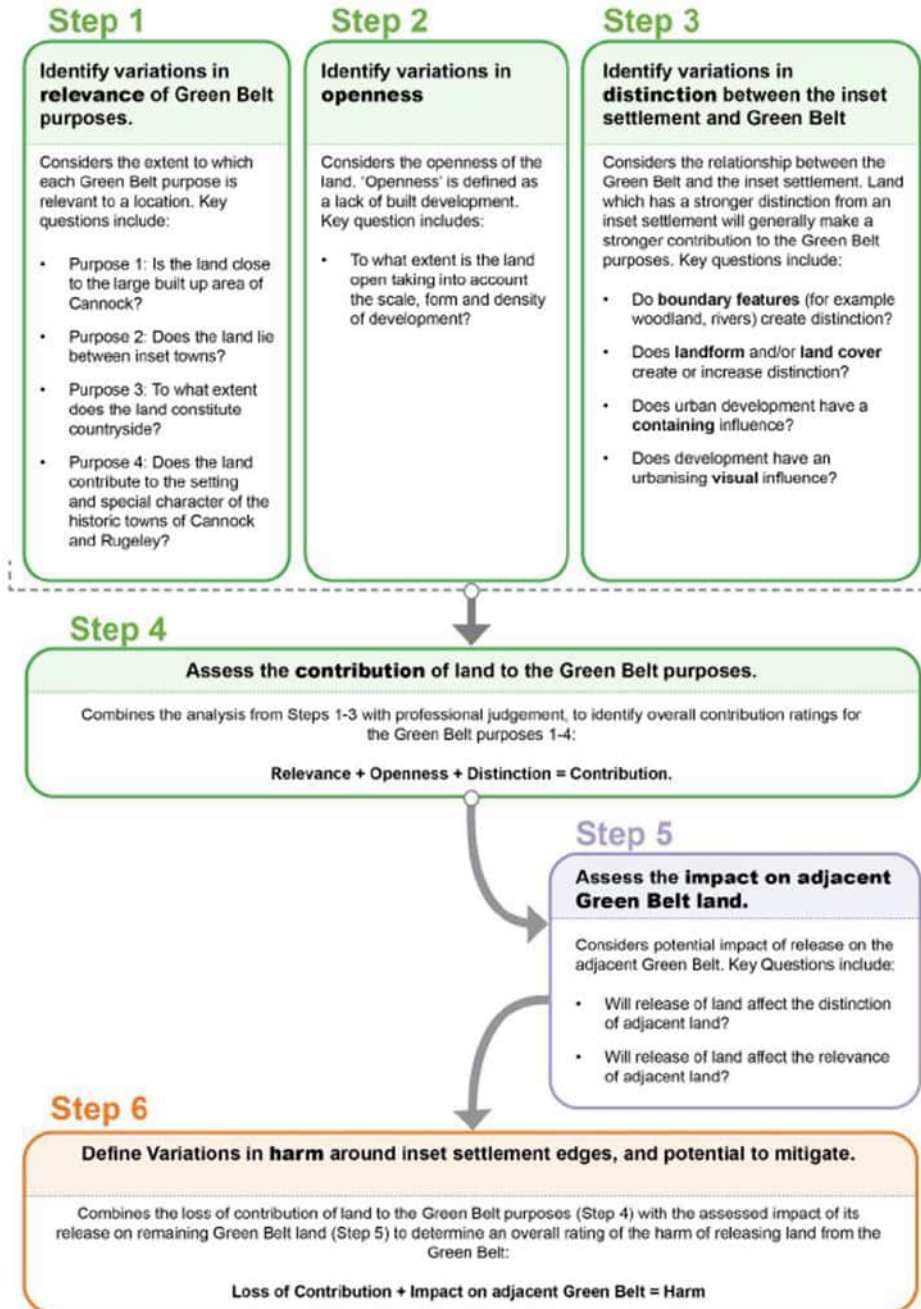


Figure 2.3 Relationship Between Site Parcels

### 3 APPROACH TO GREEN-BELT ASSESSMENT

#### Methodology

3.1 The methodology of this Assessment follows the same methodology as the 2021 LUC Assessment which was prepared for the Council to allow for comparison of the results. **Figure 3.1** below which has been taken from the 2021 LUC Assessment summarises the overall approach to assessment.



**Figure 3.1 Green Belt Assessment Methodology (Figure 3.2 of the LUC Assessment)**

3.2 The Green Belt is considered to have five purposes as per paragraph 138 of the NPPF:

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

2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
4. To preserve the setting and special characters of historic towns
5. To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3.3 These five purposes are recreated in step 1 of the LUC method and form the basis of the assessment.

### Distinction

3.4 The Proposed Allocated Land parcel, is considered as WI12 in the LUC assessment as noted in Appendix B. It is situated adjacent to the built-up area but, crucially, retains a distinct character that contributes positively to the overall landscape. While views from the site are primarily dominated by the urban area, the parcel's open nature and lack of containment distinguish it from its surroundings. This modest distinguishment is not disputed by RPS.

3.5 Figure 3.2 below shows the parcels used by the 2021 LUC Assessment

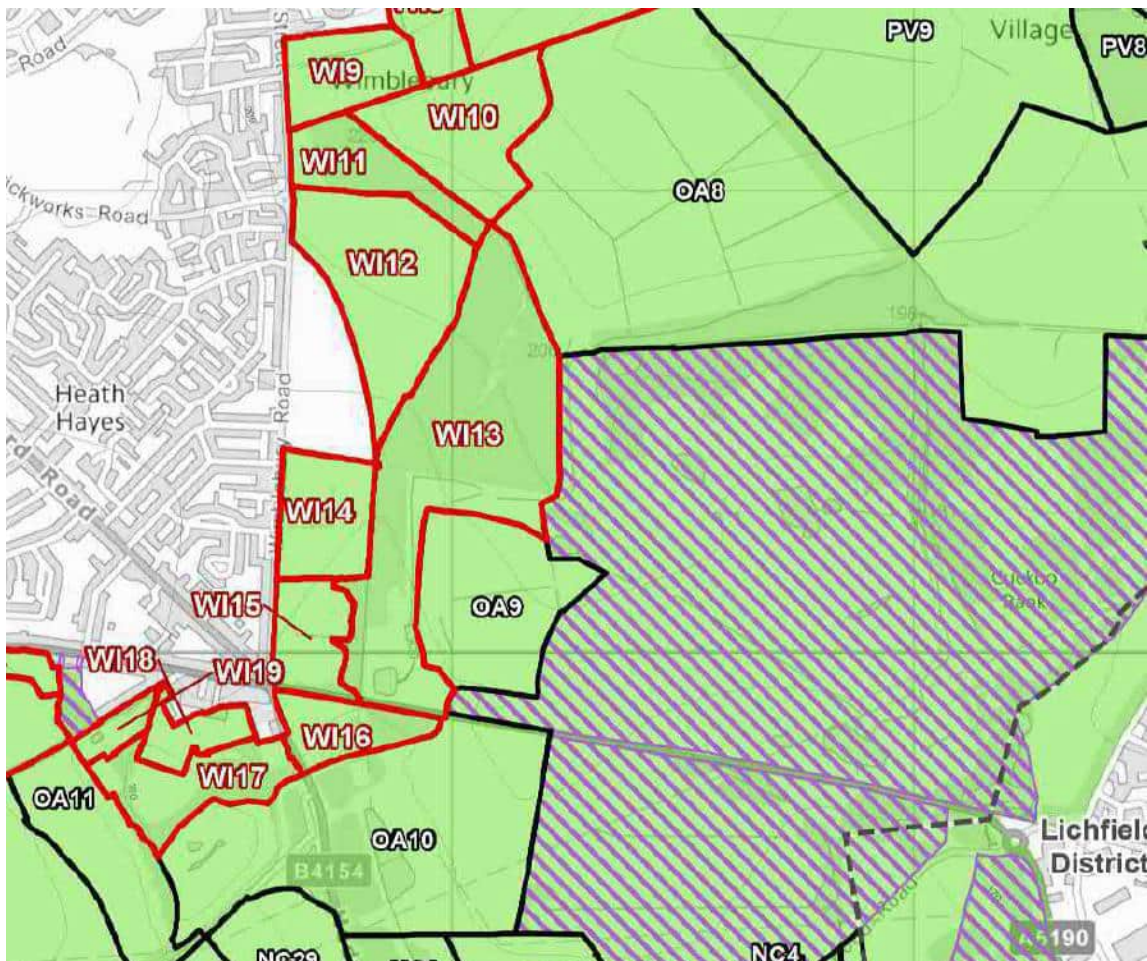


Figure 3.2 LUC 2021 Assessment Parcels

3.6 Paragraph 3.69 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that four interrelated elements were considered to assess the distinction between land within the Green Belt and developed land. These are:

- Boundary features.

- Landform and land cover;
- Urbanising visual influence; and
- Urban containment;

3.7 Consideration of these elements was combined, using professional judgement, to give a rating on a 4-point scale (weak, moderate, strong and very strong distinction)

3.8 Set out below is the RPS assessment of the proposed allocated land parcel against the methodology used in the LUC Assessment.

## 4 SITE-SPECIFIC GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT OF THE SITE

### RPS's Approach

4.1 Broadly speaking, RPS agree with the approach taken in the 2021 LUC assessment with regard to the identification of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel. However, a different boundary will be proposed in Appendix 2 for the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel on the basis that there is a difference in the character of the Woodland, which is densely covered by trees from the more lightly wooded area in the south east of the Proposed Land Parcel.

4.2 The parcel for assessment in this appendix, the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is shown in Figure 4.1 below:



**Figure 4.1 Proposed Allocated Land Parcel**

4.3 Neither of these parcels is covered by an ‘absolute’ constrain to development, which is defined by paragraph 3.14 of the 2021 LUC assessment as follows:

- Special Areas of Conservation
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Ancient Woodland
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Common Land
- Cemeteries

- Flood Zone 3

1.1 Appendix B of the LUC assessment concludes that the release Proposed Allocation Land Parcel would cause moderate to high harm. This harm mainly extends to purpose 1 and purpose 3 of the Green Belt. However, it crucially notes the potential for this harm to be reduced through the addition of planting on the site boundary to strengthen the Green Belt and limit any adverse impacts.

## 5 GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED ALLOCATION LAND PARCEL (POLICY SH2)

### Step 1: Consider the Relevance of Each Green Belt Purpose.

#### Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas?

