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Oxford City Green Belt Study

Final Report

Prepared by LUC
May 2017



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1 Study Objectives

Introduction

- 1.1 LUC were commissioned by Oxford City Council in March 2017 to undertake a partial review of the Green Belt within Oxford City. The review appraises eleven potential development sites within the City boundary against the five nationally defined purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF. It also draws conclusions on the relative harm (or otherwise) to the Green Belt that may result from their potential release for development. The review will inform the preparation of the policies and site allocations of the Oxford Local Plan 2036. More specifically, it will provide evidence to enable Oxford City Council to consider whether the Green Belt boundaries should be altered through the Local Plan process, to enable existing Green Belt land to contribute to meeting Oxford's housing need.
- 1.2 This chapter sets out the background to the study, the key study objectives and the structure of the remaining report.

Background

- 1.3 In 2013, the Oxfordshire Local Planning Authorities commissioned a new strategic housing assessment (SHMA), to establish the appropriate level of planned growth across the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area and the level of housing need arising in each District. In April 2014 the Oxfordshire Local Authorities published the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for Oxfordshire. The document suggested that 100,060 additional new homes were needed in Oxfordshire between 2011 and 2031.
- 1.4 In November 2014, the Oxfordshire Growth Board commissioned a Project team to address the unmet housing needs of Oxford. This project team considered the implications of the SHMA and how best to meet the identified unmet housing need of Oxford. In September 2016 the Growth Board (with the exception of South Oxfordshire District Council) endorsed the proposed apportionment across the Districts using a working figure of 15,000 homes for the period to 2031. The agreed apportionment for Oxford City was 550 homes. The latest Oxford Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA, 2016) identified a capacity of only 7,511 for 2016-2036 in Oxford which includes assumptions that Green Belt Sites will be reviewed and released.
- 1.5 Due to the tight boundaries of both the Oxford administrative boundary and the boundary of the Oxford Green Belt around the City's existing urban area, there is very limited suitable land remaining within the City's boundaries for further housing development, beyond that already planned for in the Core Strategy and Sites & Housing Plan which cover the period to 2026. Therefore, as part of the preparation of the Local Plan 2036, the City Council are giving consideration to all reasonable options to deliver more housing within Oxford, including reviewing the Green Belt within Oxford.
- 1.6 The Oxford Local Plan 2036 is currently in development and will cover the plan period from 2016-2036. Once adopted, it will replace the Local Plan 2001-2016, the Core Strategy 2026 and the Sites and Housing Plan. The Local Plan will include the consideration of sites for employment uses as well as housing use, and will therefore consider the exceptional circumstances for housing need within Oxford. This Green Belt Study has been commissioned as part of the suite of technical studies being undertaken to inform the production of the Local Plan and the consideration of housing need. This study complements a strategic Green Belt Assessment which was undertaken by LUC for the five Oxfordshire authorities in 2015.

- 1.7 The Local Plan 2036 can only influence the policies regarding Green Belt land within the Oxford City Council boundaries, therefore this is the main focus of this assessment. However, the LUC 2016 Oxford Spatial Options Assessment, commissioned by the Growth Board, identified that some of the most sustainable options for meeting Oxford's unmet housing needs are through urban extensions on Green Belt sites around the edge of Oxford. This wider strategic work was taken into account by Oxford City Council in commissioning this Green Belt Study as some of the sites do adjoin the boundaries of neighbouring authorities.

Study Aims and Objectives

- 1.8 The aim of the study was to assess the suitability of the potential sites being promoted for development against the five purposes of the Green Belt and to identify the relative harm (or otherwise) to the Green Belt that may result from their potential release for development. This will enable Oxford City Council to consider whether there are 'exceptional circumstances' (under paragraph 83, NPPF) to justify altering Green Belt boundaries through the Local Plan process, i.e. to enable existing Green Belt land to contribute to meeting Oxford's housing need.
- 1.9 The detailed objectives of the study were to:
- Appraise the sites against the five nationally defined purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF, ensuring consistency with the joint Oxford Green Belt assessment.
 - Provide clear conclusions on the potential degree of harm that may occur if the sites were to be released from the Green Belt. This takes into account both the contribution of the sites to the Green Belt purposes and the potential impact on the wider integrity of the Green Belt if the sites were to be released.
 - Recommend where defensible Green Belt boundaries could be drawn (in line with national policy and guidance) where land has the potential to be removed from the Green Belt.
 - Outline what general 'design principles' could be applied to minimise potential harm to the wider Green Belt and to enhance its beneficial use.
 - Consider whether there is justification for any other amendments to be made to the outer Green Belt boundary, for example where there are anomalies due to changes of circumstance since the boundaries were approved.

Report Structure

- 1.10 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 2** summarises **national planning policy** with regard to Green Belt assessment and alteration, sets out in more detail the Oxford **local planning policy** that has resulted in this Green Belt review. It also provides a brief background to the origins and development of the **Oxford Green Belt**.
 - **Chapter 3** sets out the **assessment methodology**.
 - **Chapter 4** summarises the **findings of the Green Belt assessment**.
 - **Chapter 5** sets out **mitigation measures** that have been identified to minimise harm to the Green Belt and **potential opportunities to enhance its beneficial use**.

2 Study Context

Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter summarises national planning policy with regard to Green Belt assessment and alteration, and sets out the local planning policy context that has resulted in this Green Belt review. It also provides a brief background to the origins and development of the Oxford Green Belt.

National Planning Policy

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

Box 2.1: The purposes of Green Belt

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

2.7 The NPPF emphasises in paragraph 83 that local planning authorities should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. It goes on to state that:

"Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period."

2.8 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF states that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. In particular, they should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.

2.9 The NPPF also states in para 85 that when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:

- *"ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- *not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- *where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- *make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;*
- *satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent."*

2.10 Current guidance therefore makes it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning tool designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas. To this end, land should be designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use. However, the NPPF states that:

"local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land" (Paragraph 81).

2.11 Neither the NPPF nor the NPPG provides any specific advice regarding the methodology for undertaking reviews, and no reference is made to different scales of review.

Housing White Paper

2.12 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.

- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 It remains to be seen how these proposed changes will become formally embodied in national policy.

Local Planning Policy

- 2.16 The Oxford Core Strategy 2026 (adopted 2011) states that the general extent of the Green Belt inside Oxford's boundaries will be maintained and that the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan will consider small scale minor changes to the Green Belt boundary.
- 2.17 **Box 2.2** sets out the Green Belt policy CS4 of the Adopted Core Strategy 2026.

Box 2.2: Policy CS4: Green Belt (Oxford City Council's Adopted Core Strategy, 2011)

The general extent of the Green Belt inside Oxford's boundaries will be maintained. Within the Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, in accordance with national policy.

The Northern Gateway AAP will consider small scale, minor changes to the Green Belt boundary in the immediate vicinity of the currently safeguarded land, where this may be necessary to achieve a suitable and appropriate site for development. Land here will only be released from the Green Belt if exceptional circumstances are shown to exist and all the following criteria are met.

- the need to do so has been justified;
- the site is not in the undeveloped floodplain;
- development would not result in the loss of a designated ecological feature;
- development would not result in the loss of land in active recreational use;
- development would relate well to the existing development pattern;
- development would not lead physically distinct built-up areas to merge; and
- development would not detract from the landscape setting or special character of Oxford.

- 2.18 The Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (2015) highlights that at the Core Strategy examination, the Inspector considered that it would be appropriate for the Action Plan process to carry out a:
- 'highly focussed inner Green Belt boundary review... to consider whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of Green Belt land'*
- 2.19 In preparation of the Action Plan, a review was carried out and concluded there were 'exceptional circumstances' to support a Green Belt review relating to:
- The regional imperative to deliver economic growth.
 - The lack of alternative sites to accommodate economic growth.
 - Poor housing affordability in Oxford and the imperative to meet a backlog of housing needs.
 - Worsening traffic congestion as a result of unsustainable patterns of development.

- 2.20 The review also concluded that the release of the larger portion of Green Belt to the south of the A40 (and within the Northern Gateway boundary) could be justified (meeting the criteria of the NPPF11 and Core Strategy Policy CS4), but that the Pear Tree Farm parcel of Green Belt should be retained at this time, due to the lack of a defined boundary to the north.

Box 2.3 sets out policy NG1 of the adopted Northern Gateway Area Action Plan 2015.

Box 2.3: Policy NG1: Green Belt (Oxford City Council's Northern Gateway Area Action Plan, 2015)

The parcel of land bounded by the A40, the A34 embankment, Joe White's Lane, and the rear boundaries of properties along Godstow Road is taken out of the Green Belt and is allocated for development as part of the Northern Gateway site.

- 2.21 The new Oxford Local Plan 2036 is in the early stages of preparation and once adopted will replace the Core Strategy 2026 and will cover the plan period from 2016-2026. The first steps consultation for this plan, closed in August 2016, and a Consultation Statement was published in November 2016¹. Also to inform the preparation of the Local Plan a number of technical studies have been completed and are in the process of being undertaken. This includes the latest Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA, 2016).
- 2.22 The HELAA (2016) identified that Oxford has the capacity to provide 7,511 homes over the Plan period 2016-2036. However, this calculation included ambitious assumptions that Green Belt sites will be reviewed and released. The following sites (within or partially within the Green Belt) were identified as having potential for housing and are counted within the identified supply of 7,511:
- Wolvercote Papermill (HELAA site 067, partially within Green Belt)².
 - Green Belt land at Frideswide Farm (HELAA Site 107).
 - Green Belt land east of Redbridge Park and Ride (HELAA Site 113).
 - Park Farm, Marston (HELAA site 462).
- 2.23 The HELAA (2016) stated that in preparation of the Local Plan 2036, a review of potential Green Belt sites for housing will be required:
- 'The capacity identified includes sites currently designated as Green Belt which would be highly contentious and will need to be reviewed through the Local Plan 2036 process, exceptional circumstances test, and Examination in order to be allocated for housing.'*
- 2.24 This Green Belt study was therefore commissioned to assist the Council with the review of potential housing sites to meet Oxford's housing needs.

The Oxford Green Belt

- 2.25 Thomas Sharpe, a pioneer of British planning, first presented the idea of a Green Belt to protect Oxford's special physical and architectural character in 1948³. A decade later in 1958, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the former Berkshire County Council, with advice from amenity groups that included the Oxford Preservation Trust, instigated Green Belt policies. A tight inner Green Belt boundary was drawn around the city, and the Green Belt extended outwards for some five to six miles in every direction. Within it were a number of villages, most of which were 'washed over', meaning that Green Belt constraints on development applied equally within the village as outside it.

¹ This can be downloaded from the following website: https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/805/oxford_local_plan_2016-2036_first_steps_consultation_statement

² This site (which lies partially within the Green Belt) has not been assessed within this Study as it already has obtained planning permission for development.

³ Oxford Replanned, Thomas Sharpe (1948).

- 2.26 Some of the largest villages, including Kidlington, were excluded from the Green Belt, as 'inset villages'. A Public Inquiry into the proposals was held in 1961 and in 1975 the Green Belt was approved. This confirmed the 'outer' boundaries of the Green Belt but the 'inner' part was left as interim, pending the outcome of the preparation of the Structure and Local Plans.
- 2.27 In 1979 the first Structure Plan for Oxfordshire provided for the continuation of Green Belt around Oxford *"to preserve the special character"* of the City. The 1987 Structure Plan continued the Green Belt policy in policy EN5 which set out the purposes of the Oxford Green Belt more fully:
- "Protect the special character of Oxford and its Landscape Setting,*
1. *check the growth of Oxford and prevent ribbon development and urban sprawl,*
 2. *prevent the coalescence of settlements."*⁴
- 2.28 Final approval of the alterations to the Structure Plan was announced by the Secretary of State on 15 April 1987. This included provision for the inner boundaries of the Green Belt to be decided through Local Plans⁵.
- 2.29 By the early 1990s, a variety of rationales for using Green Belt to protect the setting and special character of historic towns had been developed in different places. Green Belt was being used to:
- *"protect the green and open fabric of such cities, keeping open extensive belts of land which form important parts of the setting of town centres, neighbourhoods or groups of buildings;*
 - *protect gateways, by keeping open approaches to a city, and providing a clear definition of town and country;*
 - *protect the wider setting of a city. This may comprise keeping open areas of higher ground which provide a green background to a City, and help give it a distinctive character; and*
 - *seek control over the size of a city, with a view to influencing the level of activity which requires to be accommodated in its historic core, thus protecting the character."*⁶
- 2.30 In approving the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 1992, the Secretary of State agreed with his predecessors (from 1979 and 1987) *"that the unique, historic character of Oxford and its setting in its natural environment should be conserved and protected, and the growth of the City should not continue indefinitely."*⁷
- 2.31 From the 1992 Oxfordshire Structure Plan up to the final Oxfordshire Structure Plan in 2011, Oxfordshire has combined the special character rationale for Green Belt with some of the other purposes. Paragraph 3.9 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 stated that:
- "The special character of Oxford and its landscape setting means not just the University and the views of the dreaming spires, but a much broader concept including the countryside around the City, the Cherwell and Thames floodplains and the relationship of nearby settlements to Oxford."*⁸
- 2.32 More recently, in the City Council's Core Strategy and Sites and Housing Plan Development Planning Documents (published in 2011 and 2013), Green Belt is described as *"an area of undeveloped land, where the planning policy is to keep it open to (amongst other purposes) prevent urban sprawl and preserve the setting and special character of Oxford and its landscape setting."*⁹ Paragraph 3.3.23 of the Core Strategy goes on to say, *"protection of the Green Belt therefore helps to retain the distinctive physical form of the city, where the river corridors running*

⁴ Topic Paper on the Oxford Green Belt, Cherwell Local Plan (1996) Cherwell District Council.

⁵ Local Plans such as The Oxford Fringe and Green Belt Local Plan (adopted March 1991), Central Oxfordshire Local Plan -Cherwell (1992) etc.

⁶ The Effectiveness of Green Belts, Department of Environment, London, (1993).

⁷ Topic Paper on the Oxford Green Belt, Cherwell Local Plan (1996) Cherwell District Council.

⁸ Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, Oxfordshire County Council (2005).

⁹ Sites and Housing Plan (2011 – 2026), Oxford City Council (2013).

either side of Oxford's historic core are an essential part of its special character and landscape setting."¹⁰

- 2.33 There is approximately 1,287ha of Green Belt within Oxford City which equates to 28% of the administrative area of Oxford and much of this land is flood plain. The boundary of the Green Belt is drawn tightly around the City's existing urban area and extends into Oxford from the west containing Port Meadow. Additionally, a strip of Green Belt follows the route of the River Cherwell and the southern extent of the River Thames, dividing through the City from north to south.

Oxford Green Belt Study

- 2.34 In light of concerns regarding shortage of land to meet objectively assessed need within the County, Oxfordshire County Council, on behalf of the Oxfordshire Local Authorities, commissioned LUC as independent experts in 2015 to assess the extent to which the land within the Oxford Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green Belts¹¹.
- 2.35 The study assessed the extent to which land within the Oxford Green Belt performs against each of the purposes of Green Belts as defined in the NPPF. It divided the Green Belt in to parcels for assessment purposes: broad areas of Green Belt and smaller parcels adjacent to settlements inset within the Green Belt (including Oxford City). The broad areas and land parcels were assessed as to whether their contribution to each of the Green Belt purposes was high/medium/low or no contribution. The Study emphasised that where a piece of land performs less well against the Green Belt purposes, this does not in itself justify release of the land from the Green Belt. Equally, even if an area of Green Belt scores strongly against one or more purposes, the NPPF does not suggest that a review of its boundaries would not be appropriate, if 'exceptional circumstances' are demonstrated.
- 2.36 LUC was asked not to advise on the suitability or potential of land in the Oxford Green Belt for development. However, the findings of the study were considered by the Oxfordshire Growth Board on 26 September 2016 as a strand of the work that informed the apportionment decision. In commissioning the study, it was clear that should individual Councils conclude that there were 'exceptional circumstances' for making alterations to the existing Green Belt boundaries, these changes, including any allocations of land for development, would be taken forward through the respective Local Plan-making process.
- 2.37 Most land was found to make a relatively strong contribution to one or more of the Green Belt purposes (as defined by the NPPF), but some parcels were assessed as making a weaker contribution.

¹⁰ Core Strategy 2026, Oxford City Council (2011).

¹¹ Oxford Green Belt Study, LUC (2015).

3 Assessment Methodology

Introduction

- 3.1 This Chapter sets out the key elements of the assessment approach and summarises the methodology that was used to undertake it. As outlined in **Chapter 1**, the study appraises eleven potential development sites within the City boundary against the five nationally defined purposes of the Green Belt and draws conclusions on the relative harm (or otherwise) to the Green Belt that may result from their potential release for development. The methodology is consistent with the previous strategic Green Belt study undertaken by LUC on behalf of five Oxfordshire authorities in 2015 and a Green Belt Study LUC prepared for Cherwell District Council to inform their appraisal of development options (2017). Two of the sites within this Oxford City Council study were also considered in the Cherwell Green Belt study (Pear Tree Farm and St Frideswide Farm¹²).
- 3.2 The eleven sites assessed were identified by Oxford City Council from the 2016 HELAA, and the subsequent call for sites in 2017. Much of the Green Belt land within Oxford is un-developable due to environmental constraints such as floodplain and SSSI designations. This study therefore focusses only on the sites/parcels within the Green Belt that are potentially developable (i.e. they do not have insurmountable environmental constraints) and are deliverable within the Plan period to 2036.
- 3.3 Para 47 (third bullet) of the NPPF states that Local Plans need to identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15. 'Developable' is defined in the footnotes of the NPPF as follows:
- "To be considered developable, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged."*
- 3.4 Sites were only included in the Study where there was explicit landowner interest in bringing forward the site, and no insurmountable environmental constraints.

Assessment Approach

- 3.5 This study involved five key elements of work, as follows:
- 1) Review of the eleven identified potential development sites and their sub-division (where appropriate) into smaller parcels of land to facilitate assessment.
 - 2) Assessment of the contribution of each land parcel makes to each of the Green Belt purposes identified in the NPPF.
 - 3) Assessment of the strength of potential alternative Green Belt boundaries.
 - 4) Assessment of the potential harm the release of land would have on the Green Belt taking account of its contribution to Green Belt purposes; effect on the wider integrity of the Green Belt and strength of revised boundaries.
 - 5) Identification of any mitigation measures that might reduce harm to the Green Belt and potential for beneficial uses of remaining Green Belt.

¹² Cherwell Green Belt Study (2017). The site references in the Cherwell Green Belt Study are as follows: Pear tree Farm PR211a and St Frideswade Farm PR211b).

- 6) Review of the outer Green Belt boundaries to identify whether there is justification for any other amendments to be made to the outer Green Belt boundary e.g. due to cartographic errors, or changes of circumstance since the boundaries were approved.
- 3.6 The extent of existing or potential beneficial use (i.e. for access, outdoor sport and recreation, landscape enhancement, visual amenity, biodiversity and improvement to damaged or derelict land) does not form part of the judgement of harm, as the NPPF makes it clear that beneficial uses are a desirable consequence of Green Belt designation rather than a reason for designation. It does however constitute part of the consideration of environmental factors that the Council will weigh up against Green Belt harm and other sustainability considerations before deciding on which areas of land may be suitable for release.
- 3.7 In keeping with the scope of this study, environmental and sustainability issues relating to potential on and off-site impacts, such as landscape quality, biodiversity value, flooding and traffic generation, were not assessed, but are recognised as key elements in any decision-making regarding the release of Green Belt land for housing development.
- 3.8 The key assessment elements and the format of the outputs are explained in more detail below.

1: Subdivision of Assessment Sites

- 3.9 The study assesses the potential harm to the Green Belt that could result from the release of the potential eleven sites. The sites vary considerably in size and form. A list of these sites is provided in **Table 3.1** below, and a map in **Figure 3.1**:

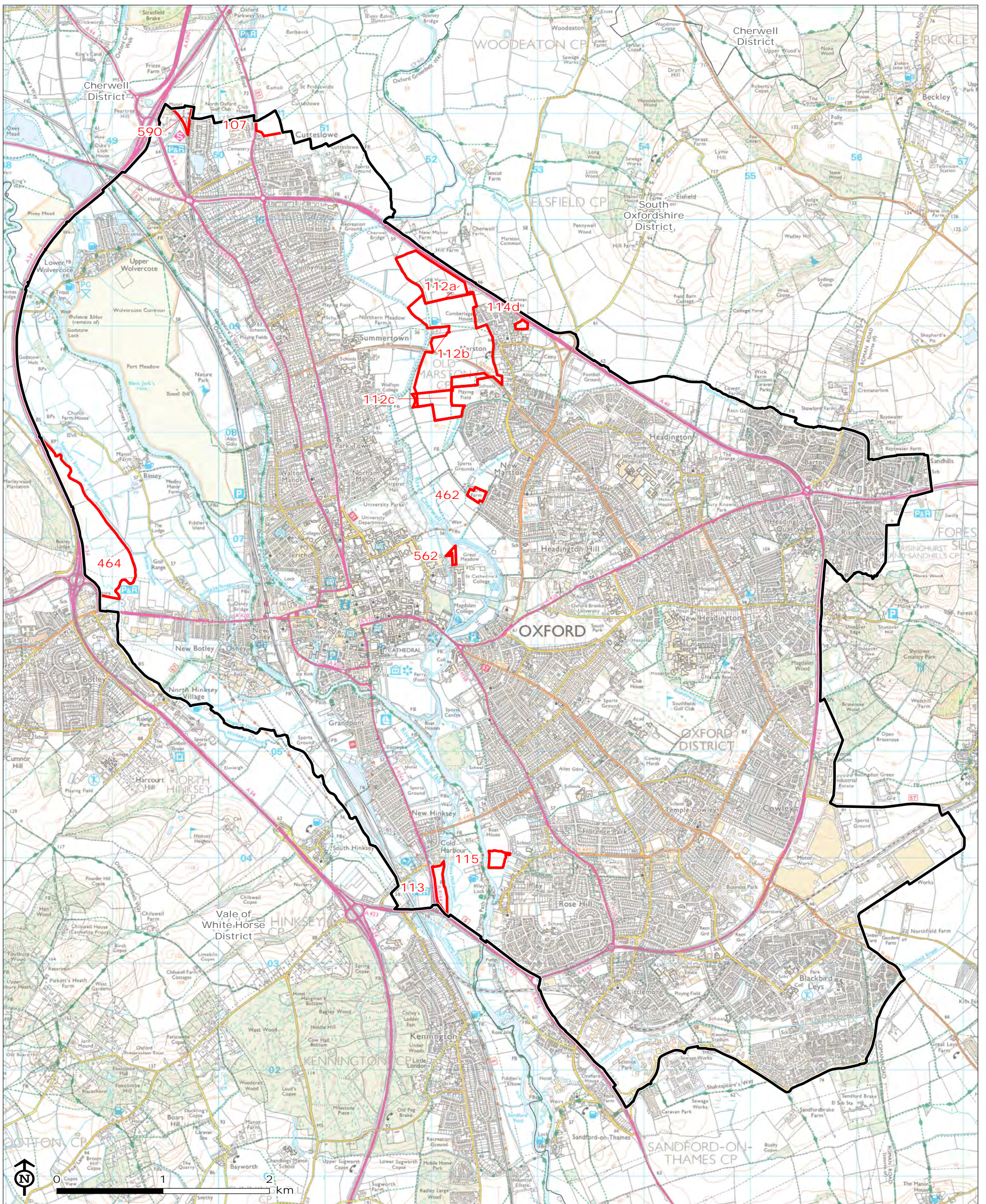
Table 3.1: Summary of Sites Assessed

HELAA Site no.	HELAA site name	Size (ha)
107	St Frideswide Farm	3.95 ha
112a	Cherwell Valley/Old Marston (includes Hill View Farm, Land at Mill Lane)	17 ha
112b	Old Marston	58.24 ha
112c	Land at Marston	10.71ha
113	East of Redbridge Park and Ride	3.64 ha
115	Land west of Meadow Lane	2.34 ha
462	Park Farm, Marston	1.56 ha
464	Land adjacent to Seacourt Park and Ride	37.25 ha
562	St Catherine's College	0.69 ha
590	Pear Tree Farm	2.03 ha
114d	Marston Paddock	0.78 ha

- 3.10 Where initial site analysis found that different parts of a site were likely to make different levels of contribution to Green Belt purposes, the site was subdivided into a number of separate assessment parcels.
- 3.11 Sites were typically subdivided into parcels on the basis of existing landscape features, such as field or road boundaries. Assessments of Green Belt at District level or above, typically select 'strong' features as parcel boundaries, in line with the NPPF's reference, at paragraph 85, to the need to *"define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent"*, but at this smaller scale it was sometimes necessary to define parcels with weaker physical boundaries.
- 3.12 It should be noted that in the case of 112b and 112c, the sites overlap each other. These sites and relevant parcels within the sites were therefore assessed more than once.

