

3 Stage 3 Assessment Findings

- 3.1 The main aim of Stage 3 of the Study is to provide a robust, transparent and clear understanding of how harm to the Green Belt can be minimised within and in the immediate vicinity of the 87 Green Belt sites being considered for allocation in the District's emerging Local Plan.
- 3.2 A total of 140 parcels of Green Belt land were defined in the 88 sites. **Table 3.1** below lists the ratings given to each site and to each parcel, and in several cases sub-divisions of those parcels. **Figure 3.1** shows the likely harm to the Green Belt if each site option was developed in its entirety.
- 3.3 These illustrations of harm represent the likely harm to the Green Belt if development were to be located in these locations without detailed site-based mitigation and enhancement measures. The residual harm of development in these locations post-mitigation and enhancement has to the potential to be lower; however, this cannot be determined until the detailed design, scale and layout of the Council's preferred site allocations are known. **Chapter 4** sets out a series of potential mitigation measures that could contribute mitigating harm on any site. Where appropriate, site based recommendations for mitigating harm to the Green Belt and/or enhancing beneficial uses within and in the immediate vicinity of sites has been outlined within the individual site assessment sheets in **Appendix 1**.

Table 3.1: Summary of Parcel Ratings

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
Amphill				
NLP048	Moderate high	NLP048	3.26	Moderate high
Aspley Guise				
NLP062	Moderate high	NLP062	0.64	Moderate high
NLP089	Moderate high	NLP089	0.59	Moderate high
NLP090	High	NLP090	5.21	High
NLP168	Low moderate	NLP168	2.03	Low moderate
Barton le Clay				
ALP082	Low	ALP082	0.45	Low
ALP418	High	ALP418	50.91	High
			18.53	Moderate high
NLP123	Moderate	NLP123	7.03	Low moderate
NLP158	Moderate high	NLP158a	27.79	Moderate high
		NLP158b	12.99	Moderate high

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
		NLP158c	3.96	Moderate
NLP382	High	NLP382	53.87	High
			18.52	Moderate high
Billington				
NLP537	High	NLP537	1.04	High
Chalton				
ALP445	Moderate high	ALP445	1.07	Moderate high
NLP435	Moderate high	NLP435	3.18	Moderate high
NLP529	High	NLP529	12.23	High
Dunstable				
NLP539	Moderate	NLP539	7.16	Moderate
Eaton Bray				
ALP072	Moderate	ALP072a	1.03	Low moderate
		ALP072b	4.68	Moderate
ALP103	Moderate high	ALP103	8.07	Moderate high
ALP192	Low moderate	ALP192	0.57	Low moderate
ALP423	Moderate high	ALP423	15.86	Moderate high
NLP013	Moderate	NLP013	1.42	Moderate
NLP483	Moderate	NLP483	2.69	Moderate
Flitwick				
NLP039	Moderate	NLP039	9.00	Moderate
Harlington				
ALP117	Moderate high	ALP117	18.14	Moderate high
ALP123	Moderate	ALP123	12.89	Moderate
ALP181	Low moderate	ALP181	6.39	Low moderate

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
ALP355	Moderate high	ALP355	2.46	Moderate high
NLP107	Low moderate	NLP107	6.39	Low moderate
NLP303	Moderate	NLP303	13.70	Moderate
NLP379	Moderate high	NLP379	2.80	Moderate high
NLP381	Moderate high	NLP381a	38.72	Moderate high
		NLP381b	18.39	Moderate high
		NLP381c	36.15	Moderate high
NLP470	Moderate	NLP470	0.83	Moderate
NLP471	Moderate	NLP471	0.81	Moderate
Heath and Reach				
NLP544	High	NLP544	4.97	High
Hockliffe				
ALP184	Moderate	ALP184a	2.03	Moderate
		ALP184b	0.25	Moderate
NLP259	Moderate	NLP259	2.03	Moderate
NLP298	Moderate high	NLP298	2.73	Moderate high
NLP327	Moderate high	NLP327	20.93	Moderate high
			3.28	Moderate
NLP413	Moderate	NLP413	0.99	Moderate
NLP538	Moderate high	NLP538	6.35	Moderate high
Leighton Buzzard				
ALP066	High	ALP066a	114.65	High
		ALP066b	79.63	High
			26.84	Moderate high
		ALP066c	56.26	Moderate high