- 5.1 On page 28 the 2021 LUC Green Belt Assessment defines the study area as part of the West Midlands Green Belt, surrounding the West Midlands Conurbation comprising of Birmingham and associated towns including Cannock, Chelyn Hay, Great Wryley and Hednesford. Paragraph 3.33 notes that settlements deemed close enough to the 'core' urban area for development associated with them to be considered to be part of the large built-up area including the town of Brownhills West.
- 5.2 It is noted that the previous 2016 LUC Assessment included a much broader definition of the large built-up area including ribbon development associated with all inset areas and industrial estates, business parks and gypsy and traveller sites. As stated at paragraph 3.34 of the 2021 LUC Assessment the definition of the large built-up area was tightened to focus on the major urban areas and to be consistent with the neighbouring Green Belt Studies covering the Black Country, South Staffordshire and Lichfield.
- 5.3 As set out on page 52 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes the areas of Wimblebury and Heath Hayes form part of the large built-up area of Cannock. The LUC assessment concludes that the relationship between the urban area and the parcel would result in sprawl based on the definition found on page 39 – “any expansion of the large built-up area is considered to constitute sprawl”
- 5.4 The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area as shown in **Figure 4.2** below:



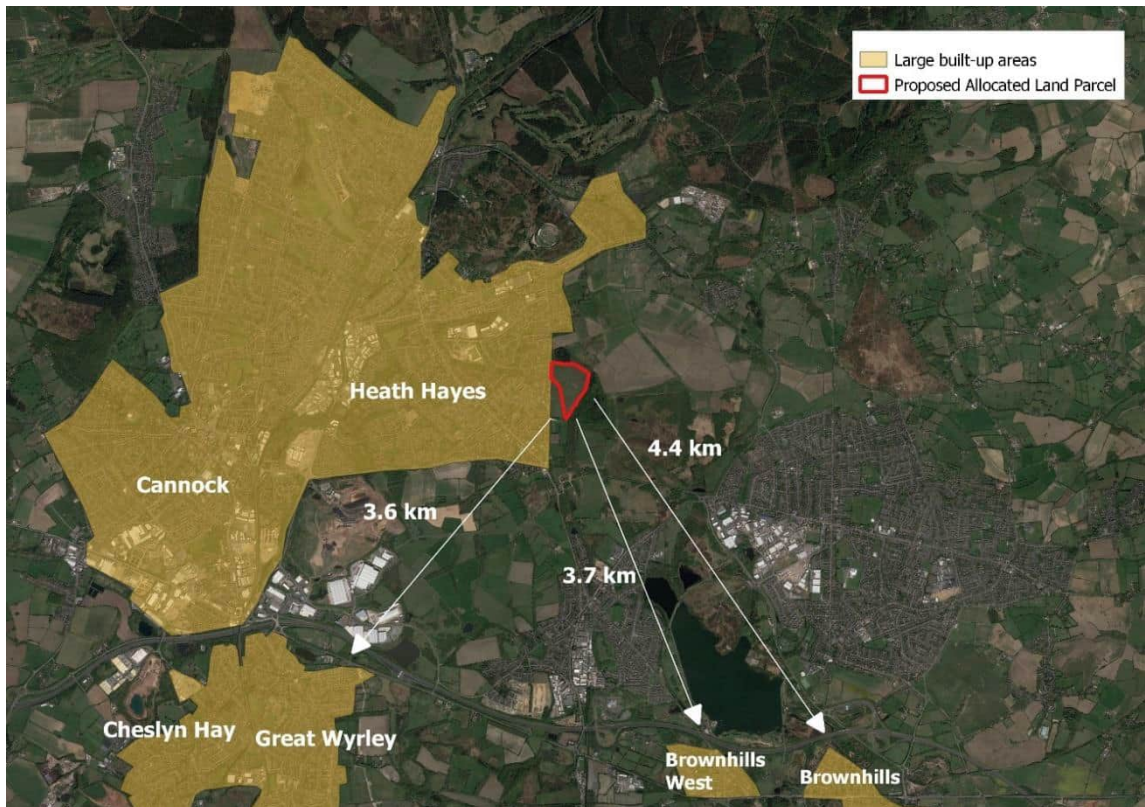


Figure 5.1 Purpose 1 Proposed Allocated Land Parcel

**Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another**

5.5 Paragraphs 3.38 and 3.39 of the LUC Assessment defines Purpose 2 towns as:

- The main urban area, grouped around Cannock, Hednesford and Heath Hayes;
- Rugely
- Burntwood
- Brownhills
- Bloxwich

5.6 Paragraph 3.40 of the 2021 LUC assessment states that:

*“Regardless of whether a particular settlement is large enough to realistically be considered a town, it is acknowledged that smaller settlements may lie in between larger ones, such that loss of separation between them may in turn have a significant impact on the overall separation between larger ‘towns’. This was taken into account in the study.”*

5.7 As such while neither Brownhills West nor Norton Cranes are identified as a Purpose 2 town, RPS has considered as part of this assessment the relationship of the Site with these towns.

5.8 Pages 33 and 34 of the 2021 LUC Assessment state that Green Belt land has less potential to play a role with regards to Purpose 2 - i.e. gap is robust – if there is a wide gap between towns with some significant separating features. RPS consider this to be the case for the Proposed Allocated Land

Parcel, although note that on page 53 of the Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that LUC consider this gap to be moderate with some significant separating features including Cuckoo Bank and Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.

5.9 RPS notes that no objective criteria is provided for assessing the relative strength of the gap between Purpose 2 Towns in the 2021 LUC Assessment, such as a measurement of distance. These points are illustrated by **Figure 4.3** below:



**Figure 5.2 Purpose 2 Proposed Allocated Land Parcel**

**Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment?**

5.10 As set out in paragraph 3.46 of the 2021 LUC Assessment this considers the extent to which land can be considered to constitute ‘countryside’ on the basis of its usage. It does not consider the impact of development which can be considered to reduce openness (in Green Belt terms), or of development which has a containing urbanising influence, as these are addressed in the analysis at Step 2 and Step 3 respectively.

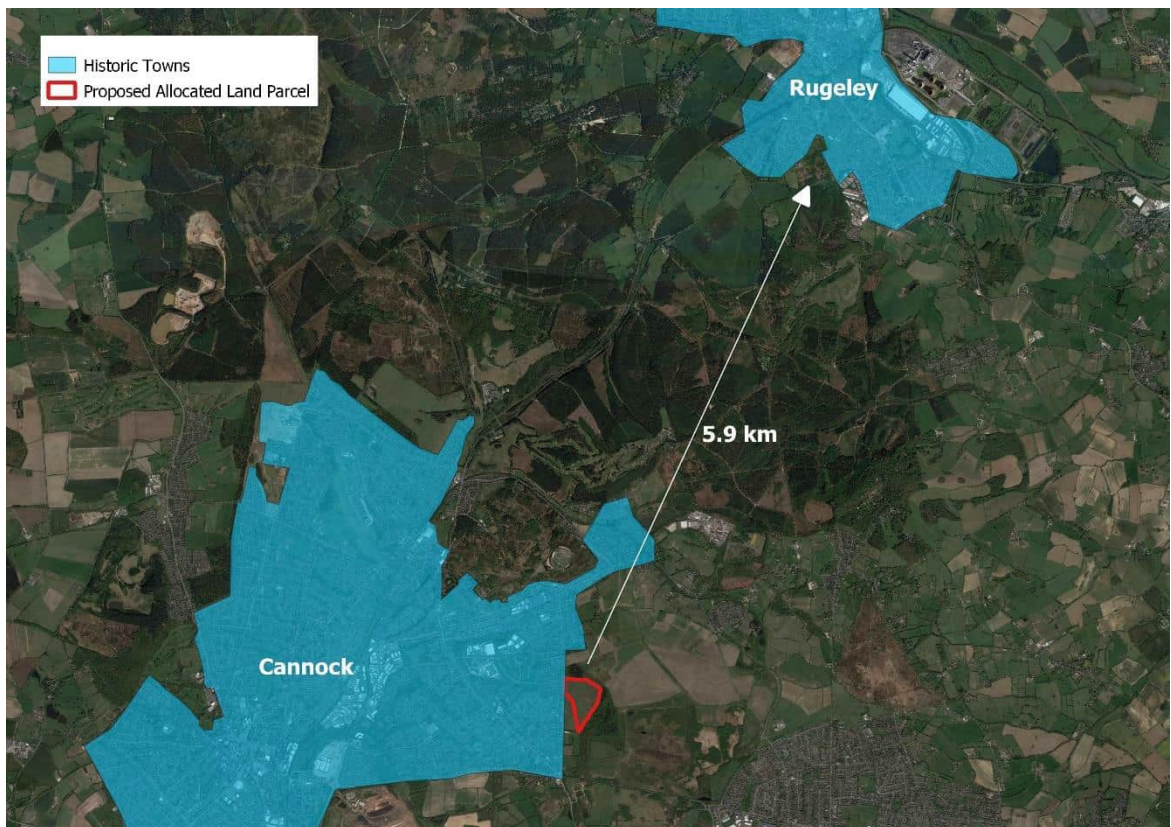
5.11 Paragraph 3.47 of the 2021 LUC Assessment goes on to state that Land may through its usage have a stronger relationship with the adjacent built-up area and, as a result, not be considered ‘countryside’ to the same degree as other open land, but it is important not to stray from assessing the Green Belt purposes into assessing landscape character, sensitivity or value. Whilst Green Belt land may be valuable in these respects it is not a requirement or purpose of the designation to

provide such qualities. Therefore, the condition of land is not taken into consideration: the poor condition of Green Belt land does not necessarily undermine its fundamental role of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

- 5.12 RPS agree with the statement on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is open countryside. As such the land has the potential to play a stronger role with regard to Purpose 3

**Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns?**

- 5.13 Paragraph 3.52 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that it concluded that land around two settlements within Cannock Chase District – Cannock and Rugeley – should be considered for potential contribution to Purpose 4. However, as noted on page 40 of the 2021 LUC Assessment the special character of the historic core is not dependent on the landscape setting to which Green Belt land contributes. As such RPS agree with the views of LUC stated on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel does not contribute to Purpose 4, despite being located near to Cannock as shown on **Figure 4.5** below:



**Figure 5.3 Purpose 4 Proposed Allocated Land Parcel**

## **Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land?**

- 5.14 Paragraph 3.57 of the 2021 LUC Green Belt Assessment notes that due to the nature of the settlement pattern within Cannock, it is not possible to draw a meaningful distinction between the availability of brownfield land within individual settlements. As such the 2021 LUC Assessment assumes an even level of contribution to Purpose 5 for all areas of Green Belt based on the average availability of brownfield land across the District. On this basis all parcels of Green Belt land within the District, including the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel areas considered to make a strong contribution to Purpose 5.

### **Step 2: Identify variations in Green Belt openness**

- 5.15 At paragraph 3.60 the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that the NPPF identifies openness as an 'essential characteristic' of the Green Belt, rather than a function or purpose. Accordingly, it notes that the presence of 'urbanising development' within the Green Belt can diminish the contribution of land to the Green Belt purposes.
- 5.16 Paragraph 3.61 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that Green Belt openness relates to a lack of 'inappropriate built development' rather than visual openness; thus both undeveloped land screened from view by landscape elements (e.g. tree cover) and development which is not considered 'inappropriate', are still 'open' in Green Belt terms.
- 5.17 RPS agree with the statement on page 50 of the 2021 LUC Assessment that land without built form is open in Green Belt terms. RPS also agree with page 52 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is open, as it is comprised of agricultural fields.

### **Step 3: Identify variations in the distinction between urban areas and the Green Belt.**

- 5.18 Paragraph 3.65 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that Having considered in general terms the variations in the relevance of each of the Green Belt purposes, the next step in the assessment process identifies more localised variations in the relationship between Green Belt land and urban development – i.e. whether the land seems like it is part of the urban area or the countryside.
- 5.19 Paragraph 3.66 of the 2021 LUC Assessment goes on to state that land that is more strongly related to urbanising development typically makes a weaker contribution to all of the first three Green Belt purposes, being less likely to be perceived: as sprawl (Purpose 1), narrowing the gap between towns (Purpose 2), or encroaching on the countryside (Purpose 3). While paragraph 3.67 notes of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that for Purpose 4 there is no separate consideration of distinction, because contrary to Purposes 1 to 3, land which has a strong relationship with the town is likely to make a greater rather than lesser contribution.

- 5.20 Paragraph 3.68 of the 2021 LUC Assessment sets out that the process of assessing distinction was carried out on a settlement-by-settlement basis, for each inset urban area. The analysis was applied as a progression out from each settlement edge, recognising that with distance from that settlement, the level of distinction will only increase, not diminish. RPS agree in general with this approach.
- 5.21 Paragraph 3.69 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that four interrelated elements were considered to assess the distinction between land within the Green Belt and developed land. These are:
- Boundary features.
  - Landform and land cover;
  - Urbanising visual influence; and
  - Urban containment;
- 5.22 Consideration of these elements was combined, using professional judgement, to give a rating on a 4-point scale (weak, moderate, strong and very strong distinction).

### **Boundary features**

- 5.23 Paragraph 3.72 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that for land adjacent to an urban area the analysis only considered the urban boundary, but progressing further from the urban area, the cumulative impact of multiple boundary features increases distinction.
- 5.24 RPS agree with the statement on page 52 of the Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that there is no defined boundary to separate the Proposed Allocation Land Parcel from the inset, but as yet undeveloped land to the east of Wimblebury Road. However, we do note that there is a hedgerow that runs along Wimblebury Road, including the part of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel on its north eastern side where it abuts Wimblebury Road, which as per page 53 of the 2021 LUC Assessment is a weak boundary to the urban area.

### **Landform and land cover**

- 5.25 Paragraph 3.74 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that as well as landform and land cover serving as boundary features this may extend into a broader feature which creates greater distinction. Examples are given of a woodland, lake or valley. These types of features do not apply to the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel.