2: Assessment of Green Belt Contribution

- 3.13 The assessment analysed how each of the identified land parcels perform against each of the Green Belt purposes, with the exception of the fifth purpose - the encouragement of recycling of derelict and other urban land to assist in urban regeneration.
- 3.14 The fifth purpose was not assessed as part of this study as measuring accurately the extent to which individual parcels contribute to this process of recycling of derelict and other urban land is problematic. While it would be possible to undertake a spatial analysis of the supply brownfield land relative Green Belt parcels (at conurbation, authority, settlement, Housing Market Area or Strategic Green Belt Areas scales), there are significant concerns about the validity of any judgements based on the results. It is not possible to identify and measure a causal link between the policy restraint in a particular Green Belt parcel and the recycling of urban land elsewhere, in part reflecting the complexity of the development process, the locational requirements of different types of development and variations in the property market over time.



- Oxford district boundary
- Neighbouring district boundary
- Site boundary

Assessment of Oxford Green Belt

Overview of Green Belt Sites in Oxford



Figure 3.1

Source: ODC, OS

Map Scale @A3: 1:35,000

- 3.15 This Study therefore acknowledges that Purpose 5 is important and should be afforded equal weight with Purposes 1-4, but that it is not possible to assess the performance of Purpose 5 on a parcel-by-parcel assessment for the purpose of this small scale review.
- 3.16 All four assessed 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 physical elements, including boundary features, in either separating the parcel from, or connecting it to, built-up areas and the wider countryside.
- 3.17 The assessment criteria used to undertake the analysis are set out in the following tables for each respective purpose.

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

- 3.18 It is possible to argue that all Green Belt prevents the unrestricted sprawl of large built up urban areas, because that is its principal purpose as a strategic planning designation. However, the Study requires one area (or parcel) to be distinguished from another in terms of the extent to which they perform this purpose. This requires a detailed, site specific assessment against this strategic purpose.

Definition of 'Sprawl'

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

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

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

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

- 3.21 For the purpose of this Study, urban sprawl is defined according the Oxford Dictionary as *"spreading out of built form over a large area in an untidy or irregular way"*. Given this definition, land immediately adjacent to the large built up area is likely to contribute to this purpose, as it provides the boundary and zone of constraint to urban expansion. Nevertheless it should be recognised that sprawl as described can be equally damaging to the overall integrity of the Green Belt, wherever it may arise.

Assessment criteria

- 3.22 The land needs to have a relationship with a large built-up area to make a contribution to this purpose. Where land has a relationship with the edge of a large built-up area, the strength of its contribution will be greater if it has a stronger relationship with the surrounding countryside than with the urban area, and lacks urbanising influences. Conversely a parcel will make a weaker contribution to this purpose if it: has a stronger relationship with the adjacent large built-up area than with the wider countryside; lacks proximity to the built-up area; or is already developed.
- 3.23 **In line with the methodology for the Oxford Green Belt Study (2015), Oxford is the only settlement considered to constitute a large built-up area.**
- 3.24 Key questions asked in relation to purpose 1, the prevention of sprawl of large, built-up areas, are:
- Does the parcel lie in adjacent to, or in close proximity to the large built up area?
 - To what extent does the parcel contain existing urban sprawl?

Table 3.2 – Purpose 2 Settlements

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

* Eynsham is not an 'inset' settlement as it lies adjacent to the edge of the Green Belt. However it was agreed by the Steering Group of the Oxfordshire Green Belt Study (2015) that this settlement should be considered under Purpose 2.

3.27 Key questions asked in relation to purpose 2, preventing the coalescence of towns, are:

- Does the parcel lie directly between two settlements being considered under Purpose 2?
- How far apart are the towns being considered?
- Is there strong intervisibility between the towns due to topography etc?
- How much of a gap is required to avert perceived coalescence, taking into consideration the role of physical features in creating either separation or connectivity?
- How do the gaps between smaller settlements affect the perceived gaps between towns?


Purpose 2: Prevent neighbouring towns from merging

Development/land-use: less development = stronger contribution

Location: juxtaposed between towns = stronger contribution

Separating features: lack of features between towns = stronger contribution


Connecting features: stronger relationship between towns = stronger contribution

<p>Stronger Contribution</p>  <p>Weaker Contribution</p>	<p>The parcel plays an essential role in preventing the merging or erosion of the visual or physical gap between settlements. Development of this parcel would result in the physical or visual coalescence of settlements, or a significant narrowing of the physical gap with no physical elements to preserve separation</p> <p>Development of this parcel would result in little or no perception of the narrowing of the gap between settlements</p>
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Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

- 3.28 The contribution a parcel makes to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment can be directly related to the extent to which it displays the characteristics of countryside – i.e. a lack of dense and urbanising development, and land uses associated with countryside – and the extent to which it relates to the adjacent settlement and to the wider countryside.
- 3.29 PAS guidance states that:

“The most useful approach is to look at the difference between urban fringe – land under the influence of the urban area - and open countryside, and to favour the latter in determining which land to try and keep open, taking into account the types of edges and boundaries that can be achieved.”
- 3.30 **It is important to recognise that Green Belt does not function as a series of isolated parcels: the assessment of a defined parcel will reflect the nature of landscape elements or characteristics within that parcel but must also reflect its relationship with the wider Green Belt. This is consistent with the methodology used in the Oxford Green Belt Study (2015).**
- 3.31 Key questions asked in relation to purpose 3 are:
 - To what extent does the land exhibit the characteristics of the countryside and is open?
 - Disregarding the condition of land, are there urbanising influences within or adjacent which reduce the sense of it being countryside?
 - Does land relate more strongly to settlements or to the wider countryside?

Purpose 3: Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	
<p>Development/land-use: less urbanising land use and more openness = stronger contribution</p> <p>Location: further from settlement or from urban encroachment in neighbouring parcels = stronger contribution</p> <p>Separating features: stronger relationship with countryside than settlement = stronger contribution</p> <p>Connecting features: weaker relationship between settlement and countryside = stronger contribution</p>	
<p>Stronger Contribution</p>  <p>Weaker Contribution</p>	<p>The land parcel displays the characteristics of the countryside, is open and there is little or no sense of urban encroachment from either within the parcel, or from neighbouring land. The parcel relates strongly to the wider countryside and has a sense of separation from the settlement. Development would represent encroachment into the countryside</p> <p>The parcel is too lacking in openness to be considered countryside, or has few countryside characteristics within it and lacks relationship with the wider Green Belt countryside</p>

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

- 3.32 Whilst many settlements have historic elements, this Green Belt purpose is only relevant to settlements of a certain size – i.e. towns – which retain a historic character connected to surrounding landscape elements, and which it is impractical to protect solely through

paragraph 85), and will in turn affect the impact that release of the parcel might have on adjacent Green Belt (as set out above).

- 3.37 Features considered to constitute strong potential Green Belt boundaries include natural features such as substantial watercourses and water bodies, and man-made features such as motorways, A and B roads and railway lines. Less prominent or less permanent features such as walls, woodland, hedgerows, tree lines, streams and ditches are considered to constitute moderate strength boundaries, and edges lacking clear definition on the ground form weaker boundaries.
- 3.38 The suitability of an alternative Green Belt boundary also depends on its relationship with existing boundaries in terms of the resulting form. An overly extended or convoluted shape is likely to cause greater harm than a simpler, more direct alignment in terms of its impact on the relationship between built development and open countryside. For each of the assessment parcels, commentary is provided on the nature of the existing boundary and any suggested alternatives.

4: Assessment of Harm to Green Belt

- 3.39 With reference to the size, shape and location of the assessment parcel, the nature of its boundaries, and its relationship with other elements that form boundaries within the landscape, judgements were made concerning the impact that the release of the parcel would have on the contribution (or integrity) of adjacent Green Belt.
- 3.40 Combining this judgement with the assessment of the parcel's contribution to Green Belt purposes, and taking into consideration boundary strength and potential for mitigation, a rating was given for the level of harm that can be expected to result from the release of the parcel. Consideration was then given as to whether there are any scenarios for release of less than the full parcel that would result in reduced harm to the Green Belt.
- 3.41 The assessment of potential harm was given as a rating, using a 5-point scale (of low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high and high) using professional judgement to weigh up the parcel assessment comments. Absolute definitions equating Green Belt harm to suitability for release cannot be given. However, where a high degree of potential harm to the Green Belt has been identified, this relates to land which makes a strong contribution to the Green Belt purposes and/or its release for development would have a significant effect on the integrity of the surrounding Green Belt. Vice versa, where a low potential for harm to occur has been identified, this relates to land which does not make a strong contribution to the Green Belt purposes and its release would not have a significant effect on the integrity of the surrounding Green Belt.
- 3.42 Detailed commentary is provided in the assessment on how the judgements relating the level of harm have been made. The harm ratings and accompanying comments are intended to contribute alongside judgements regarding environmental and sustainability impacts, and potential housing yields, to aid final decisions regarding the suitability of release of Green Belt land.

5: Identification of Potential Mitigation

- 3.43 If decisions are made to remove land from the Green Belt, the Council should seek to minimise any harm to the remainder of the Green Belt. This will include careful masterplanning of development to ensure that harm is minimised, ensuring Green Belt boundaries are defined, and that positive uses for the wider Green Belt are secured. This study provides guidance on these issues. **Chapter 5** of this report sets out:
- what 'design principles' could be applied to parcels of land that have been identified as potentially suitable for release from the Green Belt (i.e. to minimise potential harm to the Green Belt).

- what opportunities there are to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, i.e. to provide access and recreation opportunities; to retain and enhance landscapes, enhance visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
- 3.44 The study does not consider measures which might reduce environmental harm, or improve sustainability.
- 3.45 Beneficial use is considered in terms of the possible enhancements noted in NPPF paragraph 81 (see **Chapter 2** above) including:
- Improving access.
 - Improving opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation.
 - Retaining and enhancing landscapes.
 - Improving visual amenity.
 - Increasing biodiversity.
 - Improving damaged and derelict land.

Output Format

- 3.46 The assessment findings for Tasks 1-4 are presented in **Chapter 4** on a site by site basis. For each site the following information is provided:
- The site reference number, name and size.
 - A map of the site, in context with any nearby settlements – this map also shows the development constraints, listed in **Paragraph 3.4** above, which may have a significant impact on development potential.
 - An aerial photograph covering the same area, to illustrate the nature of land cover.
 - A brief description of the site in terms of its land use, boundaries and relationship with defined urban areas (i.e. settlements outside of Green Belt, or inset within but excluded from it).
 - Comments on the relationship between the site, settlements and countryside, to support the subdivision of the site for assessment purposes and the judgements made in the assessment of contribution to Green Belt.
 - A list of parcels into which the site was divided; a site which requires no subdivision has a parcel reference that matches the site reference, whereas a site which is subdivided is appended with an additional letter (e.g. 112a-1). Cross-reference is made to any other sites under which the same land is assessed.
- 3.47 For each parcel within a site the following is provided:
- A map showing the location of the parcel, in the context of the site and any adjacent parcels.
 - A representative photograph of the parcel.
 - Text assessing the contribution of the parcel to each of the Green Belt purposes.
 - Text assessing the strength of any potential alternative Green Belt boundaries – either the parcel boundaries or sub-divisions within it – with reference to any relevant boundary features outside of the parcel that are relevant to its relationship with settlements or with the wider Green Belt.
 - Judgement of the level of harm that would result from the removal of the parcel, or any strategic subdivision of it, from the Green Belt, taking into consideration the impact of release on the contribution of adjacent Green belt. Different release options were assessed as separate ‘scenarios’.
- 3.48 To conclude the assessment of each site an assessment is given for harm that would result from the release of the whole site and where relevant a map is provided showing the harm ratings given to each parcel/sub-parcel (if they have been identified), colour-coded by rating.

4 Summary of Findings

Introduction

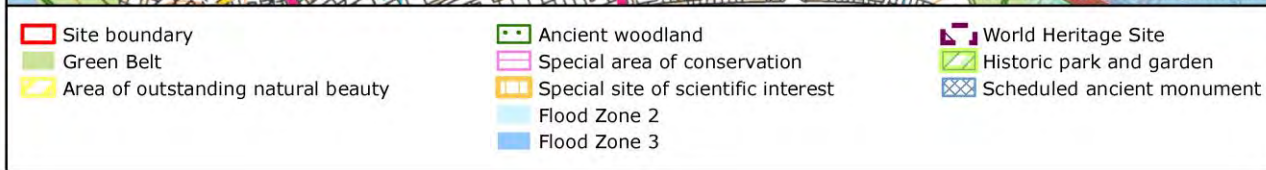
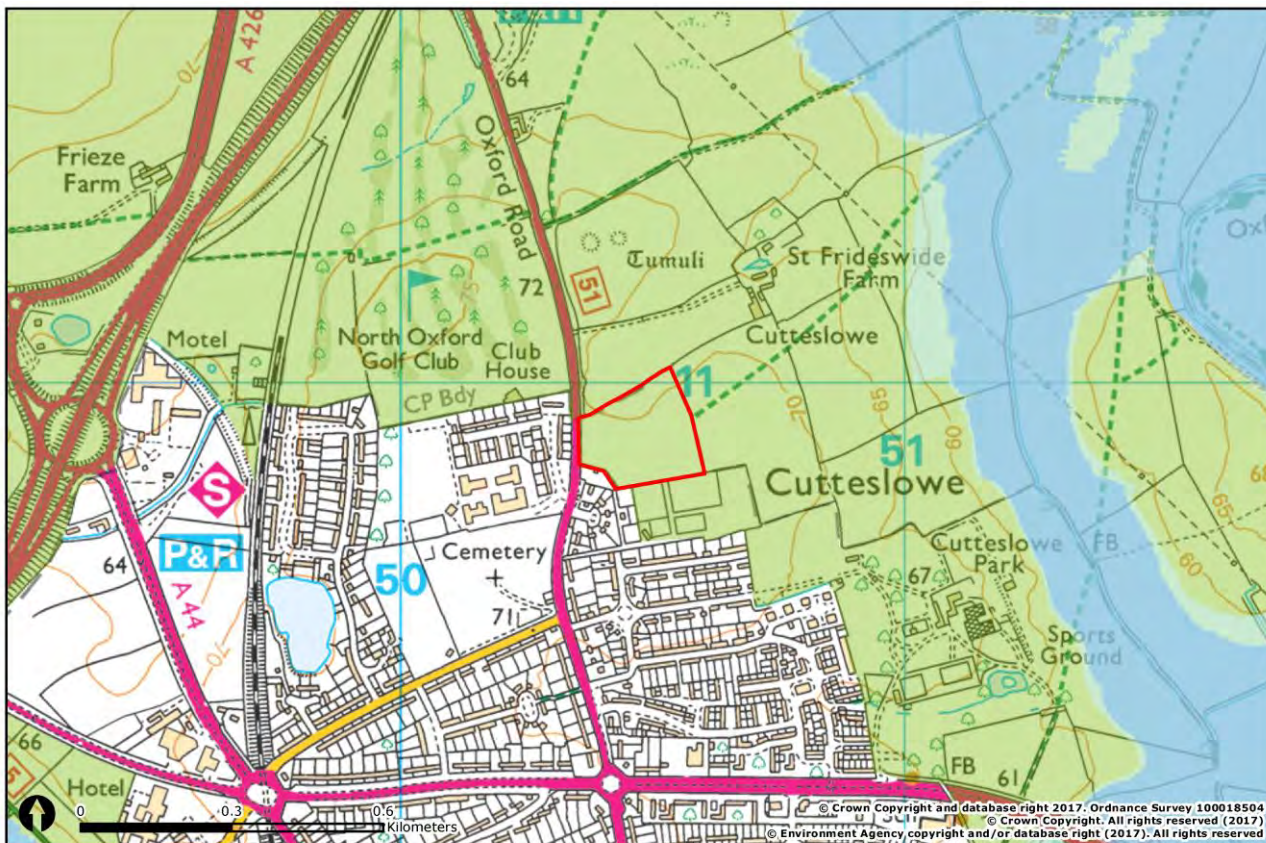
- 4.1 The following chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the assessment and consideration of the potential development sites for accommodating housing within the Oxford City Council area. The assessment does not take into account other constraints (e.g. environmental, landscape, heritage, infrastructure constraints) which may affect any decisions by the City Council about the suitability or otherwise of potential locations for housing. The assessments presented purely consider Green Belt issues alone which is explained in more detail below.

Role of Green Belt Harm Assessment

- 4.2 Consideration of the harm to Green Belt purposes that could result from the release of land for housing development is an essential aspect of the decision-making process; however it is important to recognise that consideration of Green Belt harm sits alongside environmental and sustainability considerations as one of three key elements of that decision-making process. Whilst the ideal would be to minimise harm to the Green Belt, it may in practice be that locations which will result in the least *overall* harm, will in fact be ones which do significantly harm the Green Belt. Planning judgement in the Local Plan process will be needed to weigh up the relative importance of each key element in any given location, and to determine whether the benefit of accommodating Oxford's housing need outweighs the overall harm caused in achieving it.
- 4.3 It is also important to recognise the strategic nature of Green Belt. The extents of the Oxford Green Belt do not reflect any detailed analysis of environment or sustainability of growth but rather a more generalised desire to constrain urbanisation of the landscape. Decisions that informed the delineation of the Green Belt around Oxford were made in light of local development pressures identified at that time.
- 4.4 The strategic nature of Green Belt, and recognition of local/regional variations in the extent of development and nature of open land in between settlements, is reflected in the absence from national planning policy of any definitions to accompany its defined purposes. Thus, with reference to the purposes stated in paragraph 80 of the NPPF, there is no definition of what constitutes a 'large built up area', a 'town', a 'historic town' or 'countryside', and variations in local planning authorities' interpretations of these are evident in Local Plans and/or in reviews of Green Belt that have been carried out.
- 4.5 In light of the above, this assessment of harm to Green Belt purposes does not draw conclusions as to where land should be released to accommodate housing development, but identifies variations in the harm that would be caused to Green Belt purposes.

Findings of the Assessment

- 4.6 The results of the site assessments are presented below. The findings are then summarised in **Table 4.1**.
- 4.7 It is important to recognise that this site-based assessment does not reflect the cumulative impact of the release of multiple sites, or parts of sites, on the Green Belt as a whole.



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	107	Green Belt land at St Frideswide Farm	Site size (ha):	3.95
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Site description

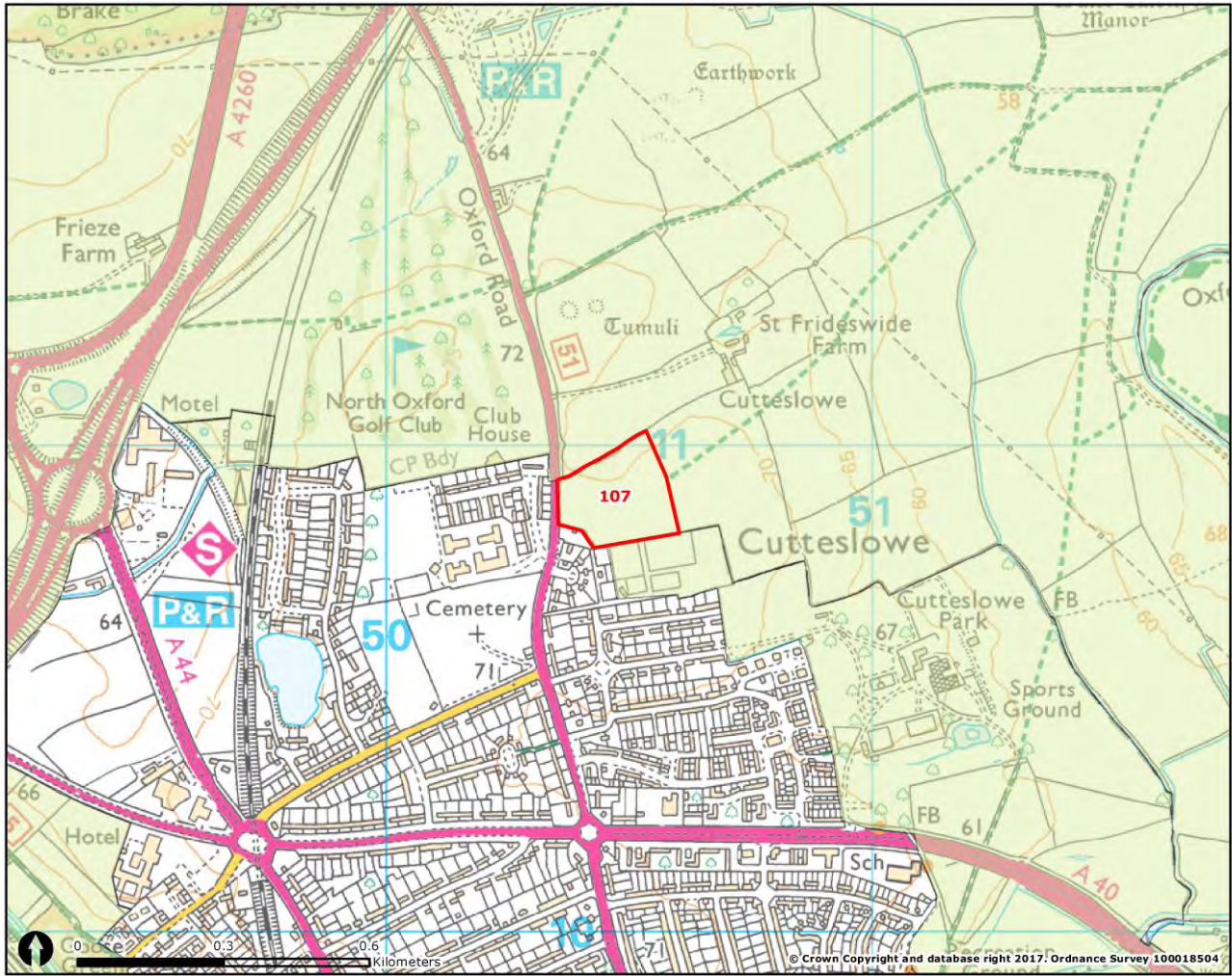
Farmland adjacent to the urban edge along the A4165 and the northern edge of Oxford at Cutteslowe. The site is approximately two-thirds of an arable field, with a hedged boundary to the north but no physical definition of the site edge to the east, where it follows the district boundary. There is no development within the site.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The site adjoins just a small number of dwellings east of the A4165, but also faces the urban edge to the west of the main road. Hockey pitches and tennis courts abut most of the southern edge of the site: several tennis courts together with a car park are included within the defined urban area at the western end of the complex, whilst the remaining courts and pitches are designated part of the Green Belt but have fencing and lighting that gives them some urbanising influence. The site has no significant separation from extensive and visually open arable farmland to the north and east, and lies on ground which slopes gently downhill towards the River Cherwell.