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
		ALP066d	45.27	High
			59.14	Moderate high
NLP072	Moderate high	NLP072	9.64	Moderate high
			5.73	Moderate
NLP074	High	NLP074a	107.28	High
		NLP074b	59.60	High
			26.84	Moderate high
		NLP074c	39.12	Moderate high
		NLP074d	78.35	High
			53.61	Moderate high
NLP464	Low	NLP464	5.52	Low
NLP533	High	NLP533	3.30	High
NLP545	High	NLP545	1.08	High
Leighton Linlade				
NLP049	Low	NLP049	1.73	Low
Luton				
ALP142	Moderate	ALP142	49.97	Moderate
NLP167	Moderate	NLP167	6.87	Moderate
NLP174	High	NLP174a	13.57	High
		NLP174b	19.47	Moderate high
		NLP174c	74.30	High
		NLP174d	11.81	High
NLP246	High	NLP246	20.21	High
NLP426	High	NLP426a	12.68	Low
		NLP426b	5.78	Low

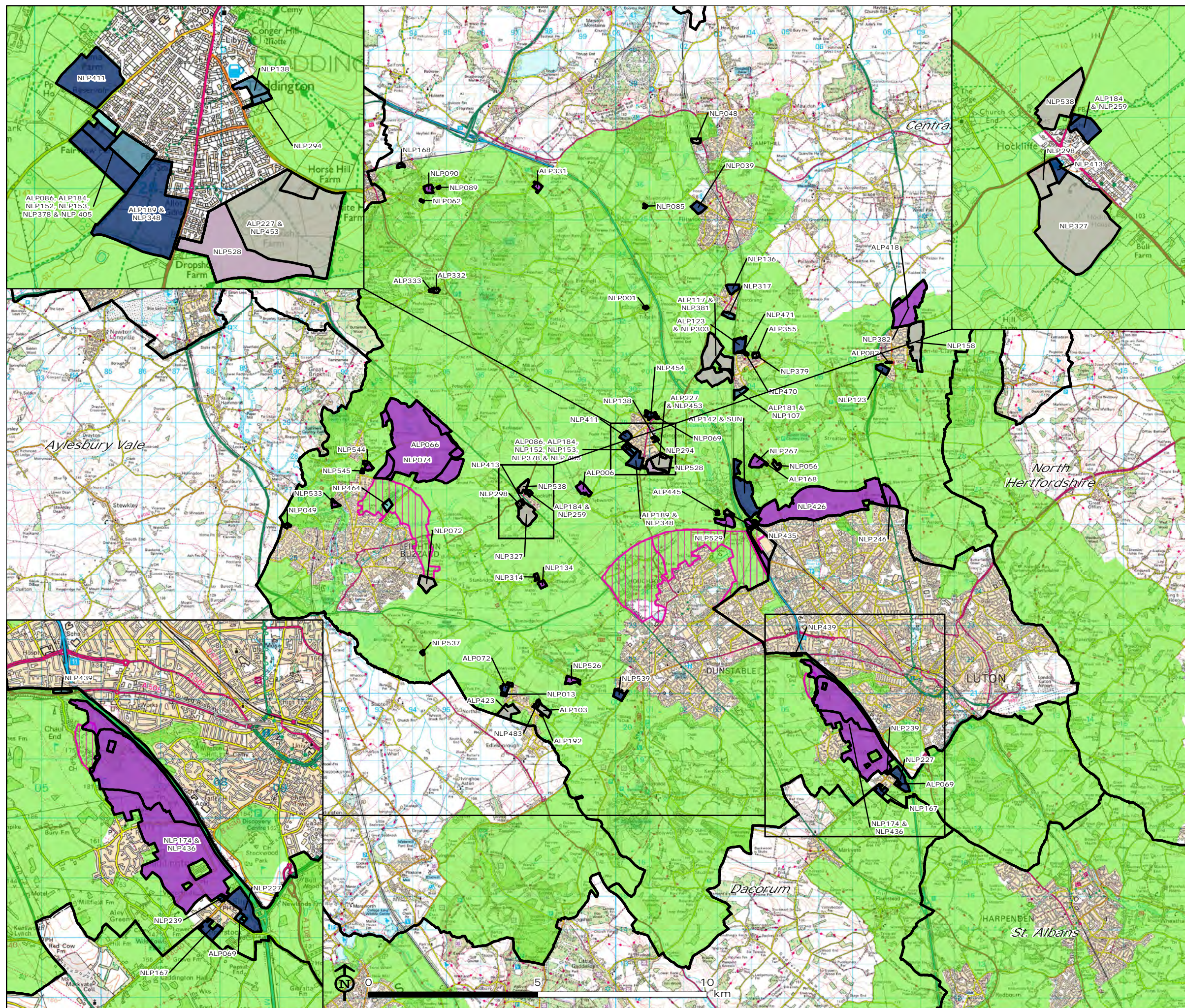
Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
		NLP426c	35.37	Moderate
		NLP426d	26.91	Moderate high
		NLP426e	57.69	High
		NLP426f	56.53	High
			33.21	Moderate high
		NLP426g	41.73	High
NLP436	High	NLP436a	33.79	High
		NLP436b	21.11	Moderate high
		NLP436c	77.62	High
		NLP436d	19.69	High
		NLP436e	6.28	Moderate high
			21.22	Moderate
		NLP436f	39.48	High
			17.17	Moderate high
		NLP436g	45.56	High
		NLP436h	20.47	Moderate high
			12.90	Moderate
NLP439	Low	NLP439	1.66	Low
NLP525	Moderate	NLP525a	50.12	Moderate
		NLP525b	6.70	Low moderate
Ridgmont				
ALP331	High	ALP331	4.40	High
Slip End				
ALP069	Low moderate	ALP069	1.62	Low moderate
NLP227	Moderate	NLP227	17.22	Moderate