### **Visual openness**

- 5.26 Paragraph 3.75 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that this is not concerned with the scenic quality of views, but the extent to which an absence of visual association with the open Green Belt countryside or, conversely, the extent to which the visual dominance of urban development may increase association with the urban area.

- 5.27 RPS agree with the statement on page 52 of the Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that views from the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel are dominated by the urban area.

### **Urban containment**

- 5.28 This relates to whether existing development to some degree contains an area of open land, thus reducing its distinction from the urban area.
- 5.29 RPS agree with the statement on page 52 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Area is not contained by urban development.

### **Distinction of the Site**

- 5.30 The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel has weak boundary features with the urban area. The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel does not contain landforms or land cover that contribute to distinction. The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel has a strong visual association with the urban area. Given this RPS agrees with the statement on page 52 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel has moderate distinction with the urban area.

## **Step 4: Assess the contribution of land to the Green Belt Purposes and define parcels**

- 5.31 As set out at paragraph 3.81 of the 2021 LUC Assessment this step considers the analysis in each of the previous steps to identify the overall contribution rating for each Green Belt purpose. Each area of variation in contribution to one or more of the purposes was defined as a parcel, with contribution ratings and supporting analysis.
- 5.32 For Green Belt Purposes 1, 2 and 3 the relevance (Step 1), openness (Step 2) and distinction (Step 3) are considered to arrive at a judgement on the relative contribution of different areas of land as described at paragraph 3.82 of the LUC 2021 Assessment. The same paragraph goes on to explain that contribution to the Green Belt purposes was rated on a 5-point scale (strong, relatively strong, moderate, relatively weak and weak/no contribution, in accordance with criteria listed on pages 59 to 67 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. It also notes that these criteria lists indicate typical combinations of relevance, openness and distinction, but professional judgement may result in the addition of particular weight to one of these elements.
- 5.33 For Purpose 4 paragraph 3.83 of the 2021 LUC Assessment explains that in accordance with advice from Historic England, judgements were based on specific analysis of the historic town in question, and its relationship with its Green Belt surroundings as set out in the criteria list for Purpose 4.
- 5.34 Paragraph 3.84 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that standard text is used to indicate that contribution to Purpose 5 is consistent across all of the study areas.

- 5.35 For Purpose 1 paragraph 3.85 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that adjacent to settlements the assumption was made that the purpose will remain relevant at least until the level of distinction between the large built-up area and open land reaches a strong level. Beyond this the relevance, and therefore the contribution, will diminish.
- 5.36 Paragraph 3.86 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that in between settlements where Purpose 2 is relevant, the contribution will likewise reduce at the periphery of the gap. Unlike Purposes 1 and 2, contribution to Purpose 3 will not diminish with distance from urban areas and will consequently be high for all land beyond those areas that do not have a strong distinction from an urban area.

### **Contribution of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel to the Green Belt Purposes**

- 5.37 RPS consider that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel consists of an area with a variation in contribution to one or more of the purposes and so should be defined as a parcel. Set out below is our assessment of the contribution of this parcel to each purpose in accordance with the criteria set out on pages 59 to 67 of the LUC 2021 Assessment.

#### **Purpose 1**

- 5.38 RPS agree with the statement on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the Proposed Allocated Land Area that the Proposed Allocation Land Parcel is open and adjacent to the large built-up area of Cannock. We also agree that the parcel has some relationship with the inset area, but also a degree of distinction from it and that overall it makes a relatively strong contribution to Purpose 1.

#### **Purpose 2**

- 5.39 RPS consider the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel to lie within a robust gap between towns and so disagrees with the statement on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes which states that it lies within a moderate gap. RPS do agree with the other comments made on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes in relation to this Purpose, namely that there are some significant separating features, including Cuckoo Bank and Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI. The parcel has some relationship with the inset area, but also a degree of distinction from it.
- 5.40 On this basis RPS consider that the area makes a relatively weak contribution to Purpose 2, not a moderate contribution as was concluded by LUC.

#### **Purpose 3**

- 5.41 RPS agree that the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is open countryside and that the parcel has some relationship with the inset area, but also moderate distinction from it. Overall, the area makes a relatively strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment as stated on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes.

#### **Purpose 4**

- 5.42 The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel does not contribute to the historic setting or special character of either Cannock or Rugeley and so makes no contribution to Purpose 4 as stated on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes.

#### **Purpose 5**

- 5.43 Page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes state that all Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose. While RPS do not completely agree with this point as we consider that previously developed land is capable of some development under paragraph 145 g) of the NPPF 2019 and so must make a weaker contribution to Purpose 5 than undeveloped open Green Belt Land, RPS consider that all undeveloped land, such as the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel makes an equal contribution to this purpose.

#### **Loss of contribution**

- 5.44 As set out at paragraph 3.90 of the 2021 LUC Assessment the loss of contribution to the Green Belt purposes as a result of the release of a parcel of land equates to the contribution ratings assessed for that parcel.
- 5.45 Paragraph 3.91 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that in cases where the release of a parcel would also, in order to form an expansion of the inset settlement, necessitate the release of intervening land, the loss of contribution is associated with the highest contributing parcel. This does not apply to the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel.

#### **Step 5: Assess additional impact of the release on adjacent Green Belt**

- 5.46 As noted earlier, paragraph 3.93 of the 2021 LUC Assessment defines adjacent Green Belt land as the land that lies next to and/or in close proximity to land/parcels being assessed for potential release.
- 5.47 Paragraph 3.94 goes on to state that the assessment of the additional impact of the release of land on adjacent Green Belt land considered two factors: the impact on the distinction (from inset areas) of the adjacent land and the impact on the relevance of the adjacent land to the NPPF purposes. The third factor, openness, is not relevant to the assessment of impact on adjacent land as it is assumed that adjacent land will remain open. **Figure 4.6** below which is Figure 3.3 in the 2021 LUC Assessment illustrates the elements to be considered when assessing the impact of the release on adjacent Green Belt land.
- 5.48 It should be noted that this approach is unusual and not consistent with RPS's substantial experience of undertaking and reviewing Green Belt Assessments elsewhere, however, to ensure constituency and aid in allowing the findings of this assessment to be compared with the 2021 LUC Assessment we have followed the same methodology.



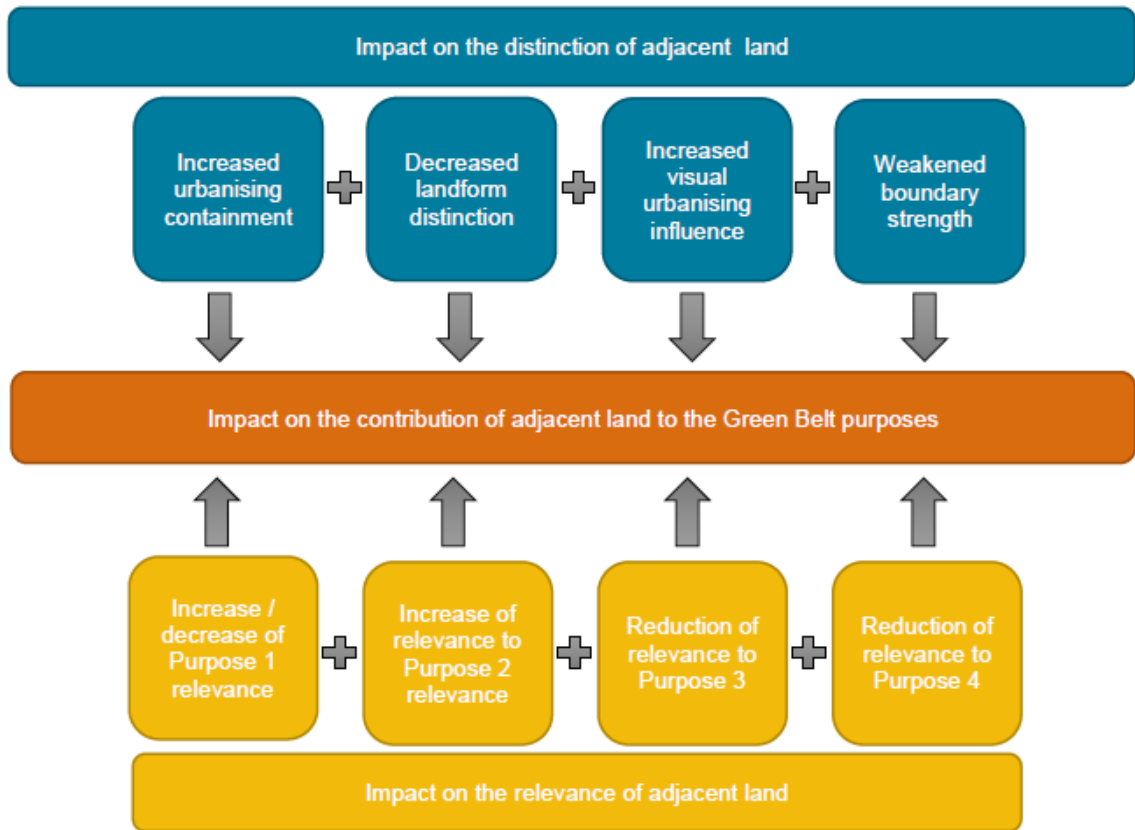


Figure 5.4 Variations in impact on release of adjacent land

**Impact on distinction**

5.49 RPS agree with the statement on page 54 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the release and development of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel would increase urbanising containment of land in WI11.

**Impact on relevance**

5.50 The release of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel would not lead to adjacent land becoming close enough to the inset edges of the large built-up area or lead to adjacent retained Green Belt land becoming perceived as being within the large built-up area. Hence, its release would not affect any adjacent land with regard to its relevance for Purpose 1 as explained at paragraph 3.99 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. It would also not lead to any substantial change in the settlement gap and so would not change the relevance of Purpose 2 for adjacent parcels of land as set out at paragraph 3.100 of the 2021 LUC Assessment.

5.51 Paragraph 3.101 notes that the relevance of adjacent retained Green Belt land to purpose 3 would rarely be affected. Its release would not result in adjacent land becoming contained to the extent that it is too isolated from the wider Green Belt to be considered part of the countryside.

5.52 Adjacent Green Belt land does not make a contribution to Purpose 4 and so the release of the Proposed Allocation Land Parcel would not harm the relevance of adjacent parcels of Green Belt in keeping with the approach set out in paragraph 3.102 of the 2021 LUC Assessment.

## Impact on adjacent land

- 5.53 RPS agree that based on the methodology set out on pages 73 to 76 of the 2021 LUC Assessment, the release of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel would have a minor impact on adjacent Green Belt land as stated on page 54 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes. However, as noted above RPS considers this approach to be unusual and not consistent with our substantial experience of undertaking and reviewing Green Belt Assessments elsewhere.

## Step 6: Define variations in harm to the Green Belt around the inset edge

### Assessment of Harm

- 5.54 RPS do not agree with the conclusion on page 54 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that the overall harm of the release of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel would be Moderate-High. RPS consider the contributions to the purposes of the Green Belt made by the parcel to be:
- relatively strong contributions to Purposes 1 and 3;
  - a relatively weak contribution to Purpose 2; and,
  - no contribution to Purpose 4.
- 5.55 RPS notes that the combination of these contributions and a minor impact on adjacent Green Belt land is not given as an example in the benchmarks set out on pages 79 to 80 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. However, it would appear to sit between the examples given for moderate-high and moderate harm.
- 5.56 Furthermore, as noted above RPS questions the approach to assessing the impact on adjacent parcels and note that the characteristics of WI11 such as its heavily wooded nature, rising landform, and connection to the SSSI via the heavily wooded WI13 parcel mean that it is unlikely to be recommended for release from the Green Belt even if the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is developed and if parcel WI9 and W10 were to be developed. As such we question the contention that increasing the urban containment of WI11 in this particular circumstance would diminish the role of WI11 as an inset edge boundary and suggest therefore that the level of harm of releasing the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel **should only at most be assessed as moderate**.
- 5.57 The nature and characteristics of these parcels will therefore ensure that the boundary between these and the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel can endure in the future. This would be in accordance with paragraph 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) which states:
- “Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period”*
- 5.58 **Table 4.1** below provides a summary of our assessment.