Parcels

The site is assessed as a single parcel of land. Land to the north and east, within Cherwell District, has also come forward for consideration in a call for sites process as part of a Partial Review of the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1.



Looking south-east from the A4165 entrance to St Frideswide Farm.
Oxford City Green Belt Study

Site:	107	Green Belt land at St Frideswide Farm	Site size (ha):	3.95
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Parcel:	107	Parcel area (ha):	3.95
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel lies adjacent to the large, built-up area of Oxford. There is no strong separation from the urban edge at Cutteslowe, but the tennis courts and hockey pitches represent a transition into this visually open, valley landscape. There is no development within the parcel at present, and there are no strong barrier features to contain development, but release of this parcel would not extend the urban edge further north than housing to the west of the A4165, or any further east than the existing edge of Cutteslowe, so perception of development as sprawl would be limited.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel occupies a relatively small part of the gap between Oxford and Kidlington. Any development is likely to be very exposed in this visually open landscape, but little more so than the existing settlement edge.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	This parcel forms part of a broad valley with consistent land use and field patterns. Development here would constitute a degree of encroachment, but would still relate strongly to the urban form.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The Cherwell valley is an important element in Oxford's wider historic setting, but the contribution of the western fringe of the valley to its character is more limited than the contribution of the lower valley floor in this area.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

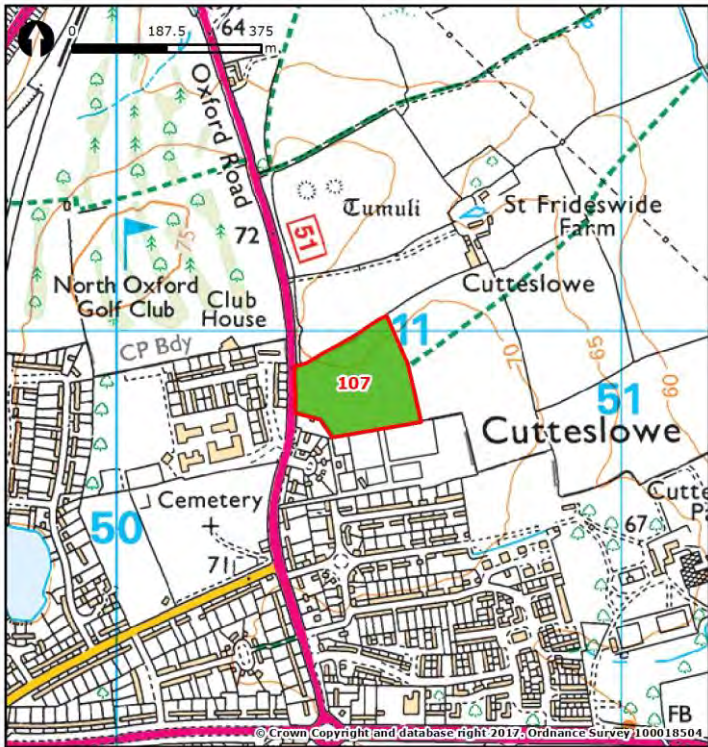
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

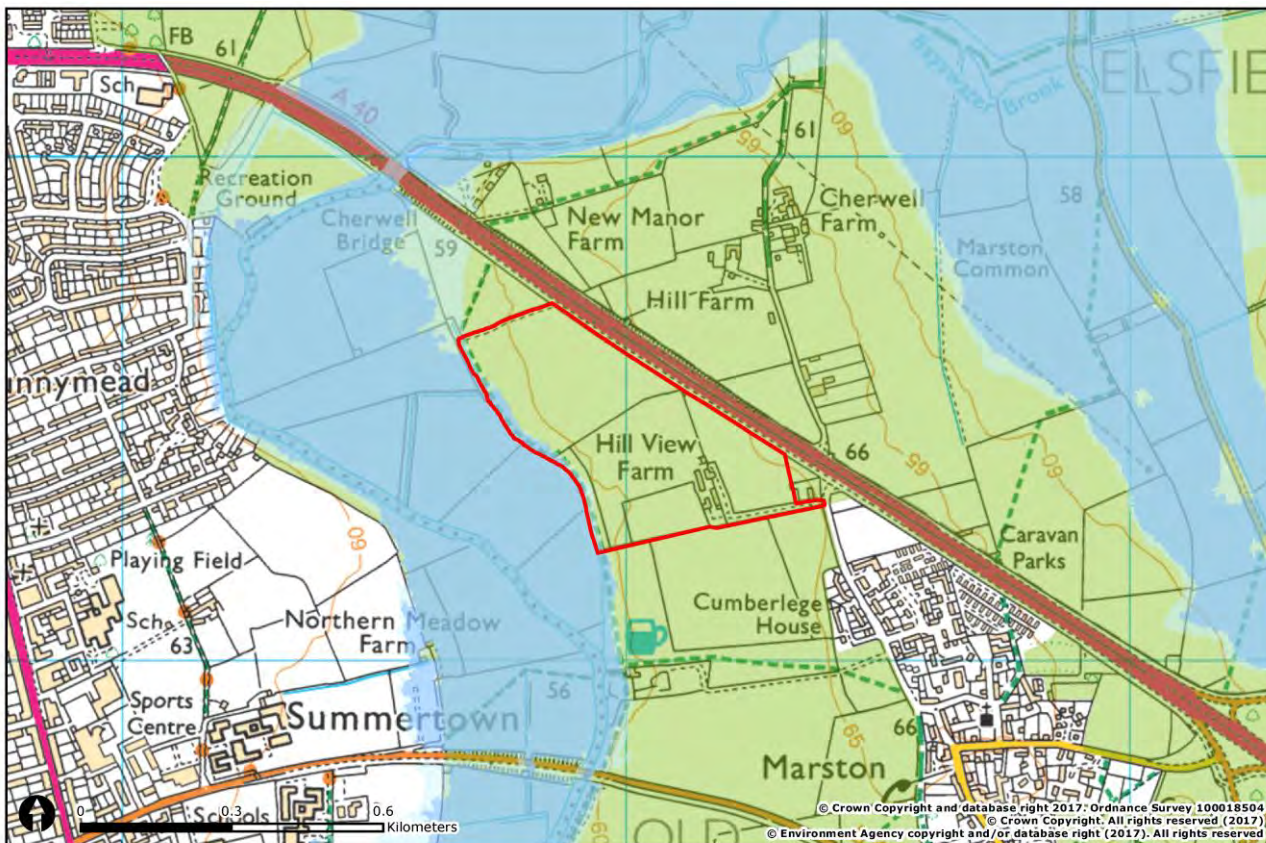
The outer edges of the parcel are hedgerows, which do not constitute strong boundary features, but the existing settlement edge at Cutteslowe is not strongly defined either.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the whole parcel – assuming that any development is low enough to avoid significant visual impact on the gap between the settlement edge and Oxford Parkway.	The parcel relates strongly to the wider Cherwell valley countryside, but also to the settlement edge. Release of this land would constitute encroachment on the countryside but the size of the parcel and its links with the existing urban form are such that the impact on the integrity of the wider Green Belt would be limited.	Moderate

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Site boundary | Ancient woodland | World Heritage Site |
| Green Belt | Special area of conservation | Historic park and garden |
| Area of outstanding natural beauty | Special site of scientific interest | Scheduled ancient monument |
| | Flood Zone 2 | |
| | Flood Zone 3 | |



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	112a	Green Belt land at Cherwell Valley/Old Marston	Site size (ha):	17.00
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Site description

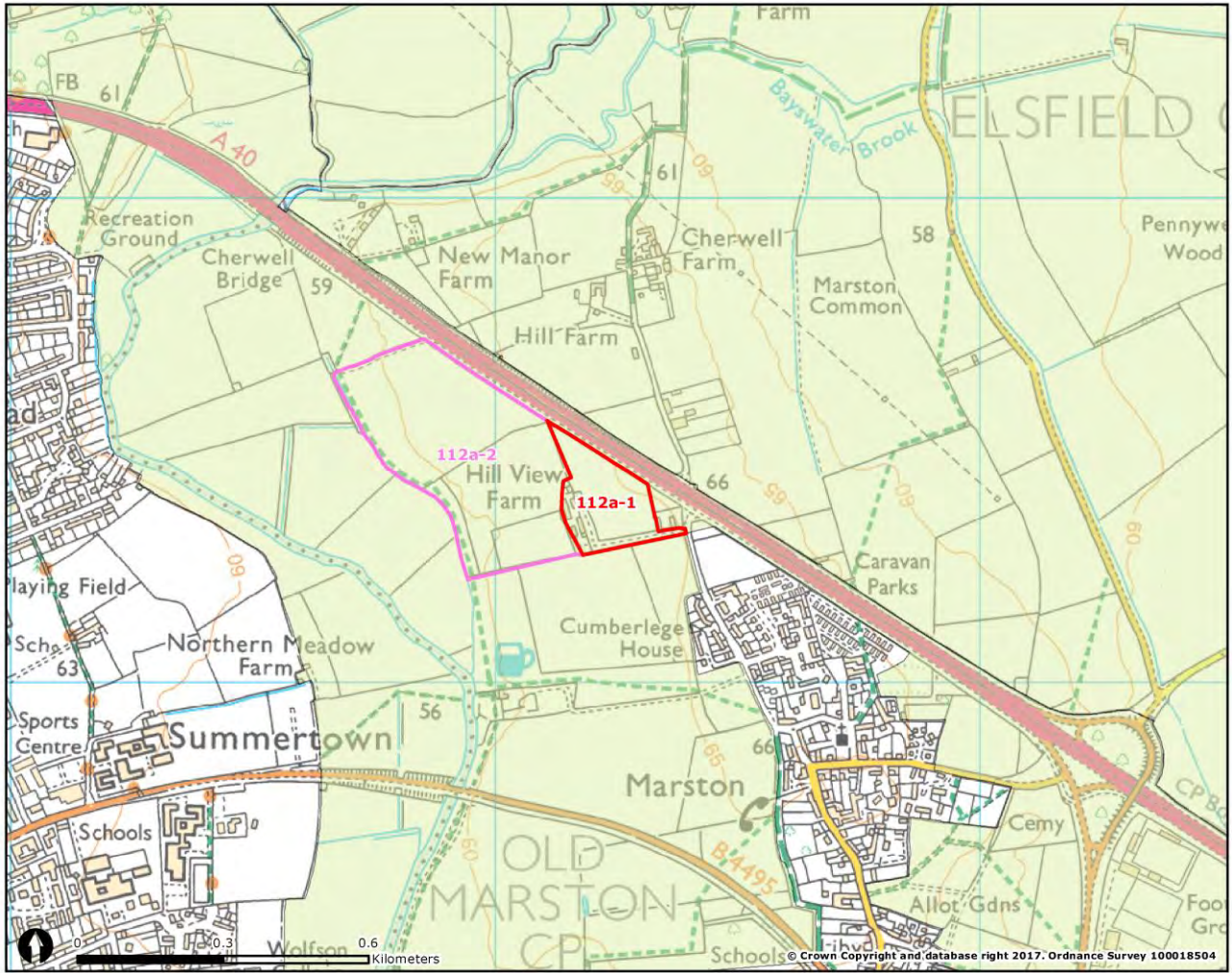
The site consists of three grazing pastures and, located between two of them, agricultural buildings associated Hill View Farm. The site adjoins the defined urban edge at its south-eastern corner, on Mill Lane, next to Hill View Farm house and an associated property, which are in the Green Belt but outside of the site. The A40 Northern Bypass defines the north-eastern edge of the site; there is a small field, with a well-hedged boundary, to the north-west; and hedgerows separate the site from similar farmland to the south. A hedgerow and drainage channel, which also mark the edge of the Thames floodplain, define the western boundary.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

There is a slight detachment between the site and the existing urban settlement edge, as allotments form the northern tip of the defined urban area. However the buildings to the south of the allotments, the Bradlands development, are prominent three-storey flats, so there is no significant separation between Marston and the site. The fields form part of a sizeable belt of similar hedged farmland and riverside meadow that frames the River Cherwell, but the A40 creates physical and visual separation from the wider Cherwell Valley to the north, and gives the site a more peripheral role than would otherwise be the case. The landform slopes gently down from Marston towards the Cherwell, levelling out in the floodplain to the west of the site, and the sense of separation from the urban edge gradually increases with distance from it. The buildings of Hill View Farm are not considered to represent an urbanising influence, and are an appropriate use of Green Belt land.

Parcels

The site is assessed as two parcels: 112a-1 is the field nearest Marston, together with the farm buildings, and 112a-2 is the two fields closer to the river. It is assumed that 112a-2 would not be released in isolation, given the extent of its separation from the urban edge.



Looking north-east from public footpath; the buildings of Hill View Farm are to the left of the view.

Site:	112a	Green Belt land at Cherwell Valley/Old Marston	Site size (ha):	17.00
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Parcel:	112a-1	Parcel area (ha):	3.47
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

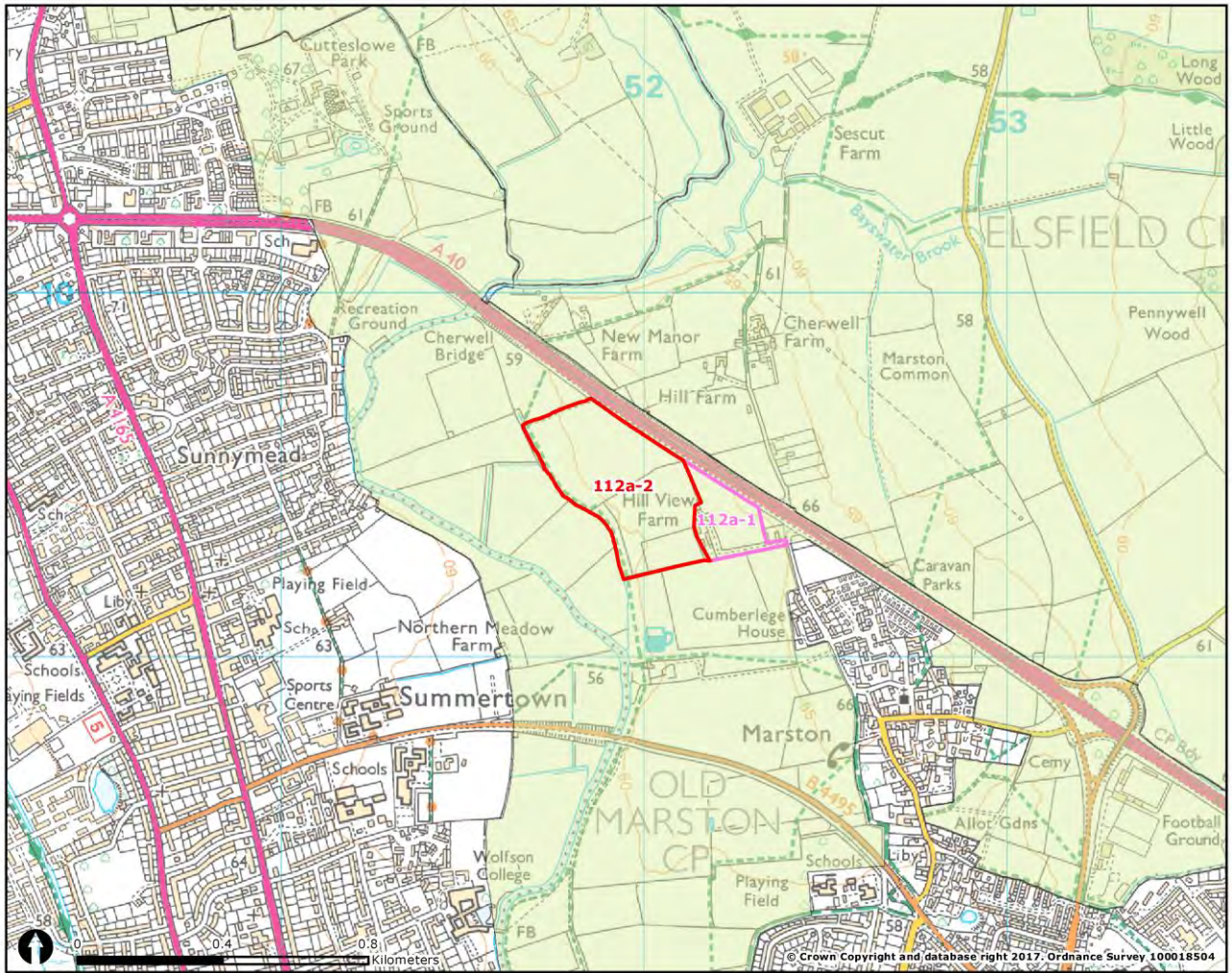
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent an expansion of the urban form, with the existing 'urban village' of Marston occupying a low ridge between the Cherwell and Bayswater Brook, but the northward containment provided by the A40 limits the extent to which this would be perceived as unconstrained sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel does not represent a significant proportion of the settlement gap between Marston and the Sunnymead suburb to the west of the Cherwell. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the field forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged, mostly pasture fields, but proximity to the settlement edge means that there is some urban influence, and the A40 also serves to limit this field's relationship with the wider countryside.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character, but this parcel is peripheral within that area. The river itself meanders westwards along the edge of Sunnymead, so the parcel is some distance from the valley floor floodplain, but the north-south orientation of the river to the south means that high buildings would still encroach on the perceived openness of the valley.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The hedges along the western and southern edges of the parcel are not strong boundary features. Mill Lane is a stronger boundary, but it does not mark a consistent Green Belt edge, with inset housing on Cumberlege Close, c.130m to the south, located to the west of the road. Use of the A40 as the northern boundary would be consistent with the existing Green Belt edge at Marston.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of parcel 112a-1, assuming any development would not be significantly visible from the valley floor to the south.	Release of the parcel would represent countryside encroachment and a degree of sprawl. Taller buildings could potentially have a greater impact on the perceived openness of the valley, but otherwise harm to the wider Green Belt would be limited, with the A40 forming a strong edge to the north and a considerable area of open land remaining to the west. The new boundary would however be weaker than the existing one. Release would weaken the contribution of the field to the south (assessed as parcel 112b-1), by increasing its containment, and there would also be little justification for retaining the Green Belt status of Hill View Farm house and the adjacent dwelling.	Moderate



Looking north from public footpath along tree line on western edge of parcel.