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
NLP239	Moderate	NLP239	0.81	Moderate
Steppingley				
NLP085	Moderate high	NLP085	0.94	Moderate high
Tebworth				
ALP006	High	ALP006	8.90	High
Tilsworth				
NLP134	High	NLP134	3.54	High
NLP314	Moderate high	NLP314	1.88	Moderate high
Tingrith				
NLP001	Moderate high	NLP001	0.99	Moderate high
Toddington				
ALP086	Low moderate	ALP086	2.83	Low moderate
ALP189	Moderate	ALP189a	3.04	Low moderate
	Moderate	ALP189b	11.54	Moderate
ALP227	Moderate high	ALP227a	8.59	Low moderate
		ALP227b	24.31	Moderate high
NLP069	Moderate	NLP069	0.90	Moderate
NLP138	Low moderate	NLP138	1.46	Low moderate
NLP152	Low	NLP152	0.70	Low
NLP153	Moderate	NLP153a	0.70	Low
		NLP153b	1.41	Moderate
NLP184	Low moderate	NLP184	2.83	Low moderate
NLP294	Low moderate	NLP294	0.44	Low moderate
NLP348	Moderate	NLP348a	3.04	Low moderate
		NLP348b	11.54	Moderate

Site ref	Site release harm rating	Parcel	Area (ha)	Parcel release harm rating
NLP378	Moderate	NLP378a	0.70	Low
		NLP378b	2.83	Low moderate
		NLP378c	5.79	Moderate
NLP405	Moderate	NLP405a	0.70	Low
		NLP405b	5.79	Moderate
NLP411	Moderate	NLP411	3.89	Moderate
			2.72	Low moderate
NLP453	Moderate high	NLP453a	8.59	Low moderate
		NLP453b	25.93	Moderate high
NLP454	Moderate	NLP454	4.58	Moderate
NLP528	Moderate high	NLP528a	6.58ha	Low moderate
		NLP528b	5.00ha	Moderate high
Totternhoe				
NLP526	High	NLP526	6.37	High
Upper Sundon				
ALP168	Moderate high	ALP168	0.52	Moderate high
ALP393	High	ALP393	11.13	High
NLP056	Moderate high	NLP056	3.49	Moderate high
NLP267	High	NLP267	11.00	High
Westoning				
NLP136	Moderate	NLP136	7.51	Moderate
NLP317	Low moderate	NLP317	4.74	Low moderate
Woburn				
ALP332	Moderate high	ALP332	1.86	Moderate high
ALP333	Moderate high	ALP333	0.94	Moderate high