#### **Table 5.1: Summary of Findings for Proposed Allocated Land Parcel**

## REPORT

Settlement	Release Scenario	Area (ha)	Purpose 1 Rating	Purpose 2 Rating	Purpose 3 Rating	Purpose 4 Rating	Purpose 5 Rating	Harm Rating
Wimblebury and Heath Hayes	Release of Proposed Allocated Land Parcel as an expansion of Wimblebury and Heath Hayes	6.1	Relatively Strong	Relatively Weak	Relatively Strong	No	Equal	Moderate

## 6 GREEN BELT TOPIC PAPER 2024

- 6.1 Following the Cannock Chase Council Cabinet meeting on 14 December 2023; the Council published its updated Cannock Chase Local Plan Pre-Submission consultation document. As part of this publication, the evidence base was updated to include an additional Green-Belt Topic Paper. The updated topic paper assessed whether exceptional circumstances for the release from the Green Belt apply in line with the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.2 Whilst this topic paper largely drew on the conclusions of The Cannock Chase Green Belt Study 2016, as noted above RPS dispute the findings of the assessment that the study in regard to the proposed allocated land parcel, having found moderate harm pertaining to its release.
- 6.3 Section 7 of the Topic Paper considers the spatial strategy in the context of the Green Belt release. The final spatial strategy was found to align with housing option C2, in that it predominantly utilises housing options for urban areas with some green belt extensions to urban edges of existing settlements at Cannock/Hednesford/Heath Hayes and Norton Canes. It notes that Heath Hayes will be a priority area for new residential development, and in this context, Green Belt release should be considered first within these locations as the wider context of the Cannock Chase AONB boundary North of Hednesford and South of Cannock create an effectively double-lock of landscape constraint for potential development elsewhere in the district.
- 6.4 It is noted that whilst Rugeley and Norton Canes could serve as sustainable locations for growth in the district, they would be ultimately inappropriate given the amount of development already undertaken in the plan period in the case of Norton Canes, and due to the large cross-boundary former power station regeneration in Rugeley.
- 6.5 RPS generally support this spatial strategy in the context of Green-Belt release and the implied justification for the release of the potentially allocated land parcel.
- 6.6 Section 8 of the topic papers assesses whether exceptional circumstances apply for the release of proposed allocations in the local plan from the Green Belt. Regarding the proposed allocated land parcel, designated as Policy SH1: Land at Wimblebury Road it concluded that exceptional circumstances did apply to the release of the land on the following grounds:
- The proposed allocation would make a significant contribution to the housing needs of the district, with a total of 410 homes, of which 35% would qualify as affordable housing.
  - Part of the land contained within the proposed allocation was safeguarded in the adopted 2014 Cannock Chase Local Plan, and originally safeguarded in the 1997 Cannock Chase Local Plan. The partial development of safeguarded land would only deliver 150 dwellings and would ultimately weaken the contribution of the remaining land to the purposes of the green belt. The proposed allocation benefits relatively from a stronger visual boundary compared to the existing safeguarding land.

- The ability to mitigate the development through woodland adjacent to the site which would be retained as green belt land. This in turn would strengthen the boundary and reduce the likelihood of harm to the green-belt purposes of surrounding land.
- The contribution to the five-way junction through an additional relief road will improve air quality and reduce congestion in the area, whilst contributions from the scheme will help to ensure the viability of the primary school proposed in Site SH1.

6.7 RPS concur with the findings of the topic paper and its overall implied support for the release of the land for the proposed allocated land parcel from the Green-Belt, though it should be emphasised once more that given the harm of doing so should be considered moderate rather than moderate high.

# **SITE S1 SAFEGUARDED LAND - SITE SPECIFIC GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT**

**Prepared for Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land**

8892.C8475  
08 March 2024

## REPORT

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### Document status

Version	Purpose of document	Authored by	Reviewed by	Approved by	Review date
1	Client Review	AC	JB	JB	08/03/2024

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### Approval for issue

Jacob Bonehill



08 March 2024

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**Prepared by:**

**RPS**

**Prepared for:**

**Taylor Wimpey**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 RPS Consulting Services LTD (“RPS”) are instructed by Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land (Taylor Wimpey) to represent their interests in the context of the pre-submission consultation on the emerging Cannock Chase Local Plan (“the Plan”) regarding the Land East of Wimblebury Road (“The Site”) which is in their sole ownership. This assessment considers land proposed to be safeguarded by the plan to accommodate growth requirements of the District beyond the plan period or following a review of the plan Site Allocation S1- East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes. Taylor Wimpey also controls land proposed to be allocated as site SH2 East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes which has been assessed separately.
- 1.2 The consideration of this assessment is the proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel. The two Parcels will be referred to in this document as:
- The proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel - Site Allocation S1- East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes
  - The Proposed Allocated Parcel – Proposed Allocation SH2: East of Wimblebury Road, Heath Hayes
- 1.3 This Site-Specific Green Belt Assessment (the Assessment) has been prepared to assess the potential harm of releasing the Site from the Green Belt through the Plan for Development for residential development. The Assessment forms part of the representations prepared by RPS on behalf of Taylor Wimpey to the preferred options consultation on the Plan.
- 1.4 The plan has been subjected to three rounds of public consultation over several years. The plan most recently underwent a public consultation in August 2022. Several elements of the evidence base have been updated; including the publication of a new Green Belt Topic Paper which was published alongside the Regulation 19 Preferred Options 2024 consultation.
- 1.5 In preparing the Assessment regard has been given to the Cannock Chase Green Belt Harm Assessment February 2021 (the 2021 LUC Assessment) prepared by Land Use Consultants Ltd on behalf of Cannock Chase District Council (the Council). In particular, this Assessment follows the same methodology as the 2021 LUC Assessment to allow for comparison of its findings.
- 1.6 The 2021 LUC Assessment assessed the land proposed for safeguarding under the reference OS9 (The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel) was only assessed at a high level as an outer area. In addition, the land that is currently proposed for allocation by the plan under policy SH2 (The Proposed Allocation Land Parcel). The Proposed Allocation Land Parcel is dealt with more extensively in Appendix 1. The 2021 LUC Assessment identifies this area as W112. In addition where appropriate we have drawn upon the findings of the LUC Assessment to inform the Assessment of the Site.
- 1.7 This assessment is structured in the following manner.
- Overview of the Site.

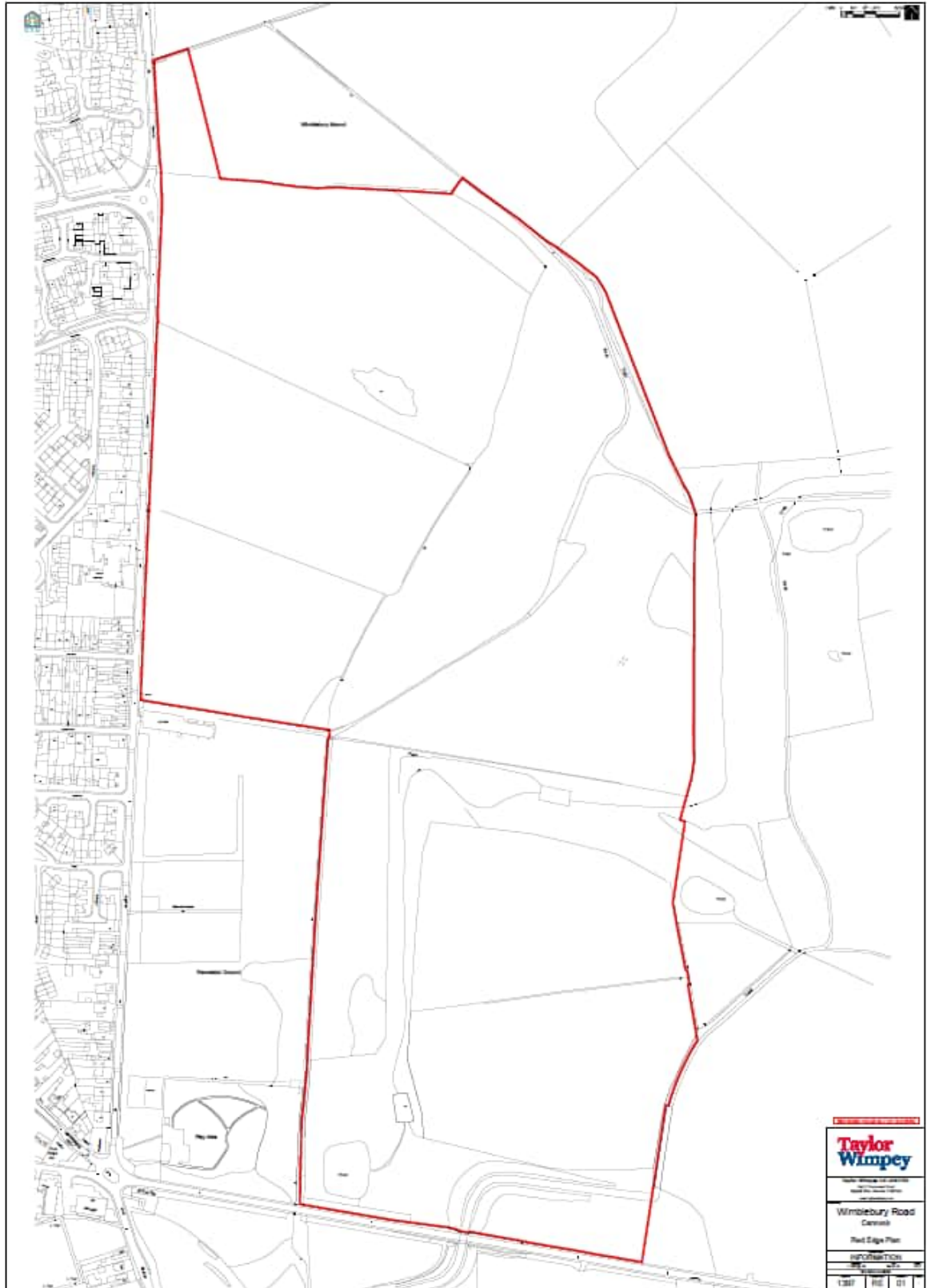
- Approach to the Green-Belt Assessment.
- Findings of the site-specific Green Belt Assessment.
- Review of the additional findings of the 2023 Green Belt Topic Paper
- Conclusions

1.8 An earlier version of the assessment (The 2016 LUC Assessment) assessed the proposed safeguarded land in detail, but only assessed the Proposed Allocated Parcel (Discussed in Appendix 1) in detail. The safeguarded parcel which is the focus of this assessment was assessed as part of a broad area. Therefore, the 2016 Parcel has only been drawn upon where relevant in order to inform the assessment of the Site.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE SITES & PARCELS

### Location

- 2.1 The Site is located on the Eastern Edge of Cannock at Heath Hayes and Wimblebury in the Cannock Chase District of Staffordshire. Wimblebury is a former mining village, consequently, the landscape around it and to the east has been shaped by this former activity.
- 2.2 The Proposed Safeguarded Land is to the south of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel.
- 2.3 The Proposed Safeguarded land is located South of the Woodland that forms the southern boundary of the proposed allocated land parcel and is smaller in scale. This Woodland extends to the South and forms the northern and eastern boundary of the proposed safeguarded land parcel. Beyond the Eastern boundary is Heath Hayes Park which is an informal park with many natural areas and contains a range of facilities.
- 2.4 To the south of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is Cannock Road, with part of Coal Haulage Road running through the most southern part of the land controlled by Taylor Wimpey (shown yellow on **Figure 2.1** below). Land lying between Coal Haulage Road and Cannock Road to the South East of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest as is much of the land to the east of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, while Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation lies just over two miles to the North West of the Site. A hedgerow runs along the eastern boundary of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel the southern portion of which abuts Coal Haulage Road beyond which lies the SSSI. The more northerly section separates the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel from a roughly triangular field beyond which lies the SSSI.
- 2.5 The Proposed Allocated Land Parcel is bordered on its northern boundary by Wimblebury Mound another former spoil heap associated with mining. To the east of the site is the settlement of Cannock itself with Heath Hayes Park to the South. Heath Hayes Park forms a small gap between the settlement and the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel. An unsurfaced footpath lies extends from the playing field through the woods along the southern boundary of the proposed allocated land parcel through the Site between the two parcels.
- 2.6 **Figure 2.1** shows the land controlled by Taylor Wimpey edged in red.