Site:	112a	Green Belt land at Cherwell Valley/Old Marston	Site size (ha):	17.00
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Parcel:	112a-2	Parcel area (ha):	13.53
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent a significant westward expansion of the urban form, with the existing 'urban village' of Marston occupying a low ridge between the Cherwell and Bayswater Brook, although the northward containment provided by the A40 and the presence of floodplain to the west would serve as a constraint to further sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel occupies around 50% of the settlement gap between Marston and the Sunnymead suburb to the west of the Cherwell. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, but this would nonetheless represent a significant narrowing of the gap.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the fields forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged, mostly pasture fields. Urban influence is limited at this distance from the settlement edge. The A40 serves to limit the parcel's relationship with the wider countryside to the north.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. The river itself meanders westwards along the edge of Sunnymead, so the parcel is above the valley floor floodplain, but loss of openness here would still be detrimental to this purpose. The north-south orientation of the river to the south means that high buildings would have a particularly strong impact on the perceived containment of the valley.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

Use of the A40 as the northern boundary would be consistent with the existing Green Belt edge at Marston, and the treed hedgerow along the western edge of the parcel is strengthened as a boundary feature by its coincidence with the floodplain edge, but the southern boundary hedgerows would constitute a weaker edge. Release of the parcel would result in a significant lengthening of the Green Belt boundary, containing an area that relates poorly to the existing settlement form of Marston. The hedgerow dividing the parcel's two fields would also be a relatively weak boundary.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of 112a-2 in conjunction with release of 112a-1.	Expansion of Marston this far west would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford. It would relate badly to the existing settlement form, and would therefore constitute urban sprawl. Release of just the easternmost field would not have significantly less impact on Green Belt purposes.	High

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of site

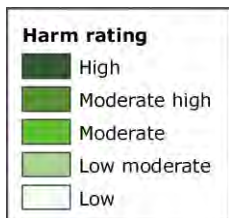
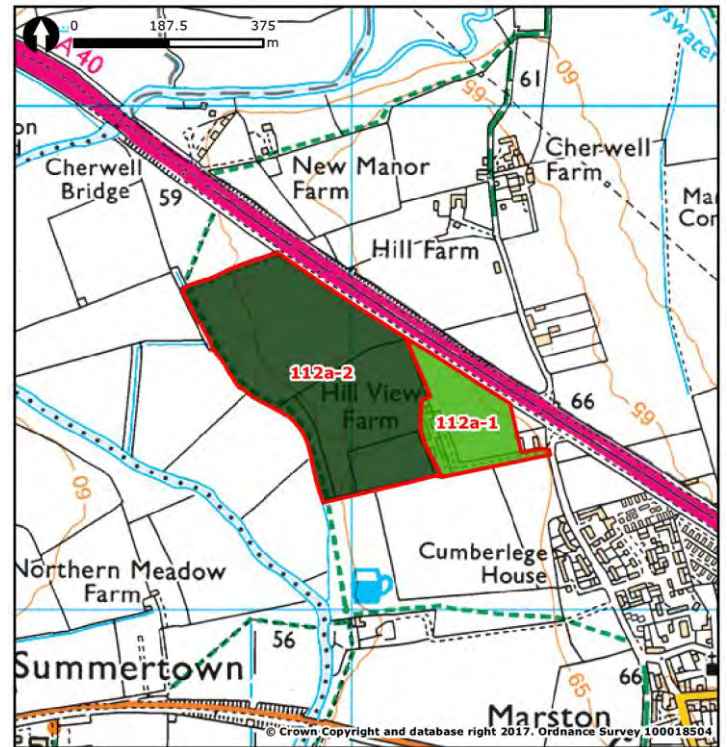
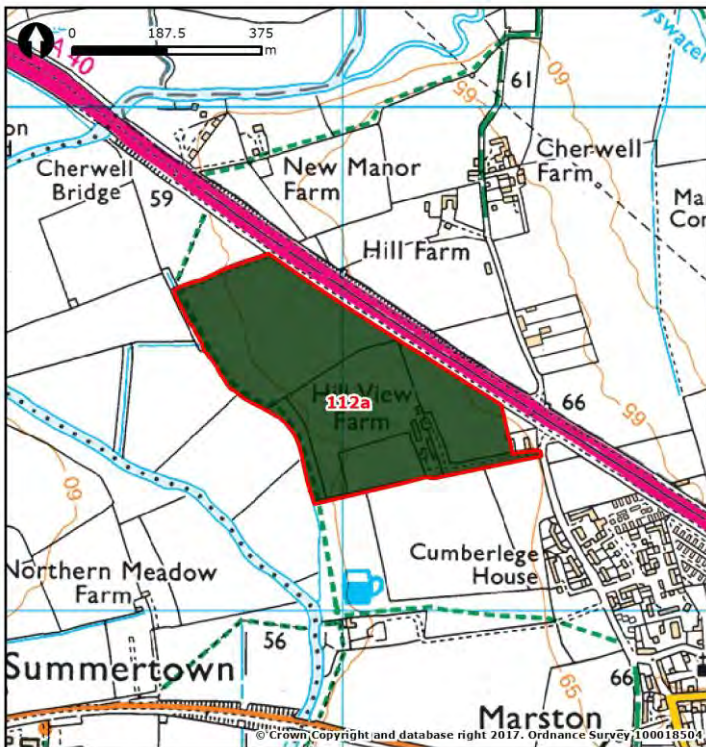
Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the site as a whole.	Open land in the vicinity of the River Cherwell is an important aspect of Oxford's special character, and the site's contribution to Green Belt purposes is considered to increase with distance from the settlement edge.	High

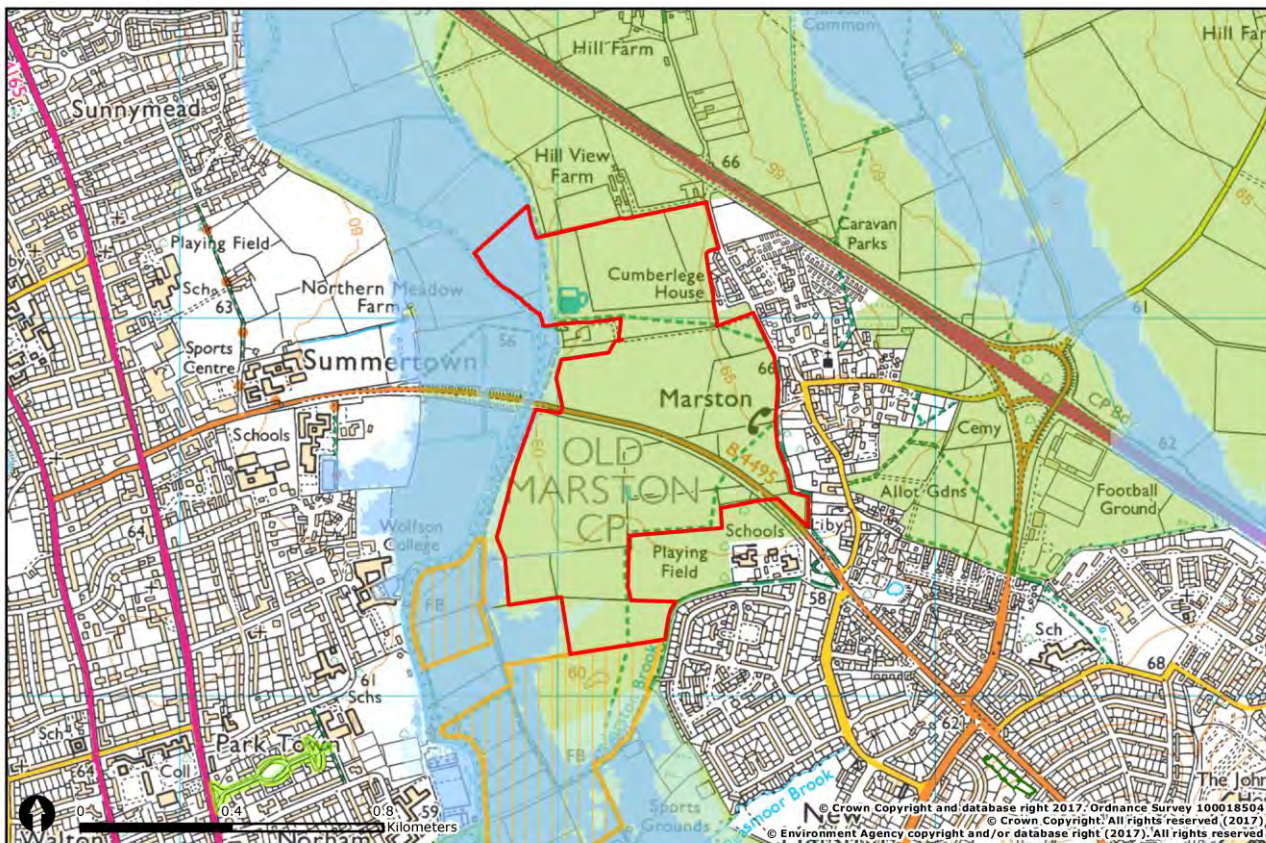
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of site

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of parcel 112a-1 in combination with parcel 112b-1.	Release of 112b-1 in isolation is assessed as resulting in low-moderate harm to Green Belt purposes. Release of both sites would not result in any greater downhill expansion of the urban area of Marston than would be the case were only one to be released, and the Cumberlege Close housing development is a containing feature to the south.	Moderate

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site

Harm to Green Belt resulting from partial release of site





- Site boundary
- Green Belt
- Area of outstanding natural beauty
- Ancient woodland
- Special area of conservation
- Special site of scientific interest
- Flood Zone 2
- Flood Zone 3
- World Heritage Site
- Historic park and garden
- Scheduled ancient monument



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Site description

A sizeable area of hedged arable and pastoral farmland, occupying gently sloping land between the River Cherwell and the urban edge at Marston. Hedgerows define the northern and southern edges of the site, beyond which lie similar fields. There is no built development within the site, but Marston Ferry Road bisects it from east to west. The Victoria Arms, a riverside pub accessed from Mill Lane, is excluded from the site.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

Marston sits on a low north-south ridge, which gradually slopes down to the River Cherwell, so landform does not play a strong role in separating settlement from countryside. However Back Lane, a double-hedged green lane, forms a strong historic settlement boundary along much of the length of the site. The site forms part of a sizeable belt of similar hedged farmland and riverside meadow that frames the River Cherwell, creating an open, rural space that connects the broader countryside to the north of Oxford with the city centre. Sense of separation from the urban edge gradually increases with distance from Marston. Marston Ferry Road has some adverse impact in this respect, but it does not compromise openness. Land to the south of the road has a relationship with New Marston rather than Marston Village.

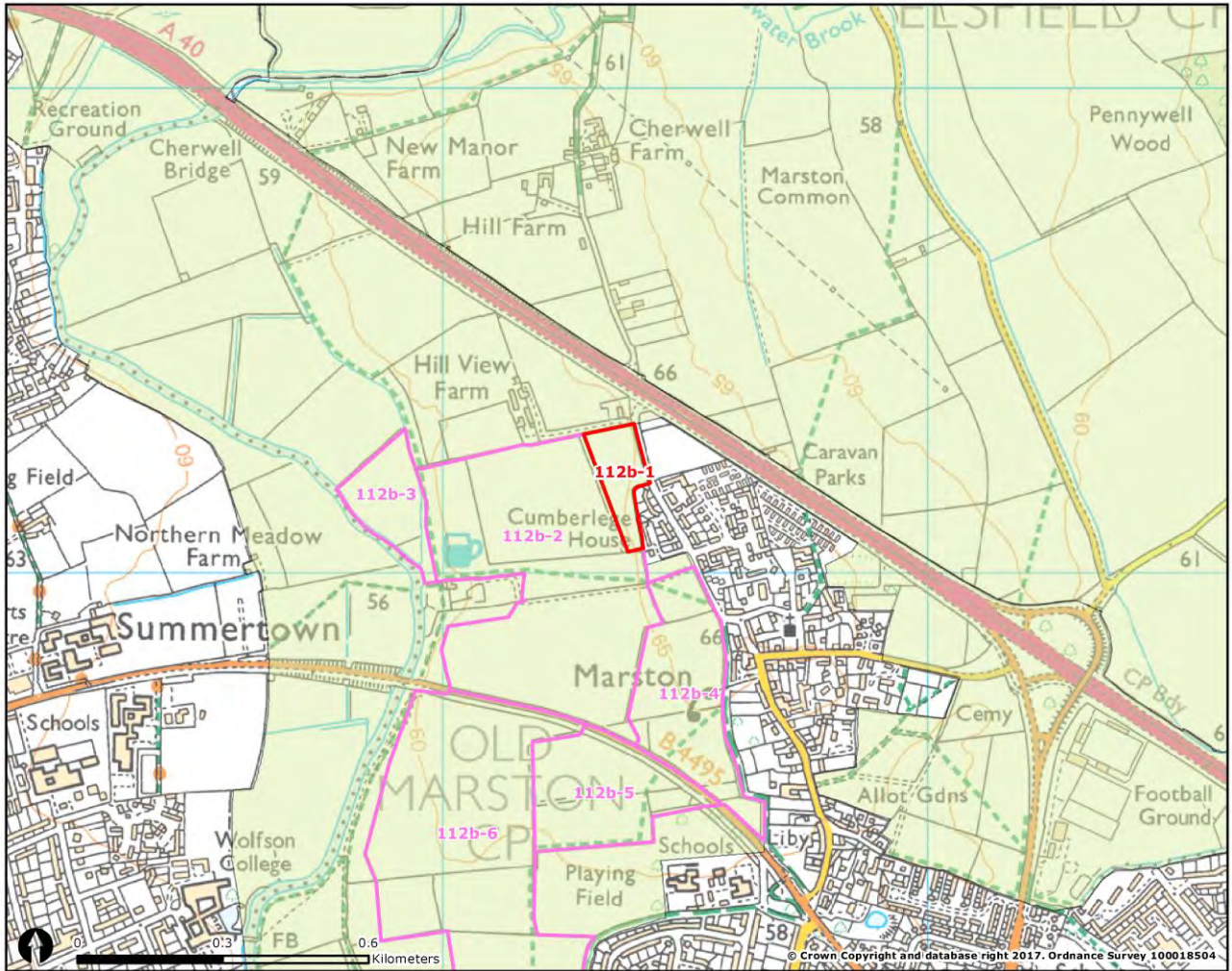
Parcels

The site is subdivided into 6 parcels, to reflect variations in terms of proximity to either the settlement edge or the river, and the subdivision caused by Marston Ferry Road:

- 112b-1 is a small field that wraps around the north and west of Cumberlege Close, a housing development to the west of Mill Lane;
- 112b-2 consists of fields to the north of Marston Ferry Road that are set back from the settlement edge but occupy the rest of the site's breadth, down to the River Cherwell;
- 112b-3 is the only field within the site that lies within the Cherwell's floodplain: there is a distinct drop from the edge of parcel 112b-2 down to this field, which is located between the river and a tributary stream;
- 112b-4 is a series of fields along the edge of Marston, between Cumberlege Close and Marston Ferry Road;
- 112b-5 is two east-west orientated fields to the south of Marston Ferry Road, with the southernmost adjacent to the playing fields of St Nicholas' Primary School. The school is part of the defined urban area, but the playing fields are in the Green Belt;
- 112b-6 consists of two whole fields and half of a third (where the site boundary has been drawn to exclude an area that is mostly within the floodplain), lying to the west of 112b-5.

The southern end of the site is contiguous with land owned by Brasenose College that has been put forward as a separate site: part of 112b-5 is therefore also assessed as Brasenose-1, and part of 112b-6 as Brasenose-2.

It is assumed that those parcels comprising the fields that abut the western side of the site - 112b-2, 112b-3 and 112b-6 - would not be released in isolation, given the extent of their separation from the urban edge.



Looking north from public footpath near Mill Lane (the parcel is beyond the fence line)
 Oxford City Green Belt Study 39 May 2017

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-1	Parcel area (ha):	1.84
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

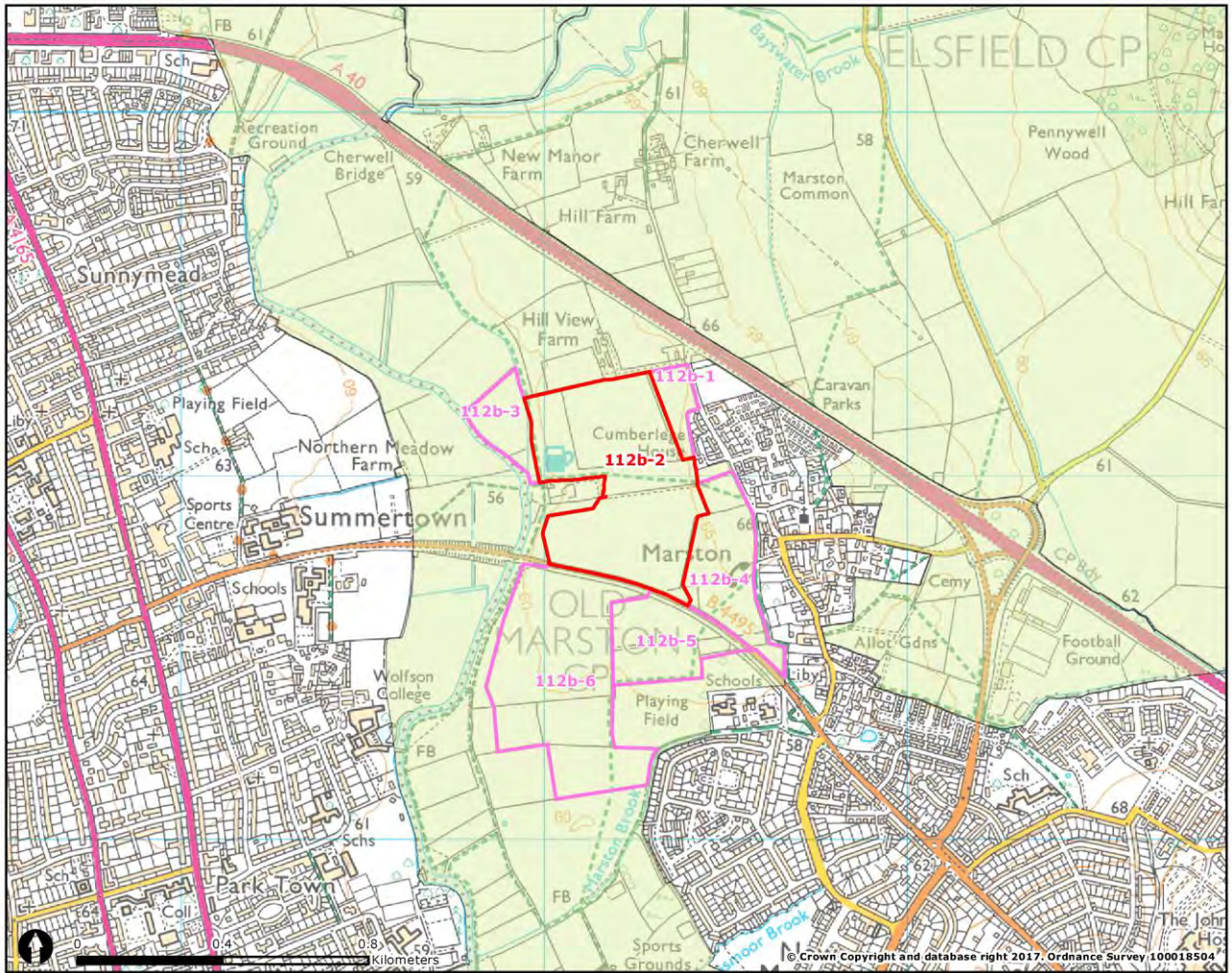
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development of this parcel would not represent a significant expansion of the urban form. It relates strongly to existing development to the west of Mill Lane on Cumberlege Close, and would not extend the settlement edge much further downslope. It would not extend the defined urban area any further northward.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel does not represent a significant proportion of the settlement gap between Marston and the Sunnymead suburb to the west of the Cherwell. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the field forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged, mostly pasture fields, but proximity to the settlement edge means that there is some urban influence - there are three-storey blocks of flats across the road at Bradfields - and the A40 also serves to limit its relationship with the wider countryside.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character, but this parcel is peripheral within that area. The river itself meanders westwards along the edge of Sunnymead, so the parcel is some distance from the valley floor floodplain.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

Mill Lane is a stronger edge than the hedgerow that defines the parcel's outer boundaries, but its role is weakened by the Cumberlege Close development that has crossed it.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of parcel 112b-1.	Release of this small parcel would represent only limited urban sprawl and countryside encroachment. The new boundary would be slightly weaker than the existing one, and release would weaken the contribution of the field to the north (assessed as parcel 112a-1) and Hill View Farm house, by increasing their containment, but impact on the wider Cherwell Valley Green Belt would be limited.	Low moderate



Looking north-east from public footpath at south-eastern corner of parcel, close to Marston Ferry Road.
Oxford City Green Belt Study 41 May 2017

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-2	Parcel area (ha):	20.39
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

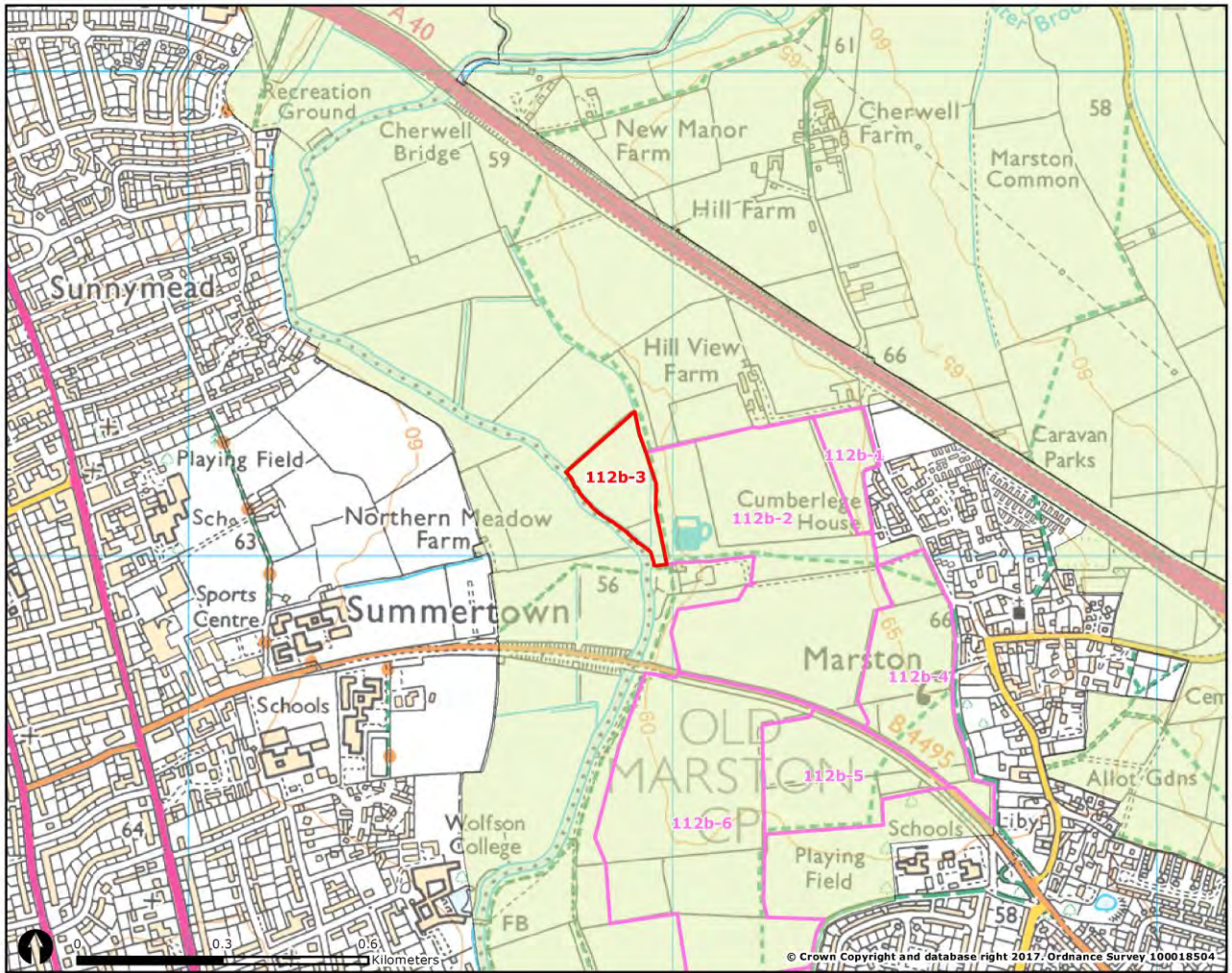
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent a significant westward expansion of the urban form, with the existing 'urban village' of Marston occupying a low ridge between the Cherwell and Bayswater Brook, although the presence of floodplain to the west would serve as a barrier to further sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel occupies around 50% of the settlement gap between Marston and Summertown, to the west of the Cherwell. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, but this would nonetheless represent a significant narrowing of the gap.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the parcel forming part of a broader landscape of similar fields. The parcel has no built development, and urban influence is limited at this distance from the settlement edge.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. The parcel is above the valley floor floodplain but immediately adjacent to the river, so loss of openness here would be significantly detrimental to this purpose. The Victoria Arms, immediately adjacent to the parcel, is one of a number of riverside pubs that are in close proximity to the urban but retain a rural character and setting which can be considered to contribute to Oxford's special character.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The River Cherwell constitutes a strong boundary feature, and Marston Ferry Road is also a strong edge. The hedgerow field boundaries to the north are weaker. Release of the parcel would result in a significant lengthening of the Green Belt boundary, containing an area that relates poorly to the existing settlement form of Marston. There are no existing alternative boundaries within the parcel that could accommodate a significantly smaller release of land.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of 112b-2 in conjunction with release of 112b-1 and 112b-4.	Expansion of Marston this far west would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford. It would relate badly to the existing settlement form, and would therefore constitute urban sprawl.	High