Green Belt Sites Overview

- Map Scale @ A3: 1:110,000



4 Mitigation and Enhancement of Green Belt

- 4.1 This Study, alongside the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Green Belt Study, is an important part of Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan evidence base, informing the identification of the most sustainable pattern of future growth within the District.
- 4.2 This final chapter sets out the potential mitigation measures that could be applied to reduce the potential harm to the Green Belt, if the decision is taken to remove areas from the Green Belt. This is followed by a discussion of the potential opportunities for enhancing the beneficial use of the Green Belt, in line with para 81 of the NPPF (2012) and section A62 of the Housing White Paper (2017).

Mitigation to Reduce Harm to the Green Belt

The concept of mitigation

- 4.3 One of the factors weighed up in the judgement of harm resulting from the release of a Green Belt parcel, is the impact that the loss of openness would have on other Green Belt land. This is assessed by considering how neighbouring land would rate in terms of its contribution to Green Belt purposes were the parcel in question to be urbanised: i.e. would its contribution be lessened? In many cases this is a key factor in the judgement: a site might in itself be small, but its development could represent a more significant change than its physical area might suggest if, for example, this resulted in the breaching of a strong boundary feature, or an increase in the built containment of adjacent land.
- 4.4 There is the potential to reduce harm to the remaining Green Belt by implementing measures which will affect the relationship between Green Belt land and urban areas. Measures which increase the contribution that land is judged to make to Green Belt purposes, offsetting to some degree the predicted reduction in contribution, could strengthen the case for release of a particular parcel.
- 4.5 Mitigation relates to land under the control of the site owner/developer, whereas it may often be appropriate to consider enhancement of the beneficial use of Green Belt land, as set out in the NPPF, at a much more strategic scale than that afforded through the masterplanning of individual site allocations. However, the two are not mutually exclusive: mitigation can apply either to land being released or land being retained as Green Belt, and so can also present an opportunity to enhance beneficial use in certain locations.

Generic mitigation themes

- 4.6 The extent to which harm can be mitigated will vary from site to site, but potential measures can be considered under generic groupings. As described in the assessment methodology, the Green Belt purposes are considered to relate to the relationship between the land area in question, developed land and the countryside. This relationship is influenced by: the location of the parcel; the extent of openness within it; and the role of landscape/physical elements, including boundary features (in either separating the parcel from, or connecting it to) built-up areas and the wider countryside.
- 4.7 **Table 4.1** below lists some mitigation measure that could be considered as part of the development process.

Table 4.1: Potential measures to mitigate harm to Green Belt and associated enhancement measures to be delivered through development proposals

Mitigation/Enhancement measure	Benefits	Considerations
Use landscaping to help integrate a new Green Belt boundary with the existing edge, aiming to maximise consistency over a longer distance	Maintaining sense of separation between urban and open land	A boundary that is relatively homogeneous over a relatively long distance – e.g. a canal or motorway – is likely to be stronger than one which has more variation. Landscaping works can help to minimise the impact of 'breaches' in such boundaries
Strengthen boundary at weak points – e.g. where 'breached' by roads	Reducing opportunities for sprawl	The use of building and landscaping can create strong 'gateways' to strengthen settlement-edge function
Define Green Belt edge using a strong, natural element which forms a visual barrier – e.g. a woodland belt	Reducing perception of urbanisation, and may also screen residents from intrusive landscape elements within the Green Belt (e.g. major roads)	Boundaries that create visual and movement barriers can potentially have detrimental effects on the character of the enclosed urban areas and the amenity of residents
Create a transition from urban to rural, using built density, height, materials and landscaping to create a more permeable edge	Reducing perception of urbanisation	This may however have implications in terms of reducing housing yield
Consider ownership and management of landscape elements which contribute to Green Belt purposes	Ensuring permanence of Green Belt	Trees and hedgerows require management to maintain their value in Green Belt terms, and the visual screening value that can be attributed to them is more limited if they are under private control (e.g. within back gardens)
Enhance visual openness within the Green Belt	Increasing perception of countryside	Although openness in a Green Belt sense does not correspond directly to visual openness, a stronger visual relationship between countryside areas, whether directly adjacent or separated by other landscape elements, can increase the extent to which an area is perceived as relating to the wider countryside
Preserve/enhance landscape elements which contribute to the historic setting, including views which provide an appreciation of historic setting and special	Preserving setting and special character	Landscape character and historic settings assessment can help to identify valued characteristics that should be retained and where possible strengthened, and intrusive elements that should be diminished