**Figure 2.1 Land controlled by Taylor Wimpey (Both Parcels Included)**

2.7 **Figure 2.2** shows the context with the Proposed Safeguarded Land in the context of the wider land controlled by Taylor Wimpey which includes the Proposed Allocated Land:



**Figure 2.2 Location of the Proposed Safeguarded Land**

**Site Description.**

- 2.8 Presently contained within land under the control of Taylor Wimpey is a mixture of agricultural land, broadleaf and coniferous woodland with access roads, and some ancillary structures. This area of land also features several public rights of way that run across it. A shallow pond is located in the western part of the Site.
- 2.9 The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel comprises of two fields covering 11.2 ha with a hedgerow dividing the fields. This hedgerow runs from the Woodland in the east to the triangular field beyond the boundary of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to the west. Ditches run alongside the hedgerow and also run alongside the hedgerow that separates the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel from the triangular parcel beyond the eastern boundary of the Site. The south western part of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is lightly wooded with a strong linear tree belt running along the southern boundary adjacent to Cannock Road. A dry pond is also located in this area.
- 2.10 North of the parcel is a mature area of woodland which forms a boundary between it and the Proposed Allocated Land which comprises three agricultural fields to the North West. The relationship between the two site parcels is shown in Figure 2.3 below:



Figure 2.3 Site Parcels

### 3 APPROACH TO GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

#### Methodology

3.1 The methodology of this Assessment follows the same methodology as the 2021 LUC Assessment which was prepared for the Council to allow results. The same method was used to assess the Proposed Allocated Land parcel in Appendix 1. Figure 3.1 below, taken from the 2021 LUC Assessment summarises the overall approach to assessment.

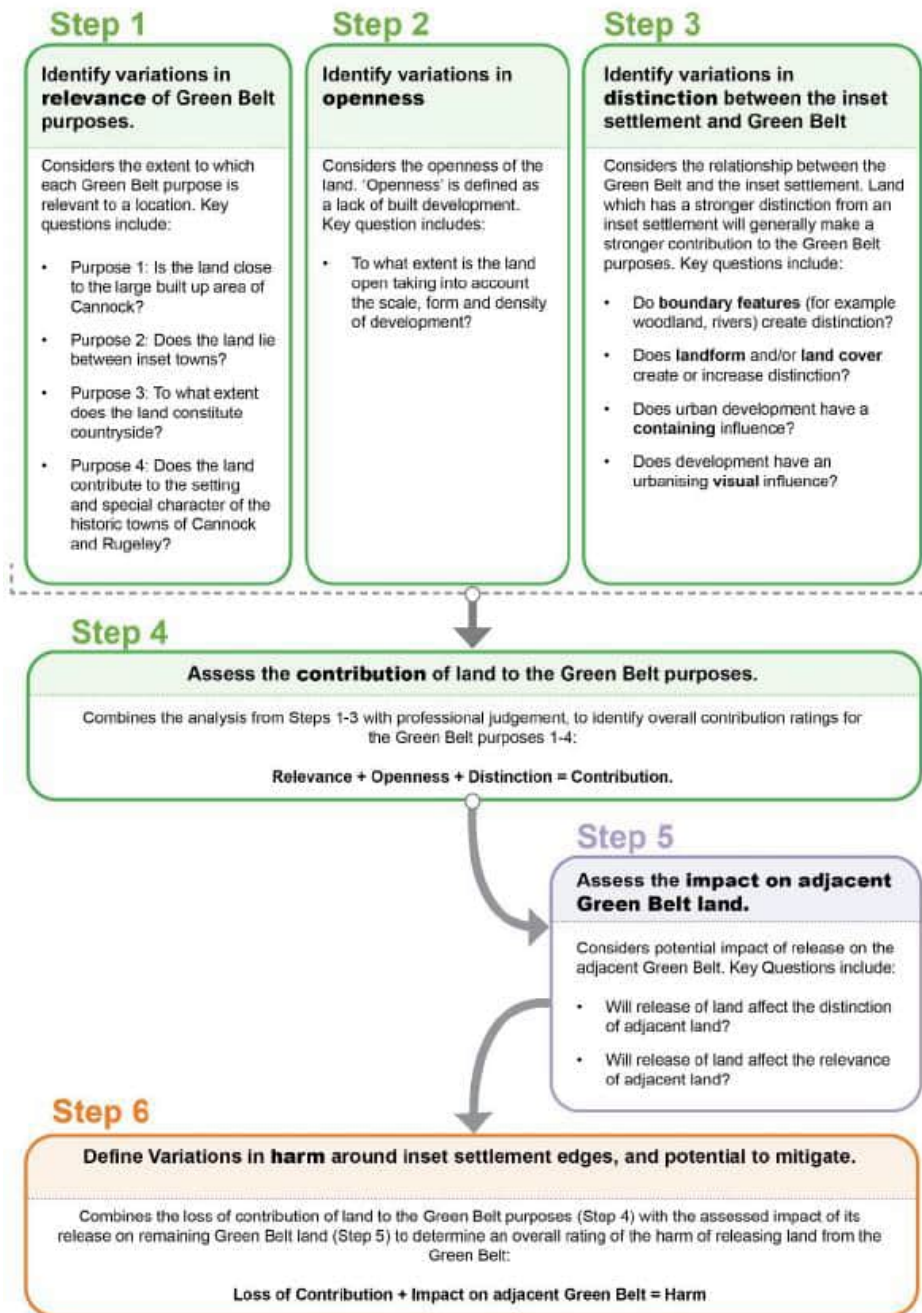


Figure 3.1 Green Belt Assessment Methodology (Figure 3.2 of the LUC Assessment)

3.2 The Green Belt is considered to have five purposes as per paragraph 138 of the NPPF:

1. To check unregulated sprawl of large built-up
2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
4. To preserve the setting and special characters of historic towns
5. To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3.3 These five purposes are recreated in step 1 of the LUC method and form the basis of the assessment.

### Distinction

3.4 RPS **do not agree** with LUC's position with regard to defining the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel as part of an outer area. Paragraph 3.10 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that the process for identifying parcels for assessment was undertaken by working out from each inset settlement edge until a strong distinction was identified. Beyond these parcels, outer areas were defined, which were subject to a high-level contribution assessment.

3.5 Paragraph 3.69 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that four interrelated elements were considered to assess the distinction between land within the Green Belt and developed land. These are:

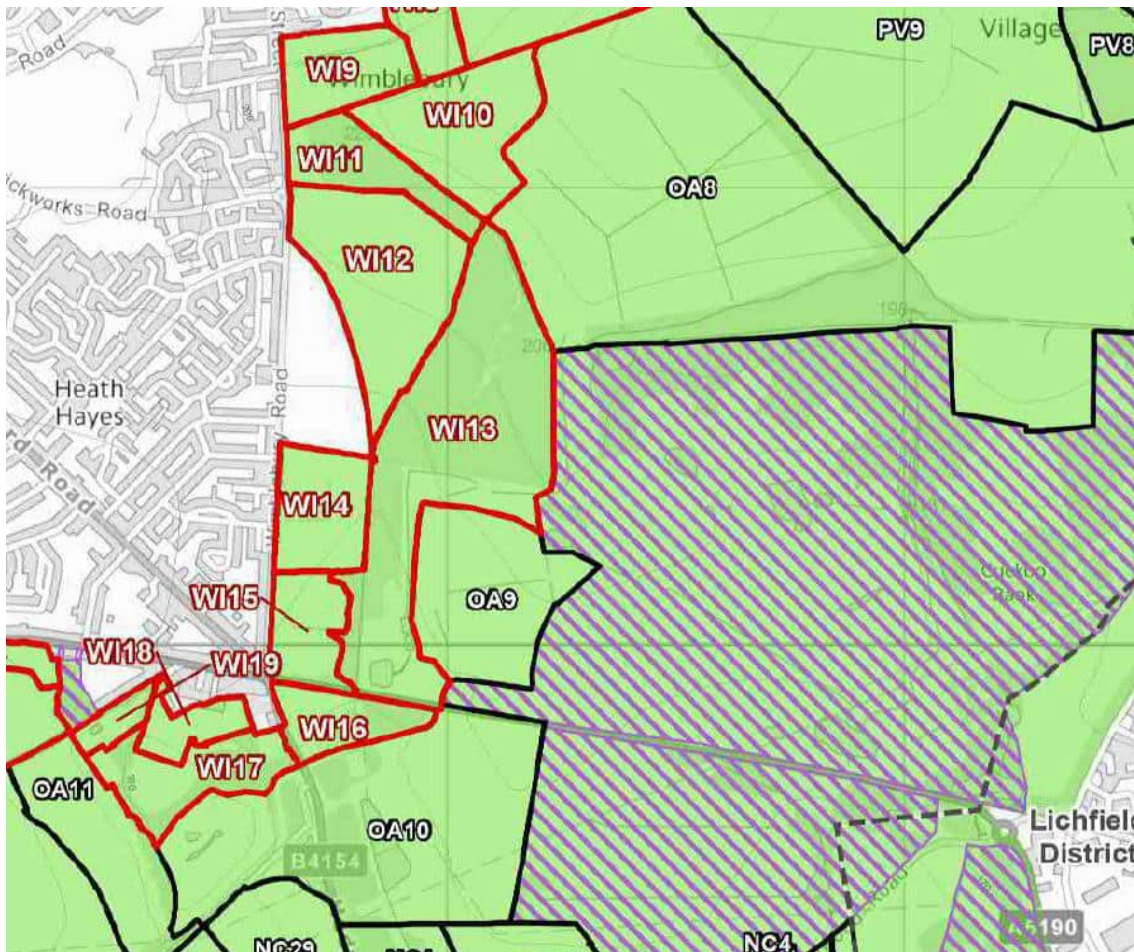
- Boundary features.
- Landform and land cover;
- Urbanising visual influence; and
- Urban containment;

3.6 Consideration of these elements was combined, using professional judgement, to give a rating on a 4-point scale (weak, moderate, strong and very strong distinction).

3.7 Parcel WI13 abuts the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel. It consists of woodland and the most south eastern part of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel. Parcel OA9 consists of the majority of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, except for the area included in WI13. The small triangular field on the eastern edge of parcel OA9 is not included in the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel. Parcel WI16 is located to the south of the Proposed Safeguarded Land. Parcel. **Figure 3.2** below shows



the parcels used by the 2021 LUC Assessment



**Figure 3.2 LUC 2021 Assessment Parcels**

3.8 The majority of the Proposed safeguarded land parcel was not assessed in detail because the LUC Assessment determined that parcels WI13 and WI16 have very strong and strong distinctions from the urban area.

3.9 With regards to the distinction of parcel WI13 Appendix B detailed harm assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes state:

“Tree cover is very prominent within the parcel, making it significantly different from the settlement, and forming a strong boundary feature, which creates separation from Wimblebury and Heath Hayes. The parcel extends a significant distance from the settlement, is not contained by urban development, and views are dominated by open countryside. Therefore, there is very strong distinction between the parcel and the urban area.”

For parcel WI16 Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments, Wimblebury and Heath Hayes states the following with regard to the distinction

The tree line and Norton Road to the west of the parcel are a moderate boundary feature creating separation from Wimblebury and Heath Hayes. The field is lower than the urban area, which combined with the well-hedged boundaries means that the countryside dominates views. The parcel

is not contained by urban development. Therefore, there is a strong distinction between the parcel and the urban area.”