Looking north-west from footpath close to the Victoria Arms; the parcel is the flat land to the left of the view.
Oxford City Green Belt Study 43 May 2017

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-3	Parcel area (ha):	3.02
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

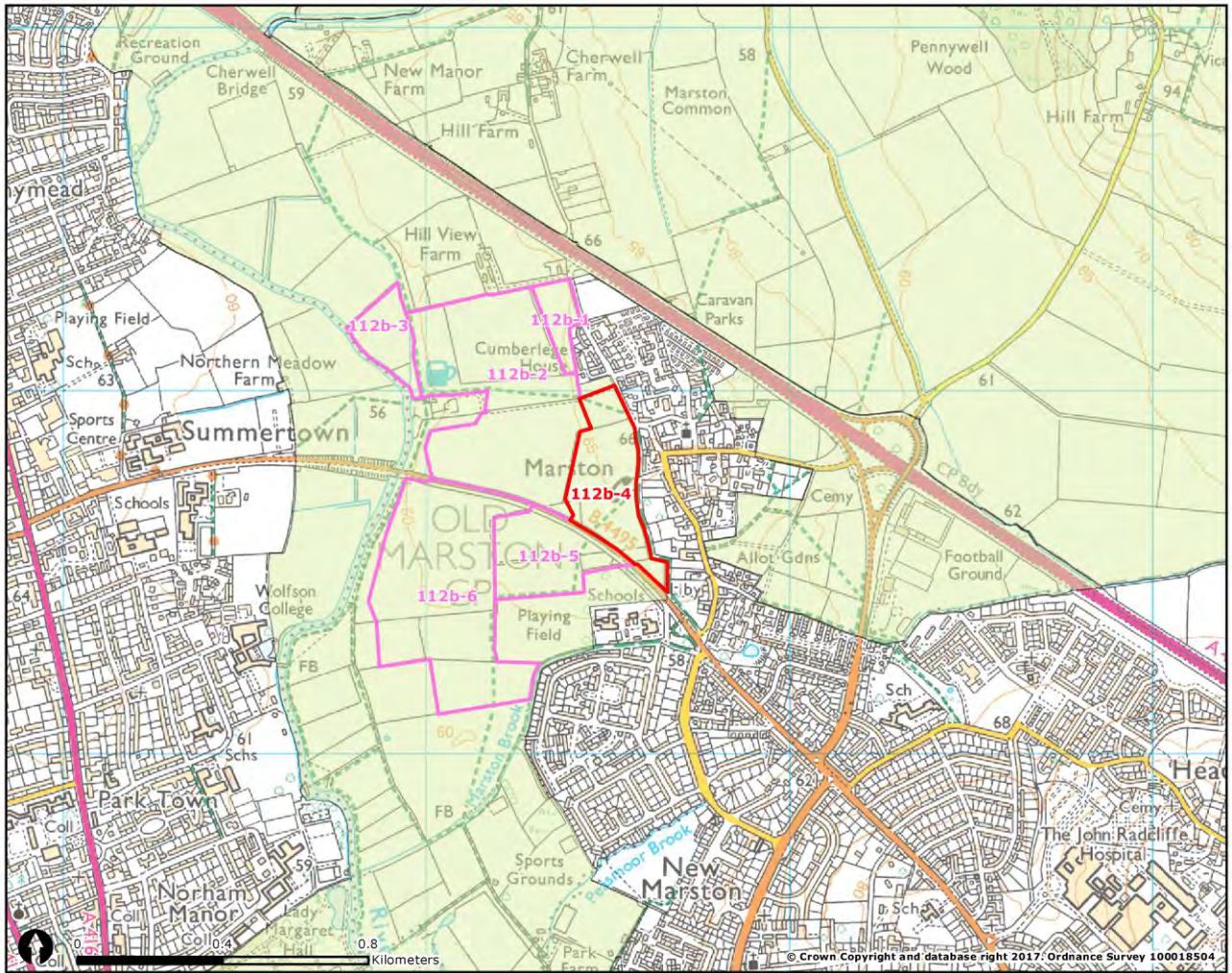
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development this far westwards would represent a major expansion of the urban form away from the existing 'urban village' of Marston, which has a linear north-south orientation, occupying a low ridge between the Cherwell and Bayswater Brook.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	Expansion this far westwards would reduce the settlement gap between Marston and Summertown by around 50%. The river constitutes a strong separating feature, but this would nonetheless represent a significant narrowing of the gap.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The parcel lies in the heart of the Cherwell Valley, on the eastern side of the river but within its floodplain. There is a distinct step down from the sloping farmland to the east into this lower-lying area, so the floodplain is the part of the valley that is most distinct from the settlement edge.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character, and prevention of urbanising development in the riverside floodplain area is essential to retaining that sense of openness.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The parcel is a clearly defined area, with the river forming a strong edge to the west, but weaker hedgerow boundaries would be needed to connect back to the existing Green Belt edge at Marston, unless there was a more extensive release of land using the A40 and Marston Ferry Road as east-west boundaries.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Any release of land out from Marston to include parcel 112b-3.	Expansion of Marston this far west would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford. It would relate badly to the existing settlement form, and would therefore constitute urban sprawl.	High



Looking north towards houses on Mill Lane, from footpath near Marston Ferry Road.

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-4	Parcel area (ha):	7.46
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

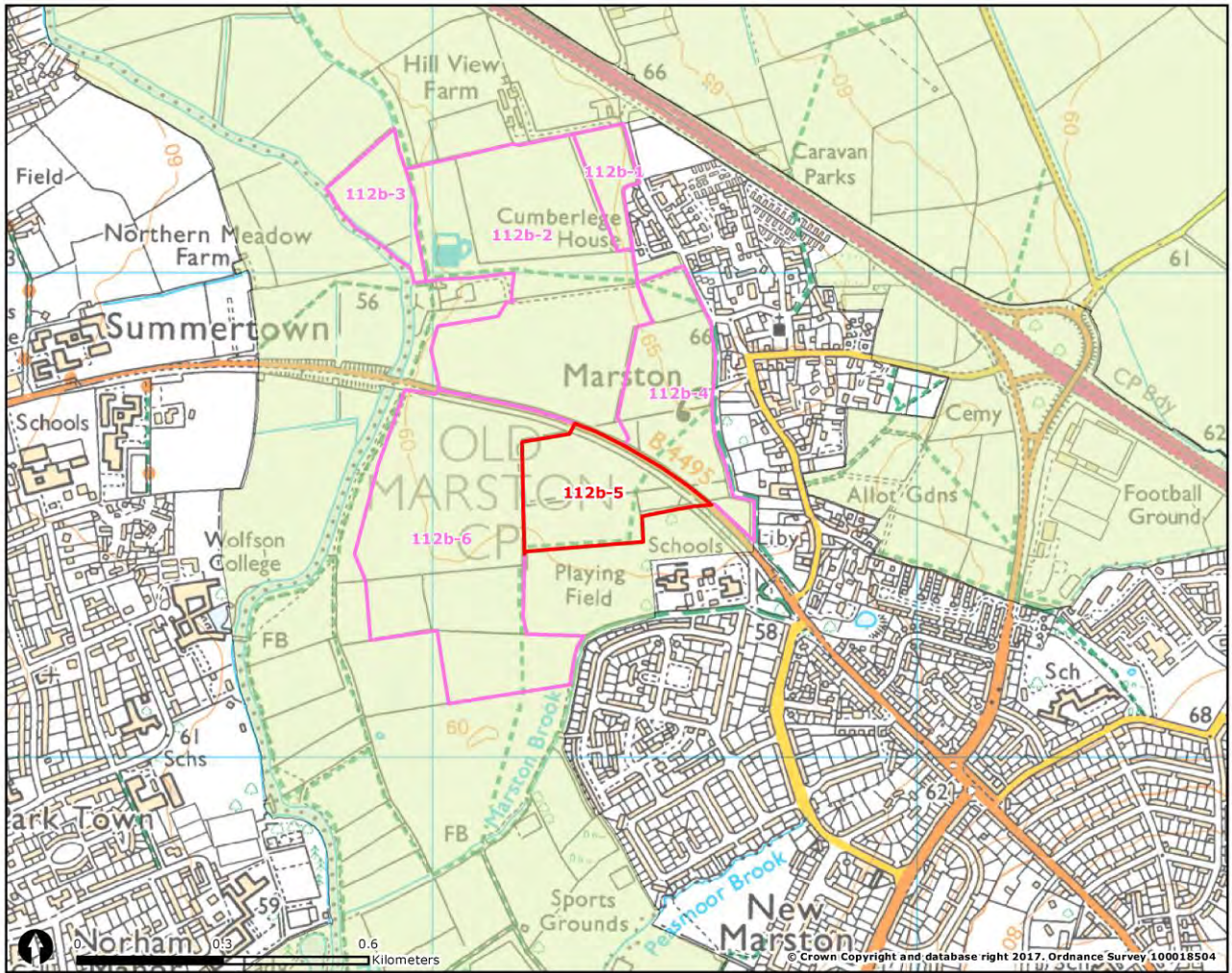
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent a downhill expansion of the 'urban village' of Marston, which occupies a low north-south ridge between the Cherwell and Bayswater Brook, but the slope is not strong enough, or the parcel broad enough, for this to represent more than a moderate level of sprawl. Development to the north of the parcel has already extended the urban area across to the west of Mill Lane.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel does not represent a significant proportion of the settlement gap between Marston and Summertown, to the west of the Cherwell. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the field forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged, mostly pasture fields, but proximity to the settlement edge means that there is some urban influence.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. At a local level the fields that comprise this parcel contribute to the setting of Old Marston Conservation Area, the boundary of which follows the Green Belt edge along Back Lane, but with regard to the function of the wider valley as an open, rural corridor reaching into the centre of Oxford, they have a more peripheral role.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

Back Lane and Mill Lane form a stronger boundary than the hedges along the western edge of the parcel, but Marston Ferry Road forms a strong boundary to the south and Cumberledge Close would contain the northern boundary. There would be no significant lengthening of the Green Belt boundary were it to move westwards to include the parcel.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of parcel 112b-4	Release of the parcel would represent countryside encroachment and a degree of sprawl. Harm to the wider Green Belt would be limited by a release of land retaining a consistent north-south boundary, with Marston Ferry Road marking its southern edge. Release would not significantly weaken the Green Belt contribution of fields to the west.	Moderate



Looking west from footpath in field to south of Martson Ferry Road.

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-5	Parcel area (ha):	6.43
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
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Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford

The parcel lies west of the southern end of Old Marston, but is separated from it by Marston Ferry Road. Development would therefore have a closer geographical relationship with New Marston, most of which sits on flat ground which lies slightly below the parcel. The parcel does not extend much further west than the existing urban edge to the south on Arlington Drive; however the playing fields of St Nicholas' Primary School and Meadow Brook College, which lie within the Green Belt, create some separation between the parcel and the urban edge. Development would therefore constitute a significant expansion of the current settlement form out along the Marston Ferry Road.

Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements

Currently only the southern edge of New Marston on Ferry Road, 1.2km to the south, is closer to the River Cherwell than would be the case if this parcel were to be released. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, and there are open fields to the west to maintain separation from Summertown; however proximity to Marston Ferry Road, which provides a direct line across the valley between Marston and Summertown, can be considered to increase the sensitivity of adjacent land in terms of contribution to settlement separation.

Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside

Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the fields forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged fields. Separation from the settlement edge limits visual relationship with existing housing, but proximity to Marston Ferry Road and the school buildings has some adverse impact on countryside character.

Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character

The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. Although not directly adjacent to the River Cherwell, the parcel is close enough to it – less than 300m across one open, arable field – to make a contribution to this purpose.

Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

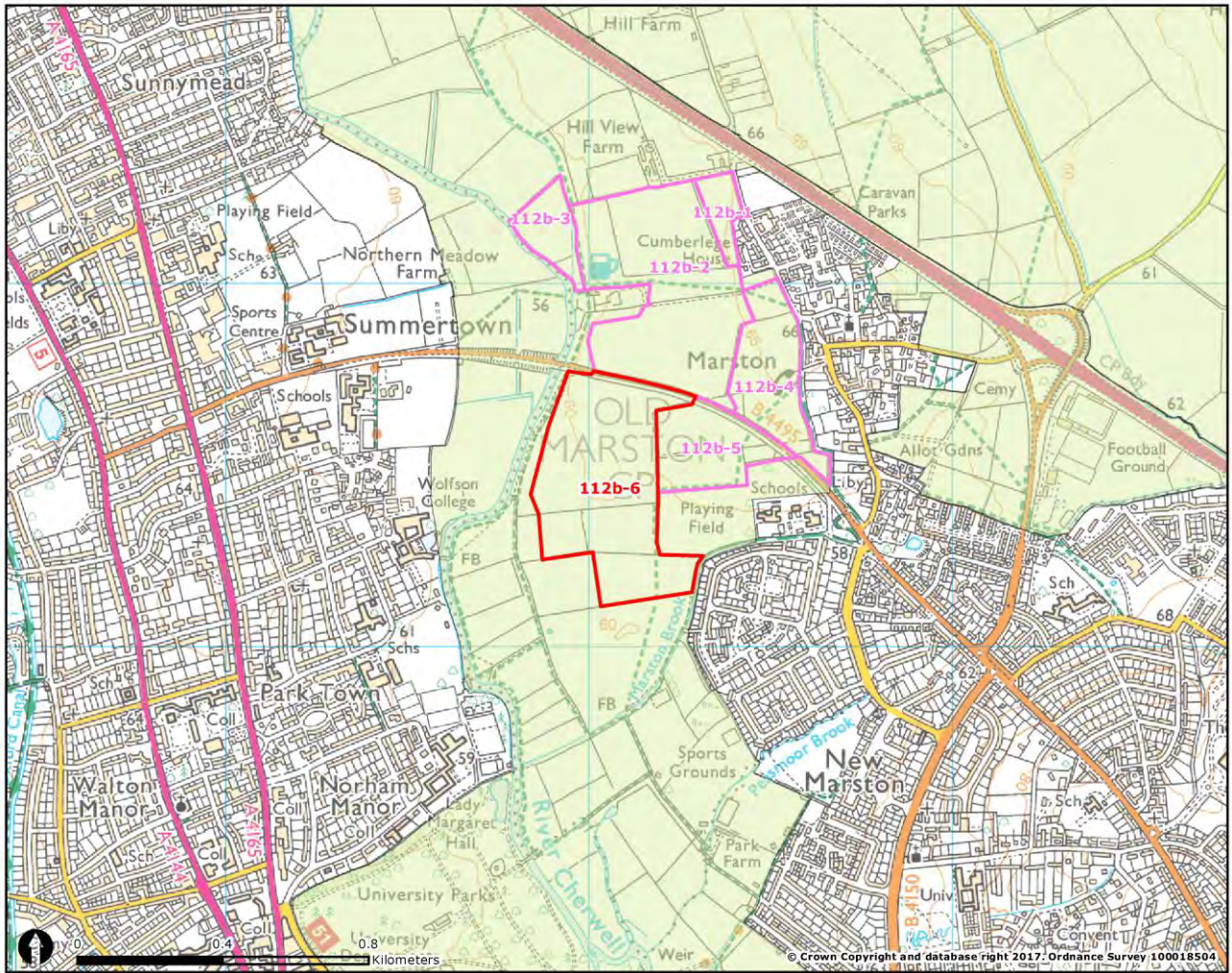
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

To the south of the schools, Marston Brook and associated tree cover and a public right of way create a strong boundary to the residential edge of New Marston on Arlington Drive. Marston Ferry Road is a strong boundary to the north, but one which also contributes to separating the parcel from the urban edge. The parcel's hedgerow boundaries are weaker edges.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
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Release of parcel 112b-5.	Although there is some urban fringe influence in this area, release of the parcel would represent countryside encroachment and sprawl, and would have adverse impact on settlement separation and Oxford's historic setting. The parcel does not relate strongly to the existing settlement edges of either Old or New Marston, so release would weaken the Green Belt boundary. The Green Belt contribution of the school playing fields to the south would also be weakened.	Moderate high
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Looking south from footpath alongside the River Cherwell, close to Marston Ferry Road.

Site:	112b	Land at Old Marston	Site size (ha):	58.24
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Parcel:	112b-6	Parcel area (ha):	19.11
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent a significant westward expansion of the urban form, although the presence of the River Cherwell and its floodplain to the west would serve as a barrier to further sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel, together with land between it and the settlement edge at New Marston, occupies around 50% of the settlement gap between Marston and Summertown / Park Town. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, but in the northern part of the parcel this is to an extent offset by the role of the adjacent Marston Ferry Road in connecting the two residential areas, and in the southern part the urban edge to the west comes right up to the riverside at Wolfson College (c.250m from the parcel edge). So release of the parcel would represent a significant narrowing of the settlement gap across the Cherwell Valley. The parcel also forms part of the setting of Old Marston, on higher ground to the north-east, so development would diminish the sense of separation between the two settlement areas that topography and the intervening presence of Marston Ferry Road currently provides.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the parcel containing no built development and forming part of a broader landscape of similar fields. Most of the parcel is near-flat ground, at a distance from the settlement edge where urban influence is limited, and where it does abut the settlement edge, at Arlington Drive, Marston Brook and associated trees and a public right of way provide fairly strong separation.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. The parcel is above the valley floor floodplain but the northern part is immediately adjacent to the river and the southern part is at a point where the gap between urban areas to either side of the valley is very narrow, so loss of openness here would be significantly detrimental to this purpose.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The River Cherwell constitutes a strong boundary feature, but the parcel edge in the southernmost fields is defined by the floodplain rather than any physical feature, so the field boundary hedgerows beyond the parcel edge would be stronger boundaries. Marston Ferry Road is a strong edge to the north, but the hedgerow field boundaries to the south are weaker. New Marston is, with the exception of the nearby school buildings, contained by the Marston Brook, which also constitutes a fairly strong edge, and release of the parcel would result in a significant lengthening of the Green Belt boundary. There are no existing alternative boundaries within the parcel that could accommodate a smaller release of land with a stronger relationship to the existing settlement form of New Marston.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of 112b-5 in conjunction with release of 112b-4.	Expansion of Marston this far west would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford, and would constitute sprawl of the urban area. It would cross well defined boundaries that also contribute to the separation of Old Marston and New Marston.	High

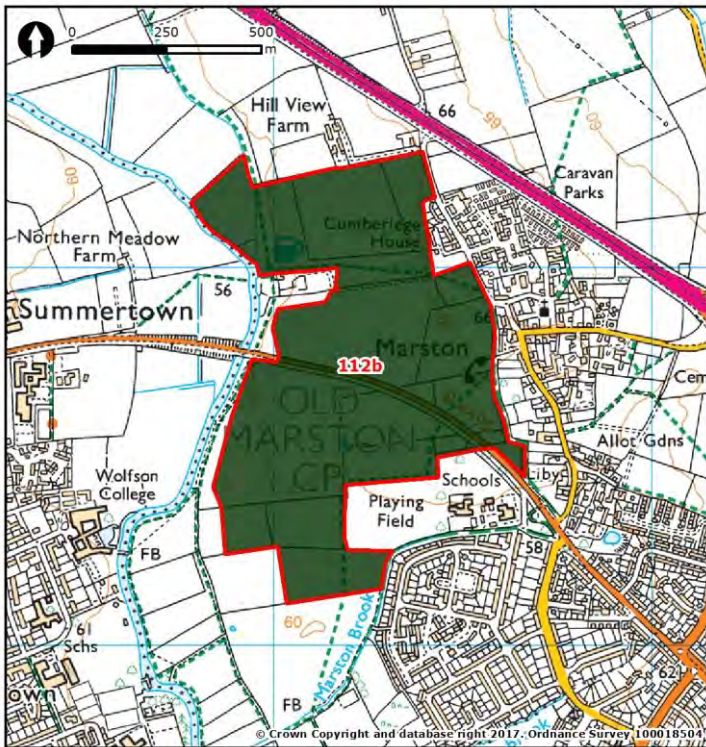
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of site

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the site as a whole	Although it would, with the exception of parcel 112b-3, leave the valley floor floodplain open, this scale of Green Belt release would result in a significant reduction in the openness of the Cherwell Valley corridor, representing encroachment on an area that is sizeable enough to retain a countryside character despite being contained east and west by the large, built-up area, and diminishing one of the key elements of the city's historic setting.	High

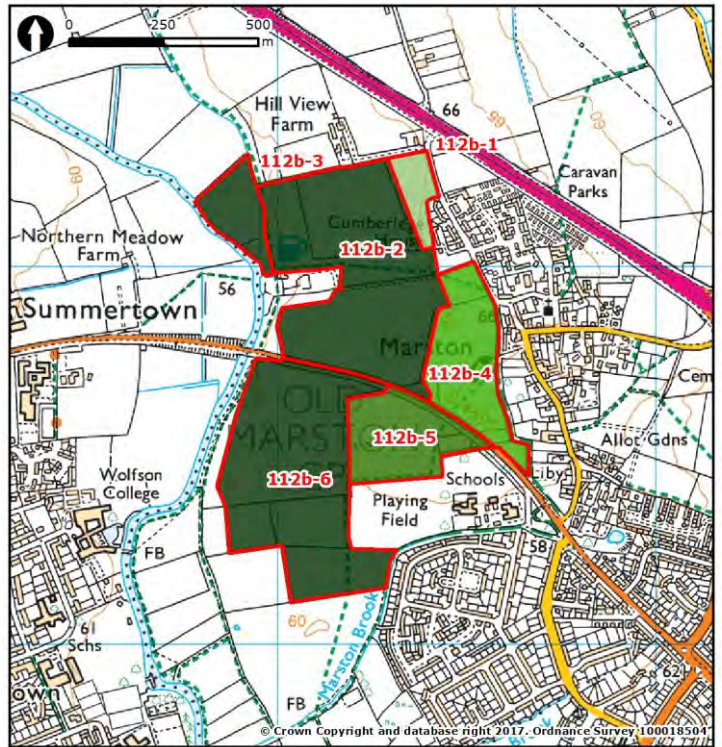
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of site

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of 112b-1 in combination with 112b-4 and 112a-1	These parcels individually rate moderate or low-moderate (in the case of 112b-1) for harm resulting from release. In combination their release would retain a consistent north-south boundary, strongly defined to the north by the A40 and to the south by Marston Ferry Road, that would not significantly weaken the contribution of remaining land sloping down to the Cherwell.	Moderate