Mitigation/Enhancement measure	Benefits	Considerations
character		and where possible removed
Enhance access within the Green Belt	Increasing perception of countryside	Uses of the countryside that permits an appreciation of it as a connected area with valued characteristics can counter urbanising influences – e.g. enhancement of connectivity of rights of way to avoiding truncation by major roads, or provision of access along the Green Belt boundary to strengthen its role
Design and locate buildings, landscaping and green spaces to minimise intrusion on settlement settings	Maintaining perceived settlement separation by minimising the extent to which new development intrudes on the settings of other settlements	Analysis of settlement settings, including consideration of viewpoints and visual receptors, can identify key locations where maintenance of openness and retention of landscape features would have the most benefit.
Maintain/create separation between existing washed-over settlement and new inset settlement	Minimising urbanising influences that could weaken the justification for retaining the washed-over settlement's status	
Design road infrastructure to limit perception of increased urbanisation associated with new development	Reducing perception of urbanisation	Increased levels of 'activity' can increase the perception of urbanisation

Beneficial Use of Green Belt

- 4.8 The purposes of Green Belt do not make any reference to the quality or use of land falling within the designation, but the NPPF, at paragraph 81, states that:
- "Once Green Belts have been defined, 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."*
- 4.9 As part of its recent White Paper on housing policy, the government has proposed that local authorities should seek to 'offset' the removal of land from the Green Belt by way of 'compensatory improvements to the environmental quality or accessibility of remaining Green Belt land'. This could be achieved through legal agreements in conjunction with the release of land and planning consent for development
- 4.10 The NPPF suggests types of beneficial use. They relate principally to the environmental quality of the land, but can also, through strengthening boundary/buffer roles and affecting landscape and visual character, affect the contribution of land to Green Belt purposes.

Generic opportunities to enhance use

- 4.11 Many of the mitigation measures listed in the previous section which relate to Green Belt land can also be considered beneficial uses, but there is broader scope for introducing or enhancing uses of Green Belt land that (by adding to its value) will strengthen the case for that land's future protection, regardless of whether it is classified as Green Belt. Some examples are provided in **Table 4.2** below.
- 4.12 Beneficial uses could be achieved through legal agreements in conjunction with the release of land and consent for development. The Housing White Paper states in paragraph A62 that the Government will be exploring whether higher contributions can be collected from development as a consequence of land being released from Green Belt.

Table 4.2: Potential beneficial uses of Green Belt

Beneficial use	Considerations
Improving access	Enhancing the coverage and condition of the rights of way network and increasing open access provision
Providing locations for outdoor sport	Some outdoor sports can represent an urbanising influence; an emphasis on activities which do not require formal facilities is less likely to harm Green Belt purposes
Landscape and visual enhancement	Using landscape character assessment as guidance, intrusive elements can be reduced and positive characteristics reinforced
Increasing biodiversity	Most Green Belt land has potential for increased biodiversity value – e.g. the management of hedgerows and agricultural field margins, and provision of habitat connectivity
Improving damaged and derelict land	Giving land a functional, economic value is a key aspect in avoiding damage and dereliction through lack of positive management, but this needs to be achieved with minimum harm to characteristics/qualities which help it contribute to Green Belt purposes.

5 Making Changes to the Green Belt

- 5.1 The NPPF requires changes to the Green Belt to be made through the Local Plan process. This should include:
- i. demonstration of exceptional circumstances, such as unmet housing or employment land needs, that cannot be met elsewhere; and
 - ii. consideration of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, considering a range of local, regional and national issues such as economic growth, health and wellbeing, accessibility and biodiversity, cultural heritage and climate change resilience, as well as an assessment against Green Belt purposes.
- 5.2 A common interpretation of the policy position is that, where necessitated by development requirements, plans should identify the most sustainable locations, unless outweighed by adverse effects on the overall integrity of the Green Belt according to an assessment of the Green Belt based around the five purposes³. In other words, the relatively poor performance of the land against Green Belt purposes is not, of itself, an exceptional circumstance that would justify release of the land from the Green Belt. Equally, even if an area of Green Belt scores strongly against one or more purposes, or a high degree of harm to the Green Belt is identified, the NPPF does not suggest that a review of its boundaries would not be appropriate, if 'exceptional circumstances' are demonstrated.