- 3.10 RPS disagree that parcel WI16 is strongly distinct from the urban area. The parcel is partly contained by urban development on its western side where it abuts the inset edge. RPS also note that a crematorium and associated car parking granted approval under application reference CH/18/380 on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2019 has been constructed on the eastern part of the parcel which provides a degree of urbanising influence. As shown in **Figure 3.3** below, taken from Cannock Road in March shows the Crematorium, there are views into and out of the parcel during winter:



**Figure 3.3 View of Crematorium taken from Cannock Road, March 2023**

- 3.11 In the intervening period since the granting of permission for the Crematorium the urbanisation of the character of the setting of the parcel has become more established with the addition of a car park and several buildings. Notably, the access to the crematorium uses the southern extent of the coal haulage road, which forms the western boundary of parcels WI16 and OA9.
- 3.12 Given the points above RPS considers parcel WI16 to only be of moderate distinction between the parcel and urban area. Accordingly, parcels beyond this including the Site should not be considered as outer areas and should be subject to more detailed site-specific assessment than was undertaken as part of the 2021 LUC Green Belt Assessment.

### **Inspector’s Letter to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council December 2017**

- 3.13 RPS note that the 2021 LUC Assessment refers to the Inspector’s Letter to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (December 2017). In this letter, the Inspector highlights a number of failings with the approach taken to Green Belt review on the preparation of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. The following quotes are particularly relevant to the approach undertaken by the 2021 LUC Assessment:

*“The phase 1 Green Belt Review was at such a strategic level as to render its findings on the extent of the potential harm to the purposes of the Green Belt, caused by development within the large parcels considered as a whole, debatable when applied to smaller individual potential development sites adjacent to the urban areas. It goes without saying that a finer-grained approach would better reveal the variations in how land performs against the purposes of the Green Belt. Such an approach is also more likely to reveal opportunities as well as localised*

*constraints, both of which might reasonably be considered further.”* (fourth paragraph, **emphasis added**)

3.14 RPS contend that this criticism can be applied to the assessment of the outer area parcels identified in the LUC 2021 Assessment.

3.15 The Inspector’s Letter to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (December 2017) goes on to state:

*“Additionally, the phase 2 Green Belt Review, which did look at a finer grain of sites, **does not appear to have examined all of the potential development sites adjacent to the urban areas.**”* (paragraph 5, **emphasis added**)

3.16 LUC appears to have interpreted this as meaning immediately adjacent when considering distinction. This would mean that only development parcels which have no separation from urban areas would be assessed. This would exclude parcels separated from urban areas by any features such as woodland, rivers, roads etc. which would be contrary to established practice.

3.17 It is noted that paragraph 3.93 of the 2021 LUC Assessment defines adjacent Green Belt land as the land that lies next to and/or in close proximity to land/parcels being assessed for potential release. This is contradictory to the approach taken to distinction wherein the 2021 LUC Assessment has used the presence of a parcel that they have assessed as being strongly distinct to mean that all parcels beyond this should not be assessed at more than a high level as an outer area. Parcels such as the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel can still be in close proximity to the urban areas while not being immediately next to said urban areas.

3.18 As such RPS consider that the approach taken by LUC in the 2021 LUC Assessment does not reflect the approach advocated by the Inspector’s Letter to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (December 2017). RPS contend that to be in accordance with this approach the approach to assessment should consider all potential development sites adjacent to urban areas, such as the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel.

## 4 SITE-SPECIFIC GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT OF THE SITE

### RPS Approach

- 4.1 RPS propose a slightly different boundary for the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel on the basis that there is a difference in the character of the Woodland, which is densely covered by trees from the lightly wooded area in the south east of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel. We have also excluded the roughly triangular field to the north east of the Proposed Safeguarded as it lies outside of the control of Taylor Wimpey. The Land parcel for the Assessment is shown in Figure 4.1 below.



**Figure 4.1 Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel.**

- 4.2 In addition, for reference figure 4.2 shows the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel the release of which has been assessed against harm to the Green Belt in Appendix 1.



**Figure 4.2 Proposed Allocated Land Parcel**

4.3 As stated, neither of these parcels are covered by an absolute constraint to development. Absolute constraints to development are established in paragraph 3.14 of the 2021 LUC Assessment as follows:

- Special Areas of Conservation
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Ancient Woodland
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Common Land
- Cemeteries
- Flood Zone 3

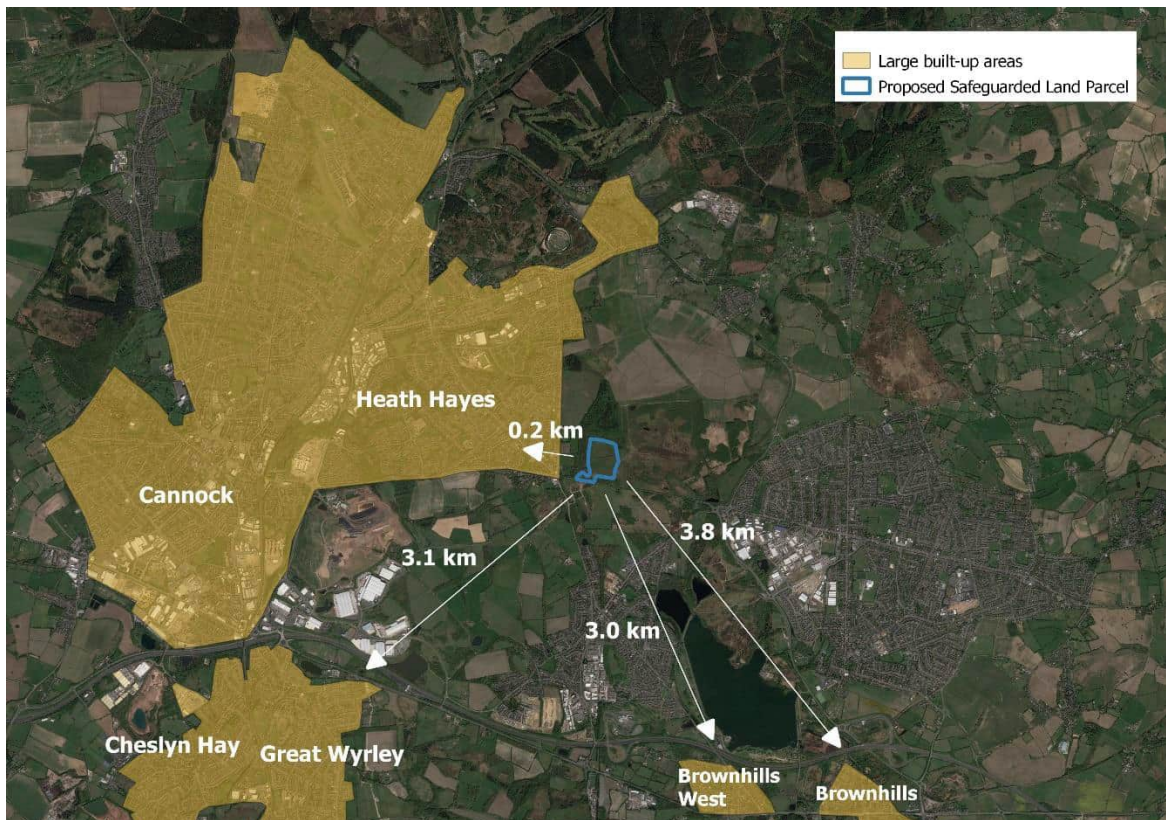
4.4 Set out below is RPS’s assessment of the Proposed Safeguarded land parcel against the methodology used by LUC. For consistency, the same approach is applied to that which was used to assess the proposed allocated land parcel.

## 5 GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED SAFEGUARDED LAND PARCEL

### Step 1: Consider the Relevance of Each Green Belt Purpose

#### Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas?

- 5.1 Page 28 of the LUC Green Belt Assessment defines the large built-up area as the main urban conurbation of Birmingham and associated towns and urban areas of Cannock, Cheslyn Hay, Great Wyrley and Hednesford. Paragraph 3.33 notes that settlements deemed close enough to the ‘core’ urban area for development associated with them to be considered to be part of the large built-up area including the town of Brownhills West.
- 5.2 It is noted that the previous 2016 LUC Assessment included a much broader definition of the ribbon development associated with all inset areas and industrial estates, business parks and gypsy and traveller sites. As stated in paragraph 3.34 of the 2021 LUC Assessment the definition of the large built-up area was tightened to focus on the major urban areas and to be consistent with the neighbouring Green Belt Studies covering the Black Country, South Staffordshire and Lichfield.
- 5.3 As set out on page 30 of the 2021 LUC Assessment Green Belt land has the potential to play a weaker role with regards to Purpose 1 if it is relatively close to the large built-up area, but intervening land provides a strong distinction. This is the case for the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, as the wooded area to the west and north of the parcel provides strong distinction as shown in **Figure 5.1** below:



**Figure 5.1 Purpose 1: Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel****Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to purpose 2 to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another**

5.4 Paragraphs 3.32 and 3.39 of the LUC Assessment defined purpose 2 towns as:

- The main urban area, grouped around Cannock, Hednesford and Heath Hayes
- Rugeley
- Burntwood
- Brownhills; and
- Bloxwich

5.5 Paragraph 3.40 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that:

*“Regardless of whether a particular settlement is large enough to realistically be considered a town, it is acknowledged that smaller settlements may lie in between larger ones, such that loss of separation between them may in turn have a significant impact on the overall separation between larger ‘towns’.*

This was taken into account in the study.

5.6 As such while neither Brownhills West nor Norton Cranes are identified as a Purpose 2 town, RPS has considered as part of this assessment the relationship of the Site with these towns.

5.7 Pages 33 and 34 of the 2021 LUC Assessment state that Green Belt land has less potential to play a role with regards to Purpose 2 - i.e. gap is robust – if there is a wide gap between towns with some significant separating features. RPS consider this to be the case for the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, although note that on page 53 of Appendix B Detailed Harm Assessments Wimblebury and Heath Hayes that LUC considered this gap to be moderate in relation to the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel (WI12) with some significant separating features including Cuckoo Bank and Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.

5.8 RPS notes that no objective criteria are provided for assessing the relative strength of the gap between Purpose 2 Towns in the 2021 LUC Assessment, such as a measurement of distance. These points are illustrated in **Figure 5.2** below