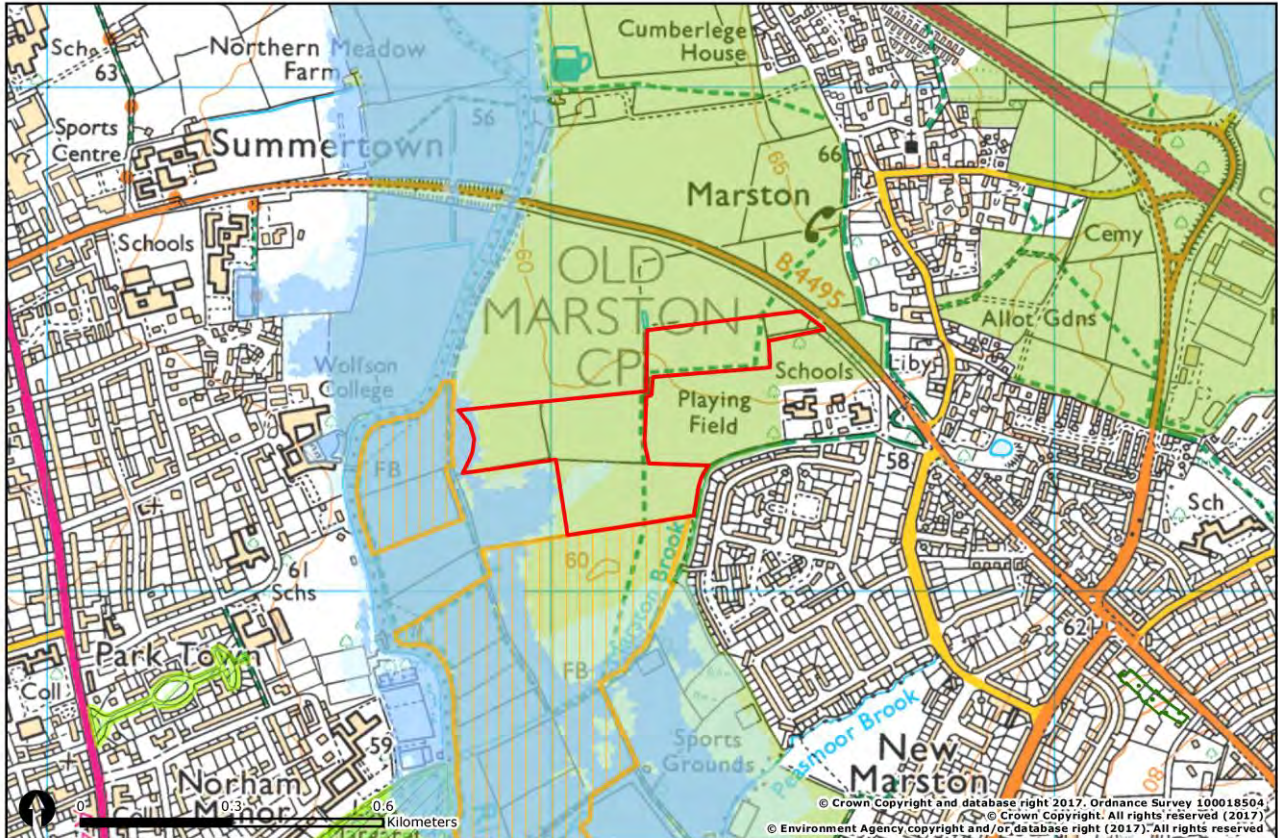
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site



Harm to Green Belt resulting from partial release of site







- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Site boundary | Ancient woodland | World Heritage Site |
| Green Belt | Special area of conservation | Historic park and garden |
| Area of outstanding natural beauty | Special site of scientific interest | Scheduled ancient monument |
| | Flood Zone 2 | |
| | Flood Zone 3 | |



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	112c	Brasenose land in 112b	Site size (ha):	10.71
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Site description

The site, which consists of those part of the larger site 112b that are owned by Brasenose College, occupies four hedged pasture fields to the west of New Marston, and contains no built development. One field lies to the north of the playing fields of St Nicholas' Primary School, and a small adjacent field to the east fronts on to Marston Ferry Road. The larger of these two fields has a narrow link to the south-west through to the remainder of the site, which consists of those parts of two fields that are not within the floodplain of the River Cherwell. Only the southernmost field has a short frontage with the defined urban edge, on Arlington Drive.

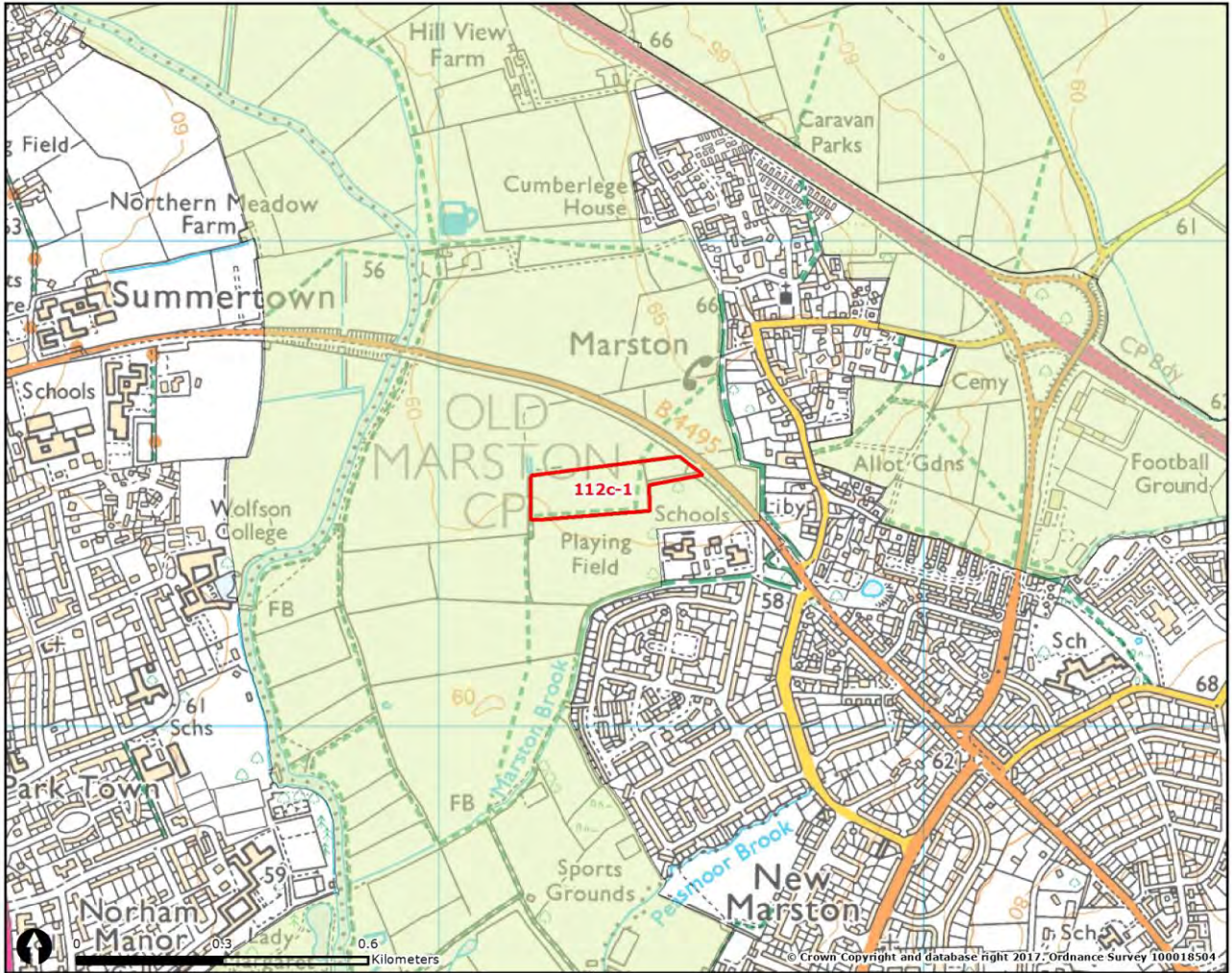
Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The school playing fields are within the Green Belt, so the northernmost field is isolated from the settlement edge. The southernmost field is separated from Arlington Drive by Marston Brook, and associated tree cover and a public right of way. All of the site forms part of a sizeable belt of similar hedged farmland and riverside meadow that frames the River Cherwell, creating an open, rural space that connects the broader countryside to the north of Oxford with the city centre.

Parcels

The site is assessed as two parcels:

- The fields to the north of the school are assessed as parcel 112c-1 (these are also assessed as part of the larger parcel 112b-5);
- The fields to the south-west are assessed as parcel 112c-2 (these are also assessed as part of the larger parcel 112b-6).



Looking west from footpath crossing field to west of St Nicholas' Primary School.

Site:	112c	Brasenose land in 112b	Site size (ha):	10.71
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Parcel:	112c-1	Parcel area (ha):	2.82
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

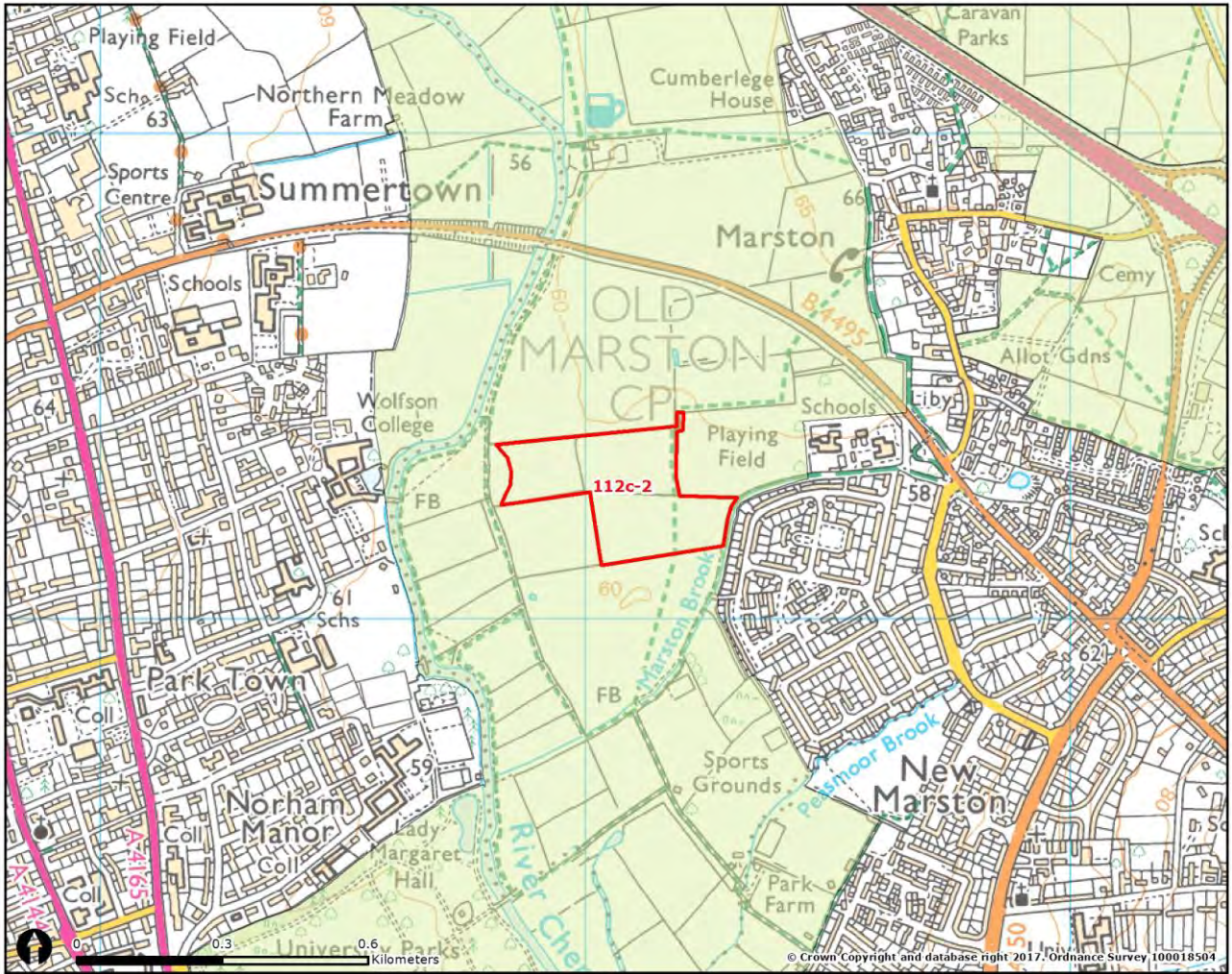
Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel lies west of the southern end of Old Marston, but is separated from it by Marston Ferry Road. Development would therefore have a closer geographical relationship with New Marston, most of which sits on flat ground which lies slightly below the parcel; however the playing fields of St Nicholas' Primary School and Meadow Brook College, which lie within the Green Belt, create some separation between the parcel and the urban edge. Development would therefore constitute an expansion of the current settlement form.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	Currently only the southern edge of New Marston on Ferry Road, 1.2km to the south, is closer to the River Cherwell than would be the case if this parcel were to be released. However the river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, and there are open fields to the west to maintain separation from Summertown. Proximity to Marston Ferry Road, which provides a direct line across the valley between Marston and Summertown, can be considered to slightly increase the sensitivity of the parcel, although it has only a narrow frontage to the road.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the fields forming part of a broader landscape of similar hedged fields. Separation from the settlement edge limits urban influence, but proximity to Marston Ferry Road has some adverse impact on countryside character, particularly in the smaller, easternmost field.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. Although not directly adjacent to the River Cherwell, the parcel is close enough to it – less than 300m across one open, arable field – to make a contribution to this purpose.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

To the south of the schools, Marston Brook and associated tree cover and a public right of way create a strong boundary to the residential edge of New Marston on Arlington Drive. The parcel's hedgerow boundaries are weaker edges. Marston Ferry Road is a strong boundary to the east, and to the north it represents a stronger boundary than the parcel's hedgerow edge, but it also contributes to separating the parcel from the urban edge.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of parcel 112c-1.	Release of the parcel would represent countryside encroachment, and would have some adverse impact on settlement separation and Oxford's historic setting. In isolation it is considered to make slightly less contribution to Green Belt purposes than parcel 112b-5, of which it forms part, but it does not relate strongly to the existing settlement edges of either Old or New Marston, so release would weaken the Green Belt contribution of the school playing fields to the south and also the field to the north, contained between the parcel and Marston Ferry Road.	Moderate high



Looking east from public footpath towards houses on Arlington Drive.

Site:	112c	Brasenose land in 112b	Site size (ha):	10.71
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Parcel:	112c-2	Parcel area (ha):	7.89
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Development would represent a significant westward expansion of the urban form, although the presence of the River Cherwell and its floodplain to the west would serve as a barrier to further sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel occupies around 50% of the settlement gap between Marston and Park Town. The river and its associated floodplain constitute a strong separating feature, but the urban edge to the west comes right up to the riverside at Wolfson College, so there would be a settlement gap of only c.250m were the parcel to be released.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Development here would represent encroachment on countryside, with the parcel containing no built development and forming part of a broader landscape of similar fields. Most of the parcel is near-flat ground, at a distance from the settlement edge where urban influence is limited, and where it does abut the settlement edge, at Arlington Drive, Marston Brook and associated trees and a public right of way provide fairly strong separation.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The openness of the Cherwell Valley, penetrating into the heart of Oxford, makes an important contribution to the City's historic setting and special character. The parcel is above the valley floor floodplain but at a point where the gap between urban areas to either side of the valley is very narrow, so loss of openness here would be significantly detrimental to this purpose.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The parcel edge in the southernmost fields is defined by the floodplain rather than by any physical feature, so the field boundary hedgerows beyond the parcel edge would be stronger boundaries. The hedgerow field boundaries to the north and south are not strong boundaries. New Marston is, with the exception of the nearby school buildings, contained by Marston Brook, which also constitutes a fairly strong edge, and release of the parcel would result in a significant lengthening of the Green Belt boundary. There are no existing alternative boundaries within the parcel that could accommodate a smaller release of land with a stronger relationship to the existing settlement form of New Marston.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

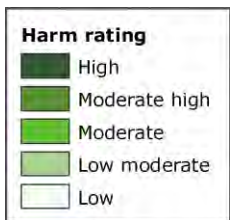
Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of 112c-2 (either in isolation or in conjunction with 112c-1) .	Expansion of Marston this far west would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford, and would constitute sprawl of the urban area.	High

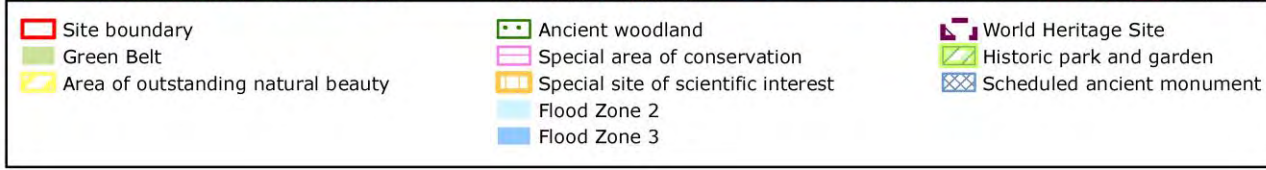
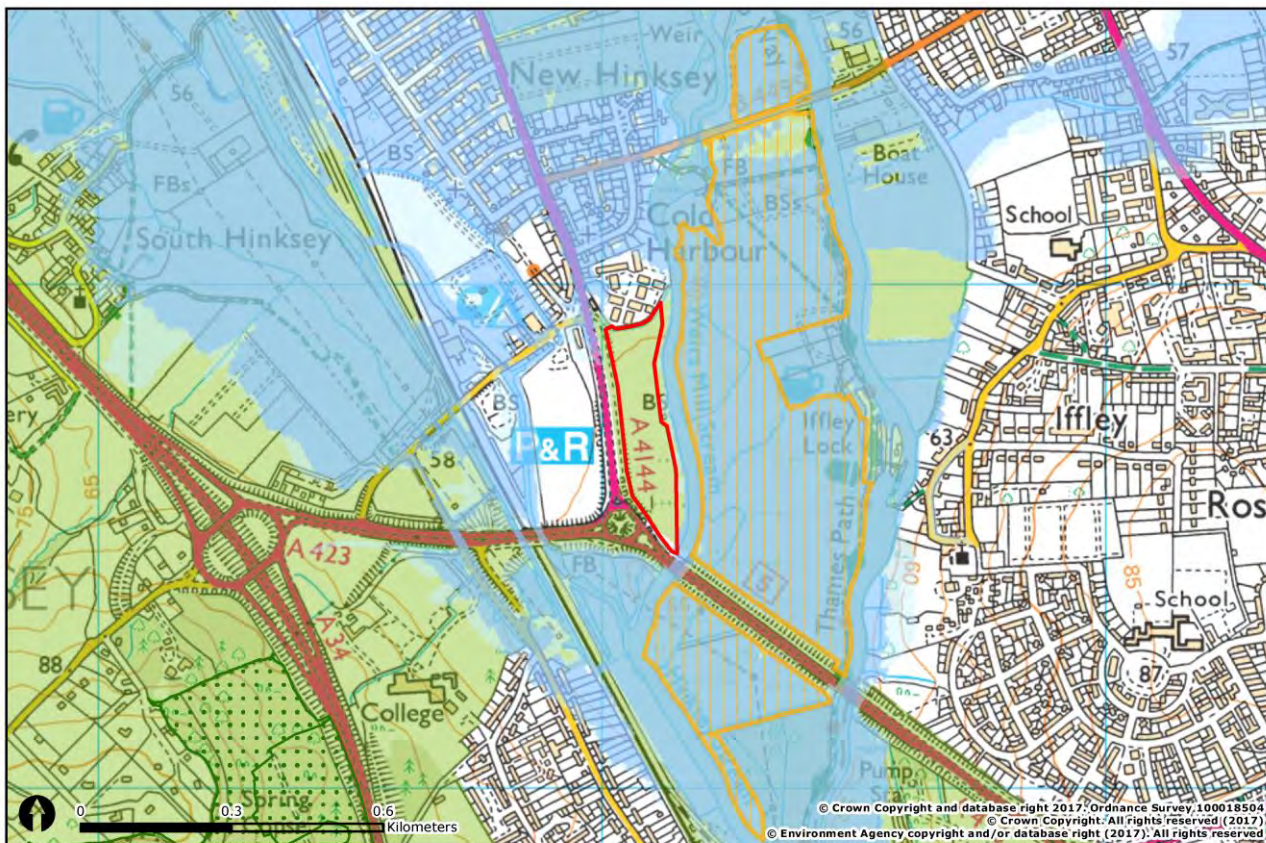
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of site

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the site as a whole.	The intervening presence of school playing fields, and the strength of the tree-lined Marston Brook as a boundary, means that the site has a fairly weak relationship with the settlement edge. Release of westernmost fields would significantly compromise the openness of the Cherwell Valley, to the detriment of settlement separation, countryside character and the historic setting of Oxford. It would relate badly to the existing settlement form, and would therefore constitute urban sprawl.	High

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site

Harm to Green Belt resulting from partial release of site





Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	113	Green Belt land east of Redbridge Park and Ride	Site size (ha):	3.64
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Site description

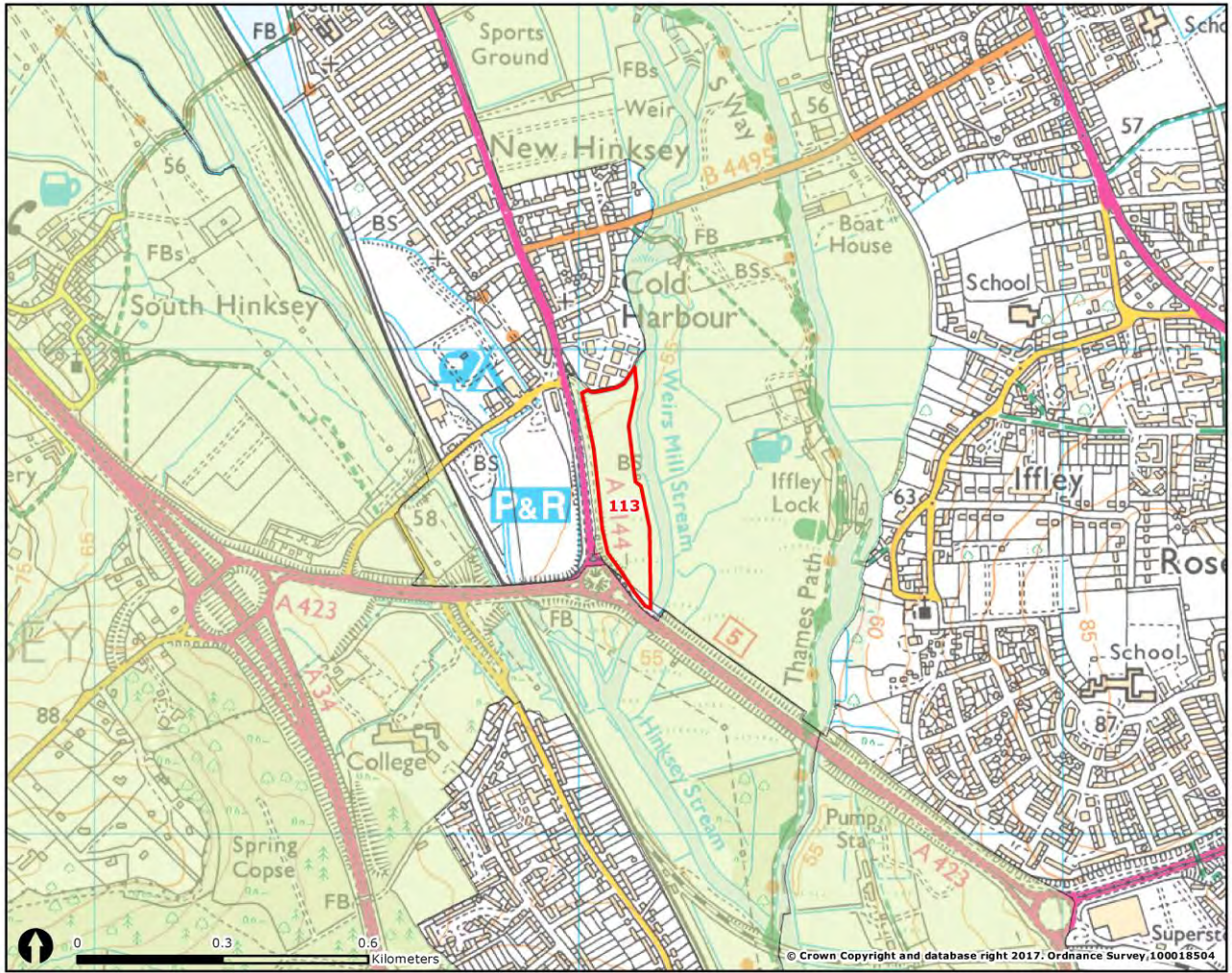
The site consists of rough grassland situated to the west of Weirs Mill Stream and contained by the A4144 Abingdon Road to the west, the A423 Eastern By-Pass to the south and residential development on Elgrove Close to the north. Elgrove Close marks the southern edge of New Hinksey (Cold Harbour), part of the inset urban area that extends south from the City centre, and the Redbridge Park and Ride, to west of the A4144, is also part of the defined urban area. Open, floodplain meadows lie to the east of Weirs Mill Stream, and meadows and wet woodland lie to the south of the A423.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The site has connectivity with the Thames valley floodplain landscape to the east and south, and therefore an association with the wider countryside, but major roads and the Weirs Mill Stream, with associated tree cover along much of its length, also provide a degree of containment that serves to strengthen the site's relationship with adjacent residential development immediately to the north.