Housing White Paper

- 5.3 As part of its recent White Paper on housing policy (Fixing our broken housing market, February 2017), the Government has proposed amendments to the NPPF to make the circumstances in which Green Belt boundaries can be amended more 'transparent'. Local authorities will only be able to alter Green Belt boundaries after they have "examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development requirements". In particular, they will have to give consideration to suitable brownfield sites, estate generation, underused and public sector land, and whether their development needs can be met by neighbouring authorities.
- 5.4 If local authorities are able to meet these conditions, they will also be required to 'offset' the removal of land from the Green Belt by way of "compensatory improvements to the environmental quality or accessibility of remaining Green Belt land". This refers to the wider benefits that Green Belts can deliver e.g. for access, sport, recreation, flood alleviation, ecology, landscape and visual amenity etc.
- 5.5 The White Paper also proposes that national policy will make it clear that when carrying out a Green Belt Review, local planning authorities should look first at using any Green Belt land which has been previously used and/or which surrounds transport hubs.
- 5.6 It remains to be seen how these proposed changes will become formally embodied in legislation and policy.

Releasing Existing Green Belt Land

- 5.7 Should the District decide to release land from the Green Belt, we recommend that outline policy guidance or masterplans are prepared as part of the Local Plan process. These masterplans should draw on the findings of this Green Belt Study to indicate precise development areas, new defensible Green Belt boundaries (existing or new features) and appropriate development heights and densities. Such an approach, together with specific policies for the development of the land,

³ Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt, Planning Advisory Service (PAS), 2015 (<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/green-belt-244.pdf>)

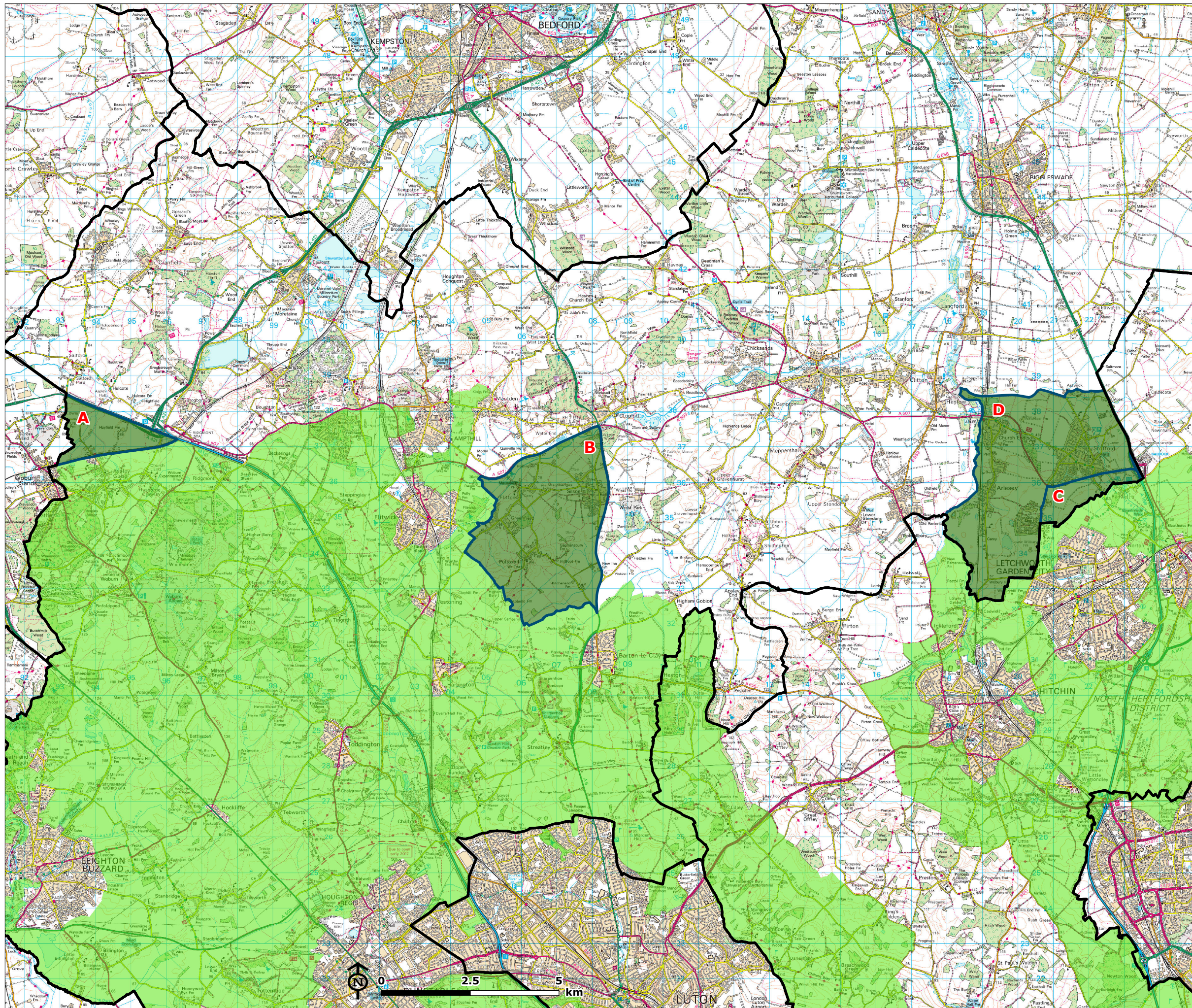
would help to engender public confidence and support, as well as mitigate harm to the remaining Green Belt.