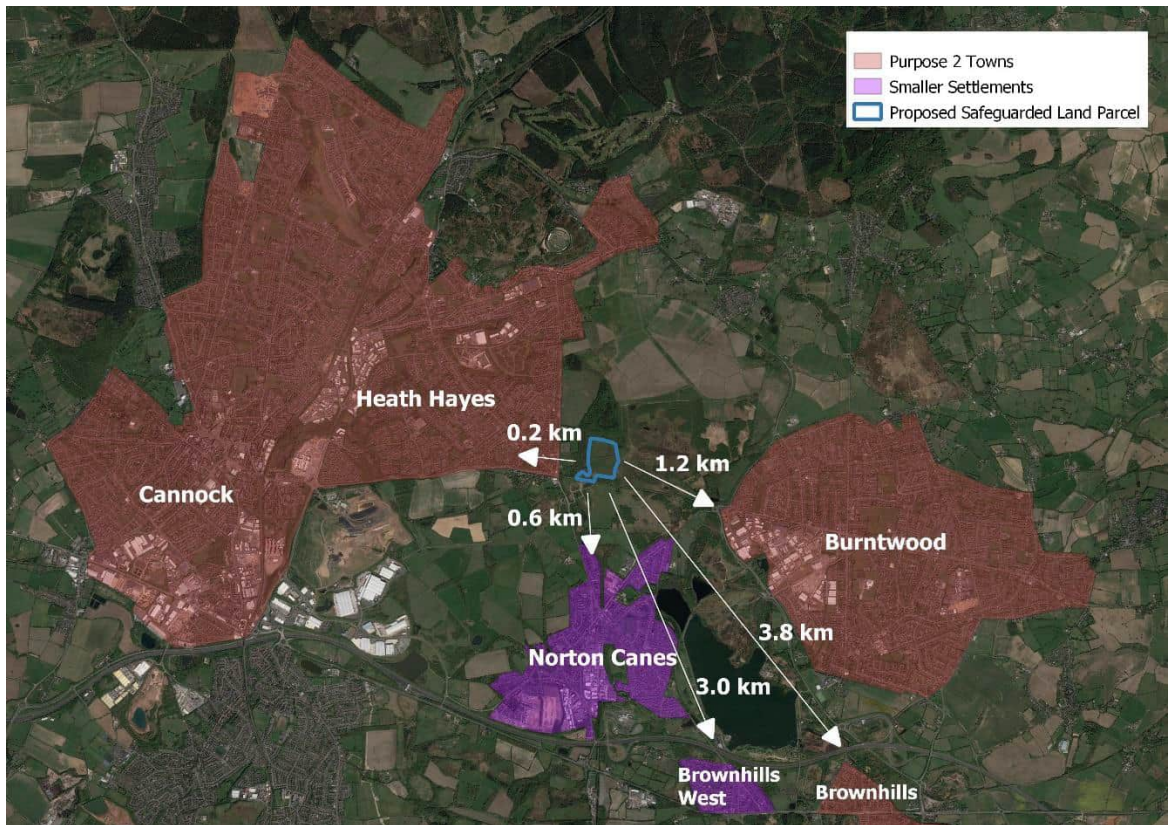


Figure 5.2: Purpose 2 Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel

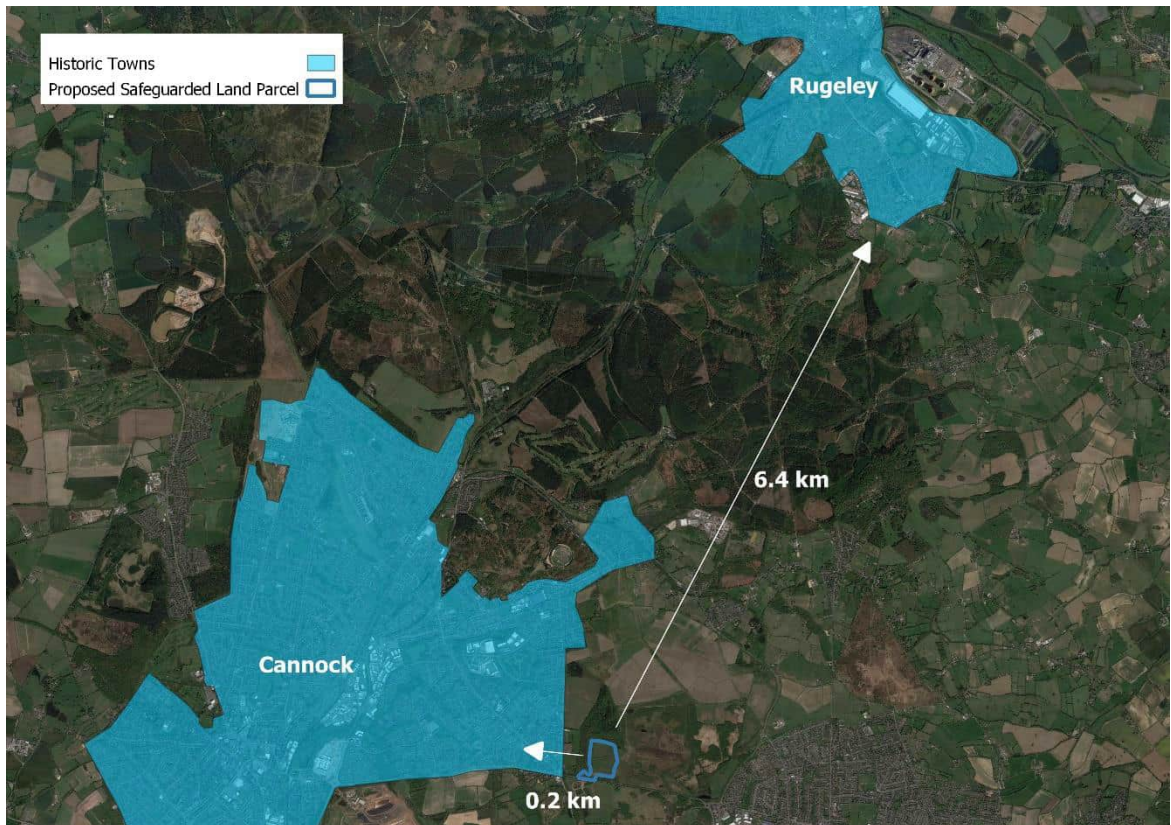
**Does the land have the potential to play with regard to Purpose 3 to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another?**

- 5.9 As set out at paragraph 3.46 of the 2021 LUC Assessment this considers the extent to which land can be considered to constitute ‘countryside’ on the basis of its usage. It does not consider the impact of development which can be considered to reduce openness (in Green Belt terms), or of development which has a containing urbanising influence, as these are addressed in the analysis at Step 2 and Step 3 respectively.
- 5.10 Paragraph 3.47 of the 2021 LUC Assessment goes on to state that land may through its usage have a stronger relationship with the adjacent built-up area and, as a result, not be considered ‘countryside’ to the same degree as other open lands, but it is important not to stray from assessing the Green Belt purposes into assessing landscape character, sensitivity or value. Whilst Green Belt land may be valuable in these respects it is not a requirement or purpose of the designation to provide such qualities. Therefore, the condition of land is not taken into consideration: the poor condition of Green Belt land does not necessarily undermine its fundamental role of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.
- 5.11 RPS consider the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to be open countryside. As such the land has the potential to play a stronger role with regards to Purpose 3.



**Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 4 to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns?**

5.12 Paragraph 3.52 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that it concluded that land around two settlements within Cannock Chase District – Cannock and Rugeley – should be considered for potential contribution to Purpose 4. The Site, and for the purposes of this assessment the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, does not lie within these areas as shown on **Figure 4.9** below and so does not make a contribution towards Purpose 4.



**Figure 5.3 Purpose 4: Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel**

**Does the land have the potential to play a role with regard to Purpose 5 to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land?**

5.13 Paragraph 3.57 of the LUC Green Belt Assessments notes that due to the nature of the settlement patterns within Cannock, it is not possible to draw a meaningful distinction between the availability of brownfield land within individual settlements. As such the 2021 LUC Assessment assumes an even level of contribution to Purpose 5 for all areas of Green Belt based on the average availability of brownfield land across the District. On this basis, all parcels of Green Belt land within the District, including the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is considered to make a strong contribution to Purpose 5.

## Step 2: Identify variations in Green Belt openness

- 5.14 In paragraph 3.60 the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that the NPPF identifies openness as an 'essential characteristic' of the Green Belt, rather than a function or purpose. Accordingly, it notes that the presence of 'urbanising development' within the Green Belt can diminish the contribution of land to the Green Belt purposes.
- 5.15 Paragraph 3.61 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that Green Belt openness relates to a lack of 'inappropriate built development' rather than visual openness; thus both undeveloped land screened from view by landscape elements (e.g. tree cover) and development which is not considered 'inappropriate', are still 'open' in Green Belt terms.
- 5.16 RPS agree with the statement on page 50 of the 2021 LUC Assessment that land without built form is open in Green Belt terms as such RPS considers the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to be open, as it is comprised of agricultural fields.

## Step 3: Identify variations in the distinction between urban areas and the Green Belt

- 5.17 Paragraph 3.65 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that Having considered in general terms the variations in the relevance of each of the Green Belt purposes, the next step in the assessment process identifies more localised variations in the relationship between Green Belt land and urban development – i.e. whether the land seems like it is part of the urban area or the countryside.
- 5.18 Paragraph 3.66 of the 2021 LUC Assessment goes on to state that land that is more strongly related to urbanising development typically makes a weaker contribution to all of the first three Green Belt purposes, being less likely to be perceived: as sprawl (Purpose 1), narrowing the gap between towns (Purpose 2), or encroaching on the countryside (Purpose 3). While paragraph 3.67 notes of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that for Purpose 4 there is no separate consideration of distinction, because contrary to Purposes 1 to 3, land which has a strong relationship with the town is likely to make a greater rather than lesser contribution.
- 5.19 Paragraph 3.68 of the 2021 LUC Assessment sets out that the process of assessing distinction was carried out on a settlement-by-settlement basis, for each inset urban area. The analysis was applied as a progression out from each settlement edge, recognising that with distance from that settlement the level of distinction will only increase, not diminish. Notwithstanding our criticisms of the findings of the 2021 LUC Assessment for the adjacent parcel WI16, RPS agree in general with this approach.
- 5.20 Paragraph 3.68 of the 2021 LUC Assessment sets out that the process of assessing distinction was carried out on a settlement-by-settlement basis, for each inset urban area. The analysis was applied as a progression out from each settlement edge, recognising that with distance from that settlement, the level of distinction will only increase, not diminish. Notwithstanding our criticisms of the findings of the 2021 LUC Assessment for the adjacent parcel WI16, RPS agree in general with this approach.
- 5.21 Paragraph 3.69 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that four interrelated elements were considered to assess the distinction between land within the Green Belt and developed land. These are

- Boundary features
- Landform and land cover
- Urbanising visual influence
- Urban Containment

5.22 Consideration of these elements was combined, using professional judgement, to give a rating on a 4-point scale (weak, moderate, strong and very strong distinction)

### **Boundary Features**

5.23 Paragraph 3.72 of the 2021 LUC Assessment states that for land adjacent to an urban area the analysis only considered the urban boundary, but progressing further from the urban area, the cumulative impact of multiple boundary features increases distinction.

5.24 The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is contained by linear tree cover to the west and north which is defined on page 53 of the 2021 LUC Assessment as being a moderate boundary. The southern boundary consists of part of Cannock Road, which forms a strong boundary due to level differences with the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, while linear tree cover within the SSSI forms the south eastern boundary of the parcel, which also provides a strong boundary. The eastern boundary consists of the disused Coal Haulage Road, which itself provides a weak boundary.

5.25 The mixture of strong, moderate, and weak boundary features means that it is considered that the overall boundary of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is moderate.

### **Landform and land cover**

5.26 Paragraph 3.74 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that as well as landform and land cover serving as boundary features this may extend into a broader feature which creates greater distinction. Examples are given of a woodland, lake or valley.

5.27 The woodland to the west and north of the site increases the distinction of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, as does the woodland and wider SSSI located to the south east and east of the Parcel.

### **Visual Openness**

5.28 Paragraph 3.75 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that this is not concerned with the scenic quality of views, but the extent to which an absence of visual association with the open Green Belt countryside or, conversely, the extent to which the visual dominance of urban development may increase association with the urban area.

5.29 The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is visually contained by mature tree belts on its western and northern edge, but it is open along its eastern edge so it is visually associated with the wider open Green Belt countryside.

### Urban Containment

- 5.30 This relates to whether existing development to some degree contains an area of open land, thus reducing its distinction from the urban area. The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is partly contained by the recently constructed crematorium to the south of the parcel. As such the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is contained on one side.

### Distinction of the Site

- 5.31 The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel has a combination of strong and weak boundary features with surrounding areas. The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is located adjacent to woodland to the north, west and south east which increases distinction. The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is visually associated with the open Green Belt countryside to the east. Existing development to the south of the parcel provides a degree of urban containment. Based on the boundary features, adjacent landforms, degree of urban containment and visual openness we consider the overall level of distinction to be moderate.

### Step 4: Assess the contribution of land to the Green Belt Purposes and define parcels.

- 5.32 As set out at paragraph 3.81 of the 2021 LUC Assessment this step considers the analysis in each of the previous steps to identify the overall contribution rating for each Green Belt purpose. Each area of variation in contribution to one or more of the purposes was defined as a parcel, with contribution ratings and supporting analysis.
- 5.33 For Green Belt Purposes 1, 2 and 3 the relevance (Step 1), openness (Step 2) and distinction (Step 3) are considered to arrive at a judgement on the relative contribution of different areas of land as described in paragraph 3.82 of the LUC 2021 Assessment. The same paragraph goes on to explain that contribution to the Green Belt purposes was rated on a 5-point scale (strong, relatively strong, moderate, relatively weak and weak/no contribution, in accordance with criteria listed on pages 59 to 67 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. It also notes that these criteria lists indicate typical combinations of relevance, openness and distinction, but professional judgement may result in the addition of particular weight to one of these elements.
- 5.34 For Purpose 4 paragraph 3.83 of the 2021 LUC Assessment explains that in accordance with advice from Historic England, judgements were based on specific analysis of the historic town in question, and its relationship with its Green Belt surroundings as set out in the criteria list for Purpose.
- 5.35 Paragraph 3.84 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that standard text is used to indicate that contribution to Purpose 5 is consistent across all of the study area
- 5.36 Paragraph 3.84 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that standard text is used to indicate that contribution to Purpose 5 is consistent across all of the study area
- 5.37 Paragraph 3.86 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that in between settlements where Purpose 2 is relevant, a contribution will likewise reduce at the periphery of the gap. Unlike Purposes 1 and 2,

contribution to Purpose 3 will not diminish with distance from urban areas and will consequently be high for all land beyond those areas that do not have a strong distinction from an urban area.