Parcels

The site has no internal distinctions and so is assessed as one parcel of land.



Looking north towards houses on Egrove Close, from the A414 Abingdon Road.

Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
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Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	Floodplain land to either side of the Thames between the A4144 to the west and Meadow Lane to the east, extending as far north as the confluence of the Thames and the Cherwell, is largely undeveloped. However the parcel lies just to the south of the major area of development within this corridor, the southern end of New Hinksey (part of the large, built-up area of Oxford), which was developed in the late 1930's. The housing estate immediately abutting the parcel is a modern redevelopment of a former isolation hospital (later a rehabilitation centre). Residential or commercial development in the parcel would extend the settlement form more strongly southward than the parallel Redbridge Park and Ride, which retains more visual openness than would be the case with higher built development, but the parcel's strong eastern and southern boundaries would limit the extent to which any development would be perceived as sprawl.
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Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	<p>The undeveloped Thames corridor plays an important role in retaining a sense of distinction between Oxford's different 'urban villages', so any expansion of the urban form into this area will have some detrimental impact with regard to this Green Belt purpose. However the open floodplain meadowland between the Weirs Mill Stream and the Thames accounts for the majority of the gap between New Hinksey and Iffley, reducing the contribution of the parcel in this respect.</p> <p>The parcel also contributes to the gap between the New Hinksey suburb of Oxford and the separate settlement of Kennington, to the south. Built development would have a greater impact on openness than is the case with the Redbridge Park and Ride, which already extends the defined urban area south to the A423, but the A423, the railway line and a block of woodland would all serve to preserve a sense of separation from Kennington were the parcel to be developed.</p>
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Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The parcel is undeveloped but the three-storey houses to the north and the adjacent main roads to the west and south have an impact on countryside character. The adjacent stream provides a relationship with the wider Thames Valley floodplain meadows, but the containment of this parcel also makes it distinct from the wider countryside.
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Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The continuity of character provided by the undeveloped river valley as it penetrates into the heart of Oxford is a key characteristic of the City's special character, experienced by those approaching by boat or by the Thames Path, but this parcel has a degree of separation from the valley's core. The adjacent 20th and 21st century development detracts from historic setting, whereas Iffley, to the east of the Thames, retains a historic village character that has a positive impact on historic settlement character.
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Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.
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Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The A4144 is a strong landscape element but its role as a boundary feature is weakened by the fact that development has taken place on either side of the road, adjacent to the parcel. The Weirs Mill Stream forms the Green Belt boundary to the urban area north of the parcel, and so could equally form a strong boundary to the parcel itself. The A423 constitutes a strong boundary to the south.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

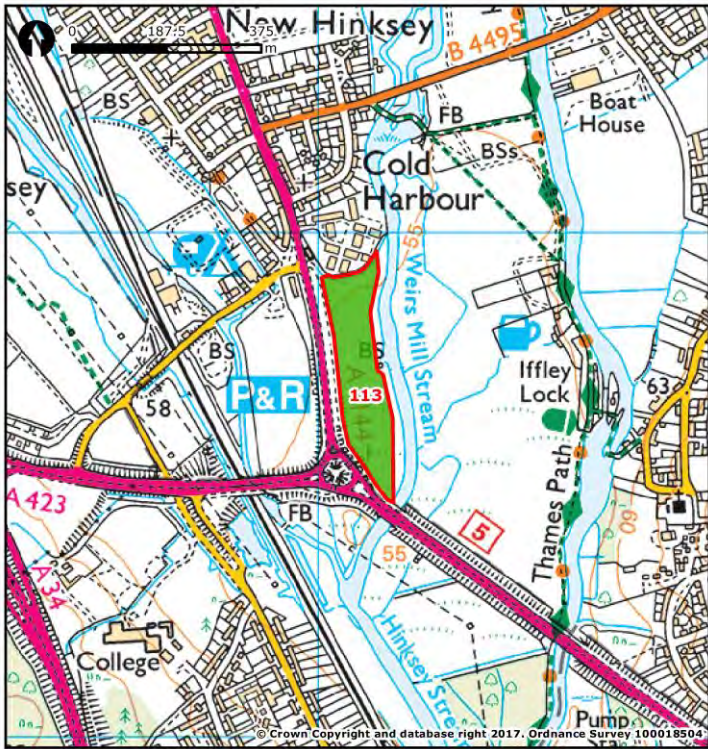
Scenario	Comments	Rating
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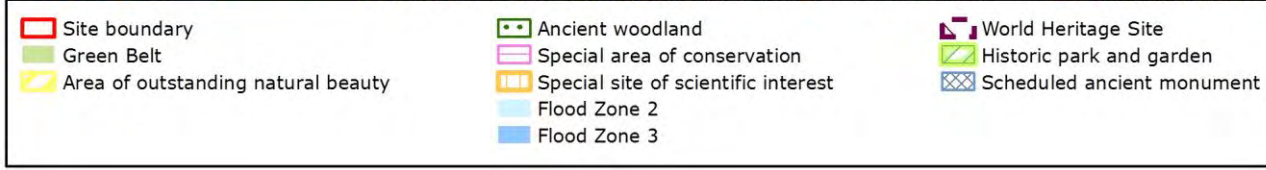
Release of all or part of the parcel.	The parcel is undeveloped and has some relationship with the wider countryside, and contributes to the prevention of sprawl and to maintenance of settlement gaps between New Hinksey and both Iffley and Kennington. However the parcel also has a strong relationship with the adjacent urban edge, and	Moderate
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Site:	113	Green Belt land east of Redbridge Park and Ride	Site size (ha):	3.64
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a degree of containment that would limit the harm to the wider Green Belt that would result from any release of land.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	114d	Green Belt land east of Old Marston	Site size (ha):	0.78
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Site description

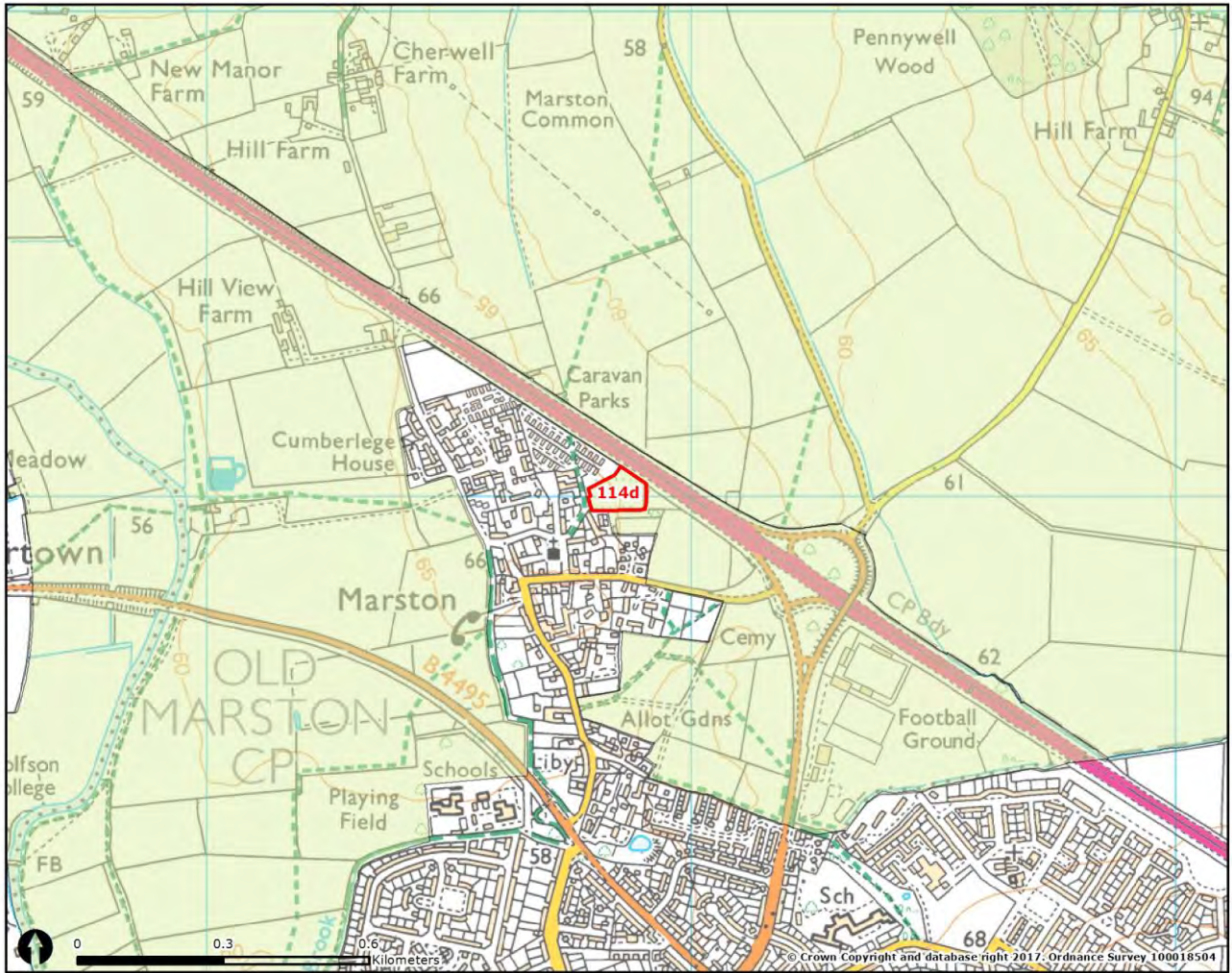
A single pasture field, with a scattering of young trees and shrubs, contained to the east and south by well-treed hedgerows. The site abuts the defined urban edge to the north (the St Nicholas Park residential 'park homes') and to the east (Butts Lane). The A40 runs adjacent to the eastern boundary hedgerow, other than at its southern end where a small remnant triangle of land lies between the site and the road. Two Green Belt fields, a small one to the south and a larger one to the south-east, lie between the site and Elsfield Road.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The A40 represents a strong barrier between the site and the wider countryside to the east and north, and although there are open fields to the south/south-east these also have a degree of separation from the wider countryside, being contained by the B4150 Marsh Lane and subdivided by Elsfield Road. Most of Green Belt to the south of Elsfield Road and west of the M40, to both sides of Marsh Lane, has recreational uses associated with the urban fringe: allotments and sports pitches.

Parcels

The site is assessed as a single parcel.



Looking east from the site entrance on Butts Lane.

Site:	114d	Green Belt land east of Old Marston	Site size (ha):	0.78
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Parcel:	114d	Parcel area (ha):	0.78
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The A40 forms the urban edge to the north of Marston and Headington, so land within its confines has a stronger relationship with the urban area than with the wider countryside. Within this area parcel 114d is largely contained by the urban form, so development would not constitute significant sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The strong relationship between the parcel and the urban area means that it makes no contribution to settlement separation.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The parcel is undeveloped but has a stronger relationship with the urban area than the wider countryside, and it forms part of an area of Green Belt that is dominated by urban fringe uses.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The parcel is not in a location that makes any contribution to Oxford's historic setting or special character.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

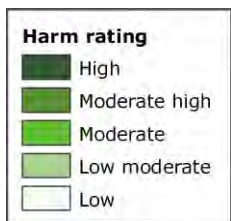
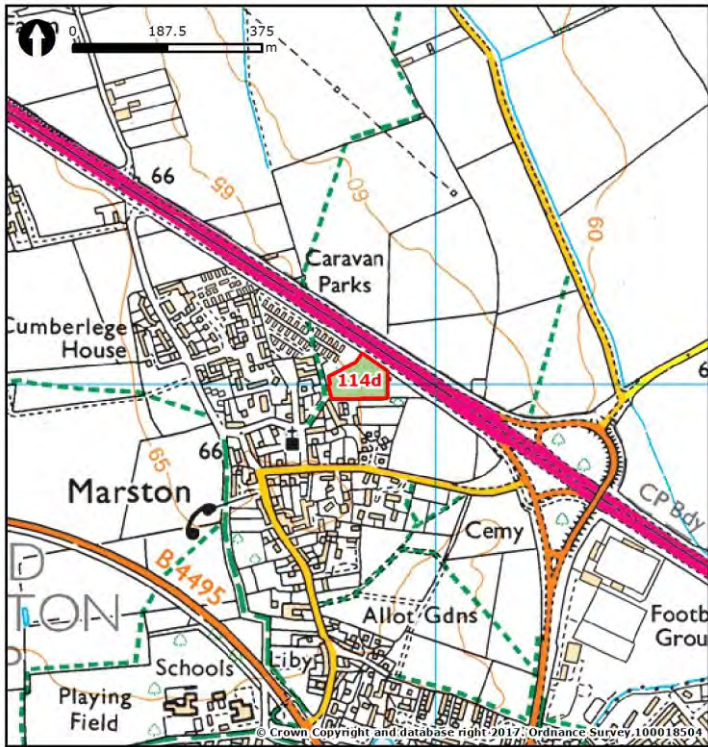
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

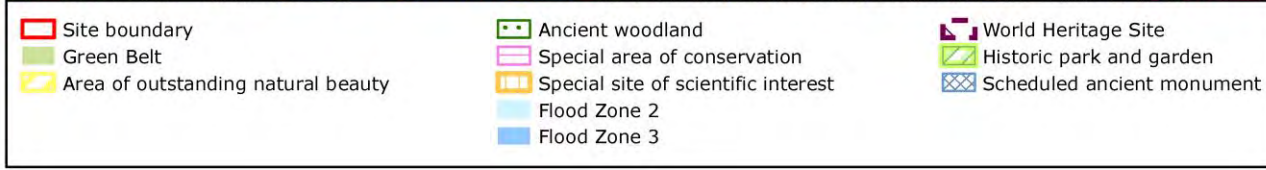
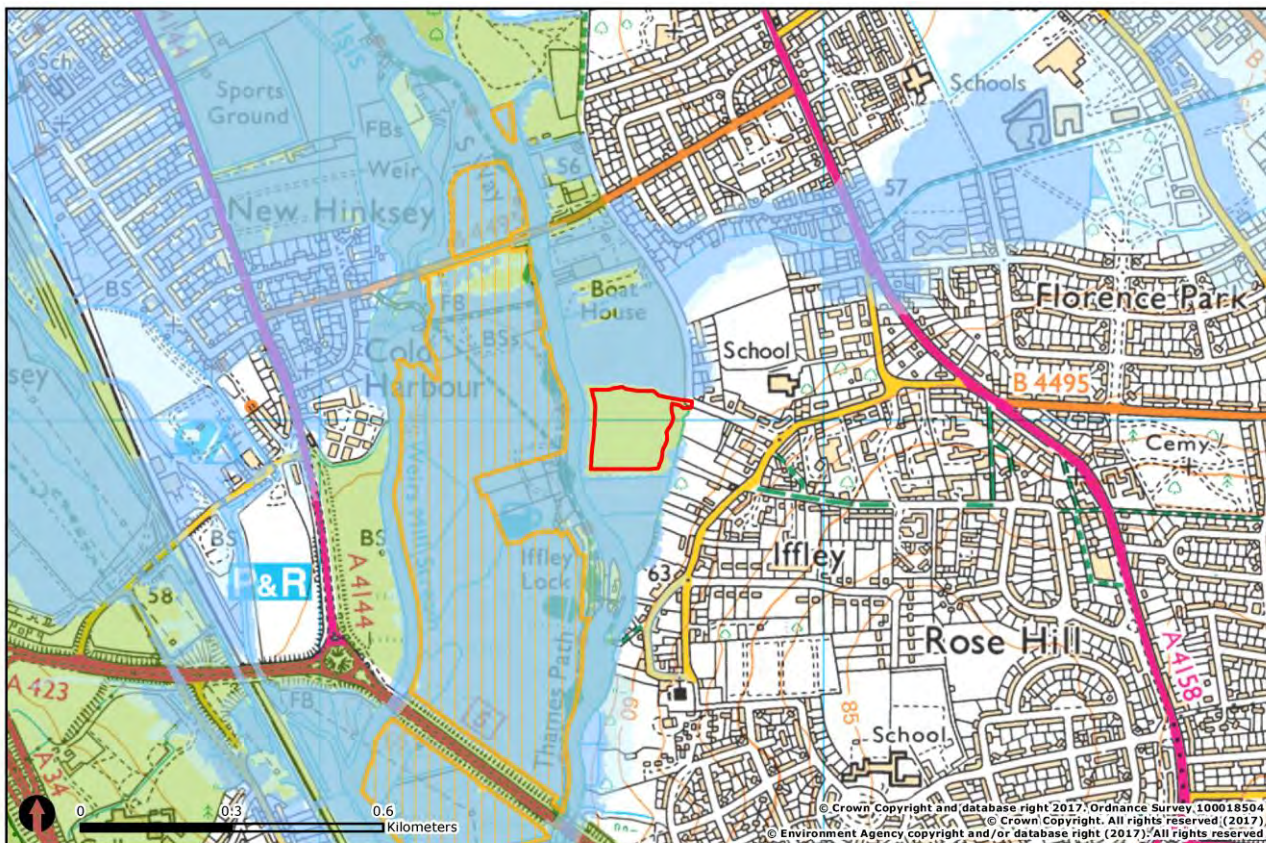
The hedgerow along the southern edge of the parcel would not be a weaker boundary than the existing Green belt edge. Elsfield Road, c.150m to the south, would constitute a stronger edge.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the whole parcel.	The parcel has a strong relationship with the urban form, and is part of an area of Green Belt that also has a strong relationship with the urban area and is separated from the wider countryside by the A40. Release of this parcel would not weaken the Green Belt boundary but would slightly weaken the Green Belt contribution of the small fields immediately to the south and east.	Low moderate

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	115	Green Belt land west of Meadow Lane	Site size (ha):	2.34
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Site description

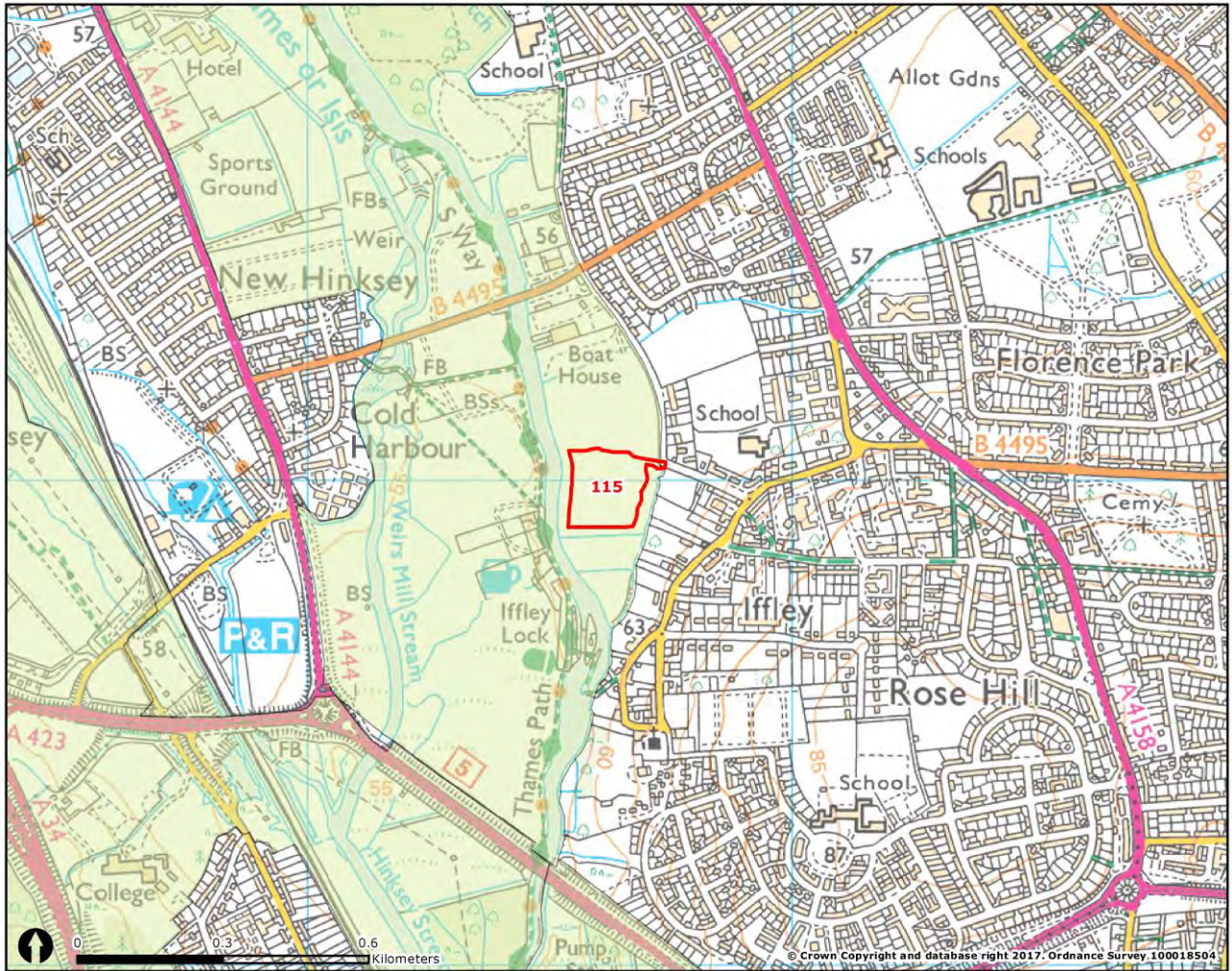
The site is rough grassland with some tree and scrub cover, especially around the margins, located to the south-west of Meadow Lane and bounded to the west by the River Thames. The Thames floodplain edge for the most part approximates to the north-south stretch of Meadow Lane, and field boundaries marking a continuation of this line to the south, but the site constitutes an isolated area that sits slightly higher. The Green Belt boundary also follows this same floodzone alignment, but the land to the east within the defined urban area is largely open, consisting of large plots behind dispersed houses along Church Way and houses on Meadow Lane that are separated from the main urban area by playing fields and open land around Iffley Mead School. Land to the north and south of the site has the same vegetation and character, and land to the west of the river is open, floodplain meadow.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

Although adjacent to the Green Belt boundary the site lies within an area which retains a rural character and openness associated with the Thames floodplain. Meadow Lane's role as the Green Belt boundary is strengthened by its coincidence, for the most part, with the floodplain edge. In this respect the Thames provides a relationship with the wider countryside, but the site and its surrounding fields on the east side of the river are to a large extent contained by built development, with dwellings on Mill Lane running up to the water's edge to the south and boathouses and the adjacent Donnington Bridge.