Designating New Green Belt Land

- 5.8 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF states that the general extent of Green Belt across the country is already established and that new Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. Once the spatial strategy for Central Bedfordshire has been confirmed, the Council will be in a position to consider how the designation of new Green Belt land could help promote the sustainable pattern of development proposed in the Plan period and in the longer term.
- 5.9 The NPPF clearly states what is required of local planning authorities defining new Green Belt boundaries. Paragraphs 82 and 85 state that 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;*
 - *show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework;⁴...*
 - *...not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
 - *satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and*
 - *define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent."⁵*
- 5.10 A high-level assessment of the existing edge of the Green Belt within and bordering Central Bedfordshire has been undertaken to establish whether there are alternative permanent and readily recognisable physical features beyond the existing edge that could be used as alternative Green Belt boundaries, should the Council's Local Plan strategy and policies satisfy the NPPF tests for new Green Belt.
- 5.11 Generally, the existing edge of the Green Belt within and adjacent to Central Bedfordshire follows physical features which, relative to the alternatives, are permanent and readily recognisable. However, **Figure 5.1** illustrates four sections of the existing Green Belt edge that have been identified to have relatively weak boundaries when compared to alternative physical features. Once the principal of this potential growth has been established, it can inform an assessment of the contribution of new Green Belt land against the five purposes of Green Belt.

⁴ Paragraph 82 of the National Planning Policy Framework

⁵ Paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy Framework



Central Bedfordshire - Stage 3 Green Belt Study

Green Belt Revision Scenarios

- District boundary
- Parcel boundary
- Green Belt
- Potential New Green Belt

Map Scale @ A3: 1:105,000

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Green Belt Extension – Scenario A

- 5.12 The existing boundary of the Green Belt to the north of Aspley Guise follows the railway line that runs east-west through the northern half of the Plan area. However, the M1 motorway to the north represents a stronger alternative Green Belt boundary which is contiguous with the existing Green Belt boundary to the east. Designating the land in between the railway line and M1 motorway could help to shape a potential northern expansion of Aspley Guise to the south while protecting the openness of the countryside.
- 5.13 It should be noted that an extension to the Green Belt in this location would likely result in the local authority boundary forming the new western edge of the Green Belt. Relative to the roads to the west of Central Bedfordshire, this would be a weak Green Belt edge. The designation of new Green Belt in this location would require meaningful cooperation with Milton Keynes Council to the west. There are no stronger alternative boundaries than the M1 in between the railway line and the motorway.