### **Contribution of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to the Green Belt Purposes**

5.38 RPS consider that the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel consists of an area with a variation in contribution to one or more of the purposes and so should be defined as a parcel. The surrounding linear tree belts, act, hedgerows, and road act as boundary features that contain the parcel. Set out below is our assessment of the contribution of this parcel to each purpose in accordance with the criteria set out on pages 59 to 67 of the LUC 2021 Assessment.

#### **Purpose 1**

5.39 As set out on page 30 of the 2021 LUC Assessment Green Belt land has the potential to play a weaker role with regards to Purpose 1 if it is relatively close to the large built-up area, but intervening land provides a strong distinction. This is the case for the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, as the wooded area to the west of the parcel provides a strong distinction. As such RPS consider the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to make a moderate contribution purpose 1.

#### **Purpose 2**

5.40 RPS consider the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to be open and lie within a robust gap between towns. RPS note that there are some significant separating features, including Cuckoo Bank and Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI. The parcel has a moderate distinction from the inset settlement edge.

5.41 On this basis RPS consider that the area makes a relatively weak contribution to Purpose 2

#### **Purpose 3**

5.42 RPS consider the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to be open countryside and that the parcel has some relationship with the inset area, but also moderate distinction from it. Overall, the area makes a relatively strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

#### **Purpose 4**

5.43 The Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel does not contribute to the historic setting or special character of either Cannock or Rugeley and so does not contribute to Purpose 4.

#### **Purpose 5**

5.44 As set out in paragraph 3.57 of the 2021 LUC Assessment all Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose. While RPS do not completely agree with this point as we consider that previously developed land is capable of some development under paragraph 145 g)

of the NPPF 2019 and so must make a weaker contribution to Purpose 5 than undeveloped open Green Belt Land, RPS consider that all undeveloped land, such as the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel, makes an equal contribution to this purpose.

### Loss of contribution

- 5.45 As set out at paragraph 3.90 of the 2021 LUC Assessment the loss of contribution to the Green Belt purposes as a result of the release of a parcel of land equates to the contribution ratings assessed for that parcel.
- 5.46 Paragraph 3.91 of the 2021 LUC Assessment notes that in cases where the release of a parcel would also, in order to form an expansion of the inset settlement, necessitate the release of intervening land, the loss of contribution is associated with the highest contributing parcel. It is proposed that access to this parcel would be secured through the development of the Proposed Allocated Land Parcel, which makes a weaker contribution and so does not increase this assessment. While this access would be via the Woodland that lies between the two parcels, it is not proposed that this Woodland is released from the Green Belt. Indeed, it is suggested that the Woodland be retained as Green Belt and used to provide compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the Green Belt.

### Step 5: Assess the additional impact of the release on adjacent Green Belt

- 5.47 As noted earlier, paragraph 3.93 of the 2021 LUC Assessment defines adjacent Green Belt land as the land that lies next to and/or in close proximity to land / parcels being assessed for potential release.
- 5.48 Paragraph 3.94 goes on to state that the assessment of the additional impact of the release of land on adjacent Green Belt land considered two factors: the impact on the distinction (from inset areas) of the adjacent land and the impact on the relevance of the adjacent land to the NPPF purposes. The third factor, openness, is not relevant to the assessment of impact on adjacent land as it is assumed that adjacent land will remain open. **Figure 4.11** below which is Figure 3.3 in the 2021 LUC Assessment illustrates the elements to be considered when assessing the impact of the release on adjacent Green Belt land.
- 5.49 It should be noted that this approach is unusual and not consistent with RPS's substantial experience of undertaking and reviewing Green Belt Assessments elsewhere, however to ensure constituency and aid in allowing the findings of this assessment to be compared with the 2021 LUC Assessment we have followed the same methodology.

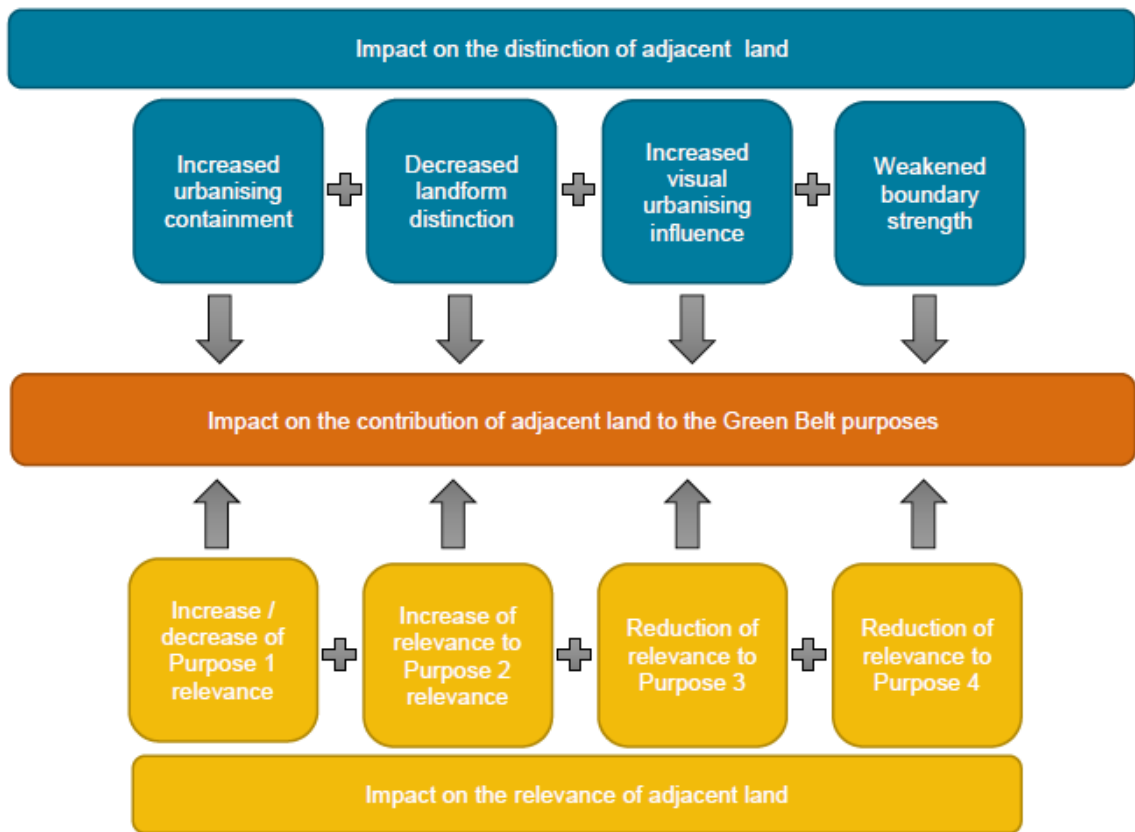


Figure 5.4 Variation in impact on release of adjacent land

**Impact on distinction**

5.50 The release of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel would increase the urban containment of the land to the west of the parcel and so would weaken the distinction of adjacent Green Belt land. Therefore, it would affect the contribution of adjacent land to Green Belt Purposes and so the harm of the release of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel would increase on this basis

**Impact on relevance**

5.51 The release of the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel would not lead to adjacent land becoming close enough to the inset edges of the large built-up area or lead to adjacent retained Green Belt land becoming perceived as being within the large built-up area. Hence, its release would not affect any adjacent land with regard to its relevance for Purpose 1 as explained at paragraph 3.99 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. It would also not lead to any substantial change in the settlement gap and so would not change the relevance of Purpose 2 for adjacent parcels of land as set out at paragraph 3.100 of the 2021 LUC Assessment.

5.52 Paragraph 3.101 notes that the relevance of adjacent retained Green Belt land to purpose 3 would rarely be affected. Its release would not result in adjacent land becoming contained to the extent that it is too isolated from the wider Green Belt to be considered part of the countryside.

**Assessment of Harm**

5.53 RPS consider the contributions to the purposes of the Green Belt considered to be made by the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel to be:

- A moderate contribution to Purposes 1
- A relatively weak contribution to Purpose 2
- A relatively strong contribution to Purpose 3
- No contribution to Purpose 4

5.54 RPS notes that the combination of these contributions and a minor impact on adjacent Green Belt land is not given as an example in the benchmarks set out on pages 79 to 80 of the 2021 LUC Assessment. However, it would appear to sit between the examples given for moderate-high and moderate harm.

5.55 Furthermore, as noted above RPS questions the approach to assessing the impact on adjacent parcels and notes that the characteristics of WI13 such as its heavily wooded nature, and connection to the SSSI mean that it is unlikely to be recommended for release from the Green Belt even if the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel is developed. As such we question the contention that increasing the urban containment of WI13 in this particular circumstance would diminish the role of WI13 as an inset edge boundary and suggest therefore that the level of harm of releasing the Proposed Safeguarding Land Parcel should only at most be assessed as moderate.

5.56 The nature and characteristics of these parcels will therefore ensure that the boundary between these and the Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel can endure in the future. This would be in accordance with paragraph 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) which states:

5.57 “Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period”

5.58 Table 5.1 below provides a summary of our assessment

**Table 5.1: Summary of Findings for Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel**

Settlement	Release Scenario	Area (ha)	Purpose 1 Rating	Purpose 2 Rating	Purpose 3 Rating	Purpose 4 Rating	Purpose 5 Rating	Harm Rating
Wimblebury and Heath Hayes	Release of Proposed Safeguarded Land Parcel as an expansion of Wimblebury and Heath Hayes	6.1	Moderate	Relatively Weak	Relatively Strong	No	Equal	Moderate



## 6 GREEN BELT TOPIC PAPER 2024

- 6.1 The Council have updated elements of their evidence base following the release of an updated its Pre-Submission Regulation 19 document in December 2023. The updated topic paper assessed whether exceptional circumstances for the release from the Green Belt apply in line with the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.2 The updated topic paper drew on the findings of the Cannock Chase Green Belt Study 2021. As per the above findings, RPS dispute the contribution that the proposed safeguarded land parcel makes to the green belt, and the overall harm of its release relative to the findings of said study.
- 6.3 RPS ultimately concur with the findings of Section 7 of the topic paper regarding the spatial strategy. The final strategy aligns with housing option C2, primarily utilizing urban housing options with targeted Green Belt extensions at the urban edges of existing settlements in Cannock/Hednesford/Heath Hayes and Norton Canes. The topic papers note that the AONB boundary north of Hednesford and south of Cannock acts as a significant constraint on potential development opportunities due to existing landscape limitations. This factor emphasizes the strategic significance of the Green Belt release within Heath Hayes, minimizing potentially harmful impacts to the wider AONB and indeed, the wider Green Belt.
- 6.4 RPS generally support this spatial strategy in the context of Green Belt release and the implied justification for the safeguarding in the Green Belt of the safeguarded land parcel at Wimblebury Road.
- 6.5 Section 8 of the topic papers assesses whether exceptional circumstances apply for the release of proposed allocations in the local plan from the Green Belt. Regarding the safeguarded land parcel, it concluded that the justification for further future release was as follows:
- The safeguarding of the land provides the option for enhanced connectivity for active travel and biodiversity between Hednesford Road and Wimblebury Road.
  - The development of the site has the ability to assist with flood mitigation downstream in Norton Canes.
  - The safeguarded land parcel would be partially developed for the new access included in Policy SH1: Land at Wimblebury Road, this would serve to fundamentally alter the site's contribution to the Green Belt.
  - The safeguarded land can deliver an enhanced active travel link from the proposed allocated land through to Heath Hayes Park.
- 6.6 RPS concur with the findings of the topic paper and its overall implied support for the release of the proposed safeguarded land parcel from the Green-Belt in the long term, though it should be emphasised once more that given the harm of doing so should be considered moderate rather than moderate-high.