Green Belt Extension – Scenario B

- 5.14 The existing boundary of the Green Belt to the east of Flitwick and north of Barton-le-Clay follows a short stretch of the River Flit immediately to east of Flitwick before following a series of minor roads and field boundaries, some of which are broken and follow no readily recognisable physical features. Individually and in combination these boundaries are relatively weak when compared to the east-west orientated A507 which emanates from the strategic gap between Flitwick and Ampthill and A6 which connects Barton-le-Clay to Clophill. These strategic roads frame the villages of Flitton, Greenfield, Pulloxhill and Silsoe. A north-western extension to the Green Belt in this location would help shape the growth of these relatively close settlements while protecting the openness of the countryside within and around them. Consideration would need to be given as to whether these settlements should be inset within or washed over by Green Belt. For example, Silsoe is larger and more densely developed than Flitton, Greenfield and Pulloxhill.

Green Belt Extension – Scenario C

- 5.15 The existing boundary of the Green Belt between Letchworth Garden City in North Hertfordshire and Stotfold in Central Bedfordshire is the local authority boundary between Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire. The land to the south of the authority boundary in North Hertfordshire is within the Green Belt the land to the north within Central Bedfordshire is not. This boundary follows an irregular field boundaries, country lanes and small pockets of woodland. Individually and in combination these boundaries are relatively weak when compared to the A507 to the north and Hitchin Road to the west. Hitchin Road is contiguous with the existing Green Belt boundary along Stotfold Road to the south and connects with the A507 at the south western corner of Stotfold. A northern extension to the Green Belt in this location would help shape the growth of Fairfield to the west and Stotfold to the north, protecting the openness of the countryside and maintaining the strategic gap between Letchworth Garden City, Fairfield and Stotfold. The designation of new Green Belt in this location would require cooperation with North Hertfordshire Council.

Green Belt Extension – Scenario D

- 5.16 An alternative to Scenario D would be to extend the Green Belt further north and west into Central Bedfordshire, to frame the settlements of Arlesey, Church End, Fairfield and Stotfold. Such an extension could help to shape the growth of these relatively close settlements while protecting the openness of the countryside within and around them. Consideration would need to be given as to whether these settlements should be inset within or washed over by Green Belt.
- 5.17 The existing boundary of the Green Belt is the local authority boundary between Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire. The eastern half is described under Scenario D; the western half of the boundary follows Stotfold Road to the northern edge of Letchworth Garden City, a short stretch of east-west orientated Arlesey New Road before following the eastern and southern boundaries of a large rectangular field and the River Hiz. With the exception of the field, the roads and the river represent relatively strong Green Belt boundaries. A strategic north

western Green Belt extension in this location could be appropriately framed by the River Hiz to the west, the River Ivel and Astwick Road to the north and the A1 to the east. Although the north-south orientated railway line connecting Hitchin to the south with Biggleswade to the north represents a clearer boundary than the River Hiz to the west, extending the Green Belt up to the railway line would leave an irregular linear stretch of non-Green Belt land in between the railway line and the river. The designation of new Green Belt in this location would require cooperation with North Hertfordshire Council.

New Green Belts

- 5.18 The open strategic gap between Milton Keynes to the south west and Bedford to the north east is the only location within Central Bedfordshire which could be considered for designation as part of a new Green Belt (see **Figure 5.2**). While it would make sense for such a designation to be connected to the existing Green Belt to the south, it would prevent the sprawl of these two large built-up areas, inhibit their coalescence and protect the openness of the countryside in between in the long term.
- 5.19 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF states:
- "The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established. New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions."*
- 5.20 Therefore, building the exceptional circumstances case and boundaries for new Green Belt in this location would require considerable joint working between the Unitary Authority, Milton Keynes Council, Bedford Council and Central Bedfordshire Council and cooperation and consultation with the neighbouring counties of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.
- 5.21 Alternatively, the Central Bedfordshire Council could consider alternative area-based planning and development management policies to protect the open countryside within this area. The area around the growing village of Cranfield and Cranfield University, which together represent the most significant area of urbanised development within the strategic gap, is the most appropriate location for such a designation.

Figure 5.2 Open strategic gap between Milton Keynes and Bedford