Parcels

The site is homogeneous in character and lacks any internal subdivision, and so is assessed as one parcel of land.



Looking north-east across the Thames from just north of Iffley Lock; the trees mark the western edge of the Oxford City Green Belt Study parcel. May 2017

Site:	115	Green Belt land west of Meadow Lane	Site size (ha):	2.34
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Parcel:	115	Parcel area (ha):	2.34
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel is adjacent to the large built-up area of Oxford, but retains a stronger association with the undeveloped Thames floodplain that abuts it on three sides. Although there is development closer to the river further north and south, urban expansion to the west of Meadow Lane would constitute a significant intrusion into a landscape that retains a rural character and a sense of separation from the City.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The undeveloped Thames corridor plays an important role in retaining a sense of distinction between Oxford's different 'urban villages', so any expansion of the urban form into this area will have some detrimental impact with regard to this Green Belt purpose. However the open floodplain meadowland to the west of the river accounts for a greater proportion of the gap between Iffley and New Hinksey, and its role as a settlement separator is strengthened by the presence of Weirs Mill Stream on the eastern edge of New Hinksey / Cold Harbour.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The site itself lacks urbanising influences, and the Thames floodplain provides a relationship with the wider countryside but, taken in its wider context with the surrounding fields on the east side of the river, the site is also to a large extent contained by built development.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The continuity of character provided by the undeveloped river valley as it penetrates into the heart of Oxford is a key characteristic of the City's special character, experienced by those approaching by boat or by the Thames Path. Although there is built development close to the river just to the south, at Iffley Lock, this has a strong village character that is very distinct from the more urbanised parts of the City, and which is reflected in the designation of the Iffley Conservation Area. Iffley's separation from the City and the importance of its surrounding meadows in retaining this separation are identified as key elements of the Conservation Area's significance. The parcel is considered to form part of Iffley's historic setting.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

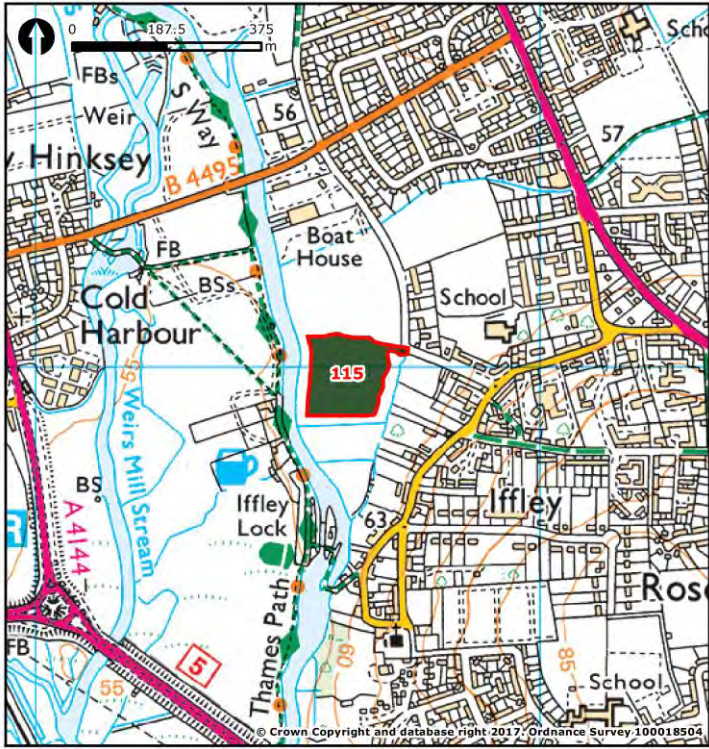
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

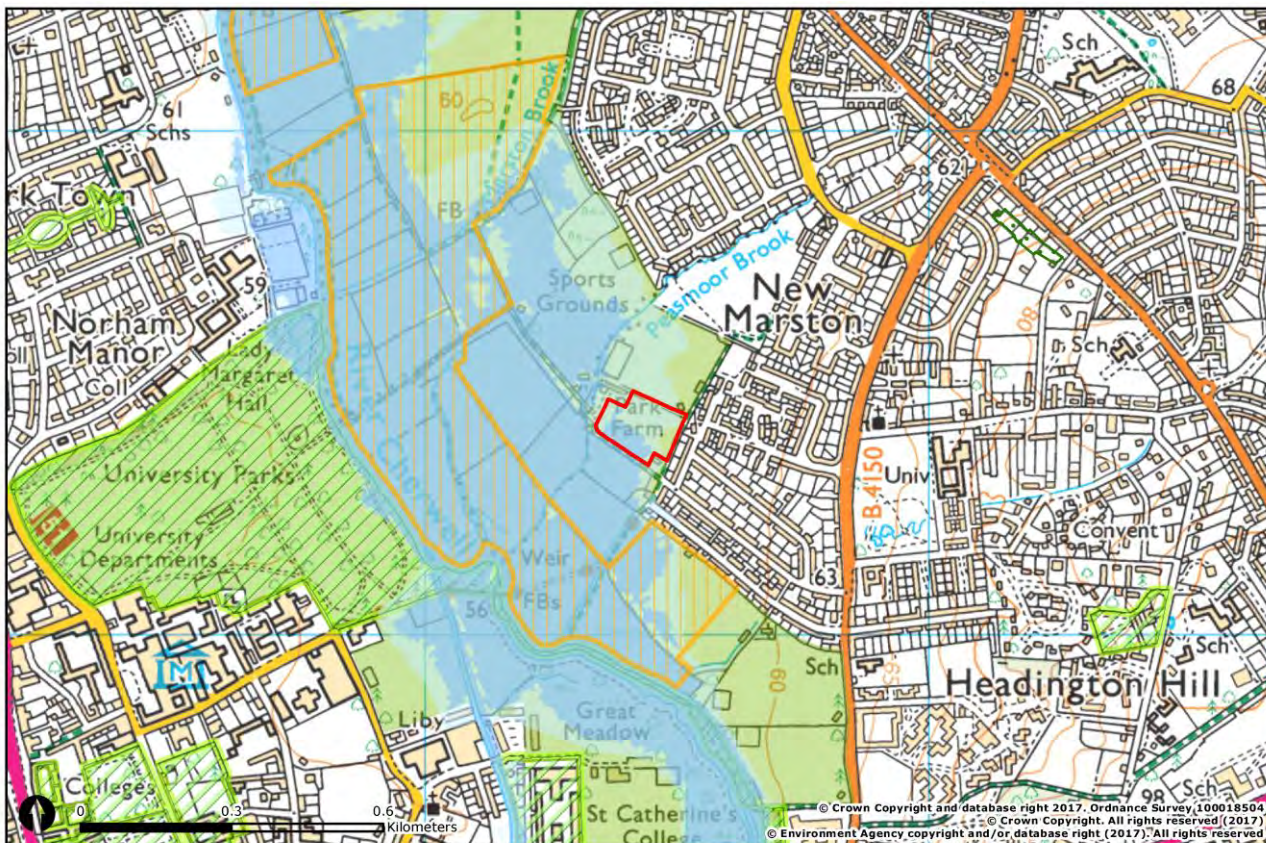
Tree cover provides some visual screening around the parcel (although less so to the north than in other directions), and the River Thames provides a strong western edge, but the current Green Belt boundary marks a stronger distinction between settlement and countryside than would be the case were this parcel to be released. However the designation of surrounding land as floodplain in practice limits the potential for any development in this area to extend further, and so can be considered to strengthen the parcel's boundaries.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of all or part of the parcel.	Although distinguished from adjacent Green Belt land by the absence of any floodplain designation, the parcel nonetheless clearly sits within a riverside area that has a strong distinction from the urban form of the City, into which any development and would constitute significant sprawl. The countryside of which the parcel is part plays an important role in maintaining the historic character of the southern approach to the City centre, with particular reference to the setting of Iffley.	High

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Site boundary | Ancient woodland | World Heritage Site |
| Green Belt | Special area of conservation | Historic park and garden |
| Area of outstanding natural beauty | Special site of scientific interest | Scheduled ancient monument |
| | Flood Zone 2 | |
| | Flood Zone 3 | |



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	462	Park Farm, Marston (A)	Site size (ha):	1.56
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Site description

A pasture field, along with a small area of hardstanding contained by a dense conifer line, located in between the urban edge at New Marston and the buildings of Park Farm. The hedged field adjoins Hertford College Recreation Ground to the north, and a small, hedged pasture field to the south, separated by the access road leading to Park Farm and to the Exeter College Recreation Ground. There is no built development within the site. One dwelling, on a plot taken from the south-eastern corner of the field, lies within the Green Belt, distinct in character from the residential urban edge beyond.

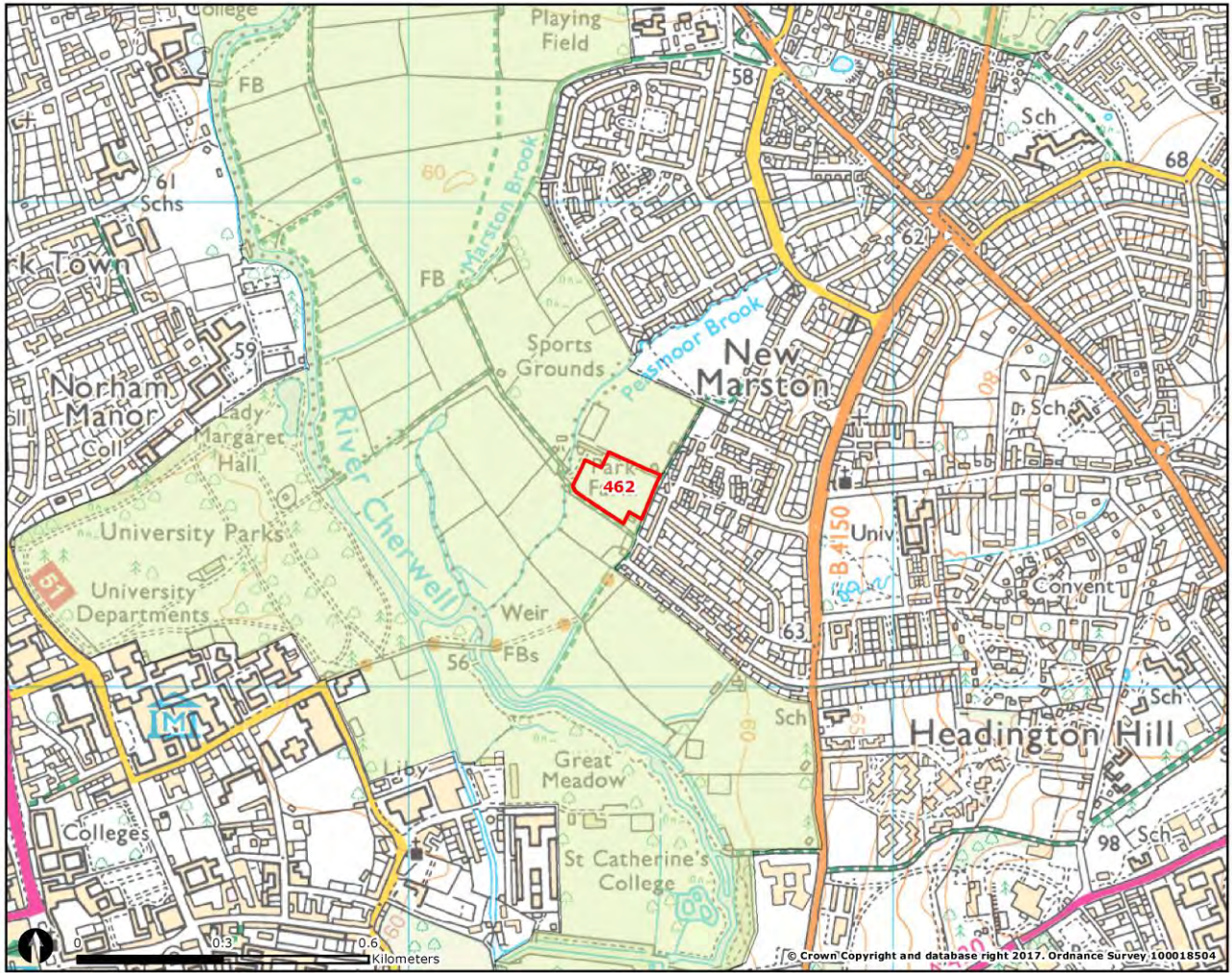
Approximately a third of the site, towards the southern edge, sits within flood zone 3, and most of the remainder is in flood zone 2.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The field is visibly adjacent to the urban edge at New Marston, which at this point, on the lower slopes of Headington Hill, extends closer to the river than is case further to the north. However it is one of a number of similar pasture fields which for the most part lie within the floodplain of the River Cherwell. The Green Belt boundary alongside the site is consistent with the boundary to the south, adjacent to the neighbouring field, and to the north, adjacent to Hertford College Recreation Ground and, to the north of that, New Marston Recreation Ground. These recreation grounds, whilst less rural in character than the riverside meadows, nonetheless preserve a sizeable area of open space between the site further built development, so the site retains a strong link with the open Cherwell Valley. The farm buildings along the north-western edge of the site are not of a character, form or density that can be considered to represent a significant urbanising influence.

Parcels

The site is assessed as a single parcel of land.



Looking south-east across the parcel towards houses on Purcell Road.

Site:	462	Park Farm, Marston (A)	Site size (ha):	1.56
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Parcel:	462	Parcel area (ha):	1.56
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel lies adjacent to the large, built-up area of Oxford. It forms part of an area of open land that is distinct from the settlement edge but which, as it abuts the urban area to the east, can be considered to lie to the north of the 'core' riverside meadows and pastures. Development here would represent a degree of sprawl but not, particularly given the small size of the parcel, a 'step change' in settlement form.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	Development in this direction, north-west from the urban edge, would not reduce the distance between New Marston and central Oxford, and the River Cherwell and associated woodland belts form a strong physical and visual separator. The parcel therefore makes no significant contribution to this purpose.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The parcel is undeveloped and sits within a belt of open land that separates urban areas from the City's northern edge all the way to the confluence of the Cherwell and the Thames. The broader setting is urban but the river and adjacent floodplain meadows and pastures provide a consistent link to the wider countryside. The parcel's peripheral location within this open valley means that there is some urbanising influence, but there is a consistent urban/open edge to the north and south of the parcel so its relationship with the open landscape is stronger than its relationship with the urban area.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The continuity of openness provided by the undeveloped Cherwell river valley as it penetrates into the heart of Oxford is a key characteristic of the City's special character, but this parcel's location adjacent to modern residential development limits its contribution in this respect.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

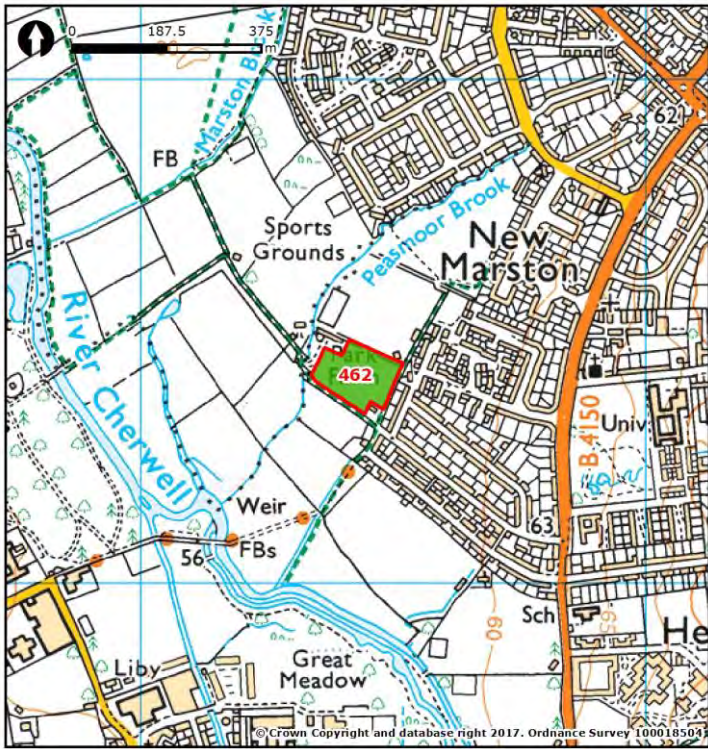
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

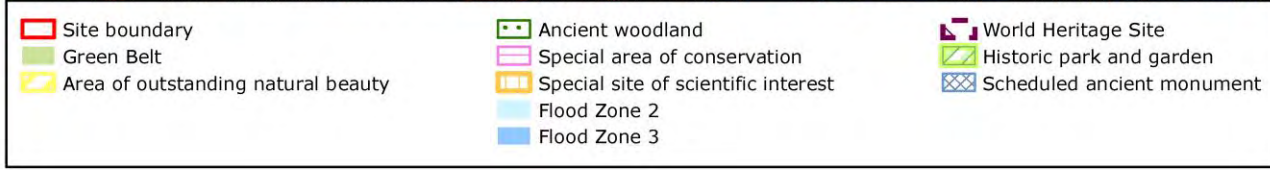
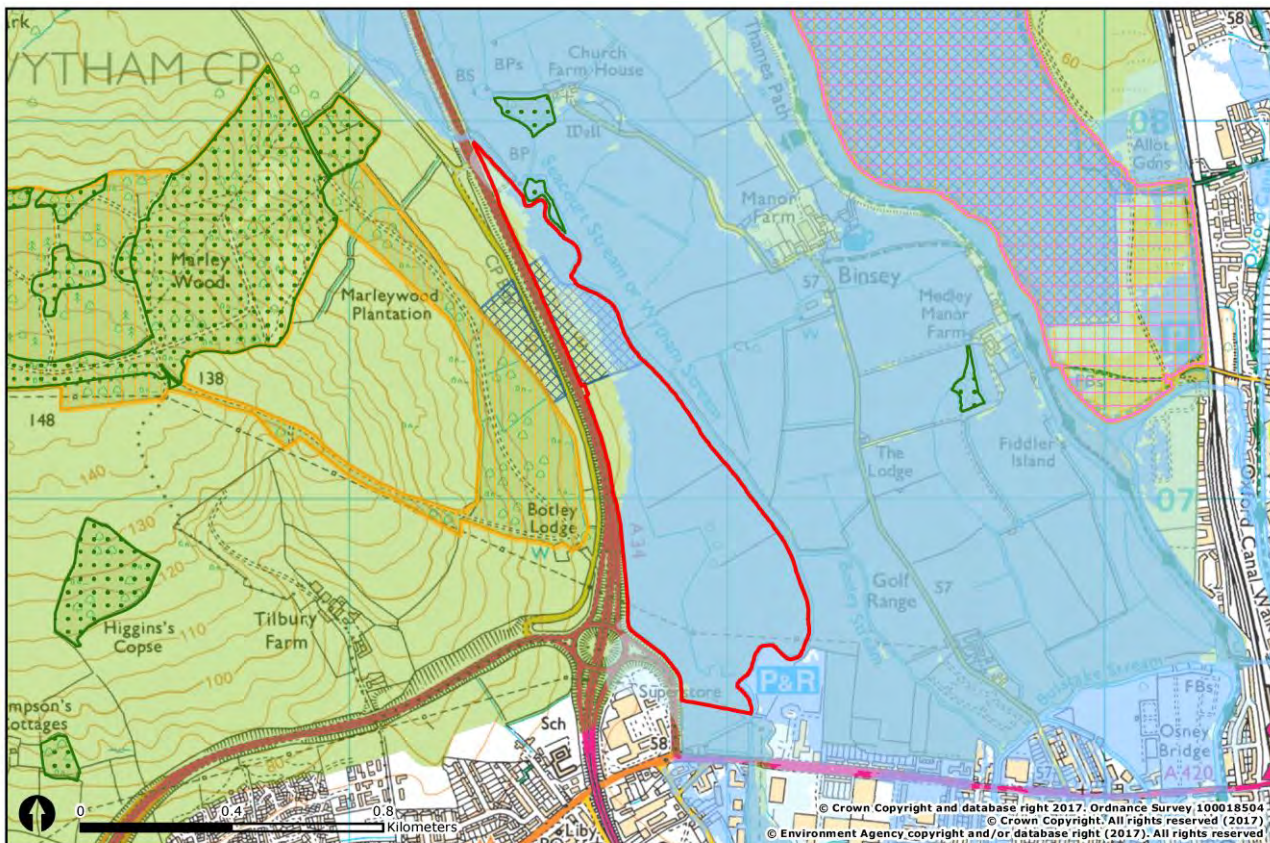
Although not defined by a strong barrier feature, the Green Belt follows a consistent edge to the north and south of the parcel. The access road to Park Farm would provide a clear feature to define an extended southern and western edge to the Green Belt, but its lengthened form would be weaker than the existing boundary.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the parcel.	This would constitute a relatively small release of Green Belt land but it would nonetheless represent a degree of sprawl beyond a consistent boundary line. Impact on the wider Green Belt would be limited, and development would not encroach any closer to the river than the housing to the east. There would be some additional containment of the recreation grounds to the north, and also the small field to the south, which would have the effect of weakening their contribution to Green Belt purposes, and there would also be less justification for retaining the Park Farm buildings in the Green Belt, were they to lack separation from the new urban edge.	Moderate

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	464	Seacourt	Site size (ha):	37.25
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Site description

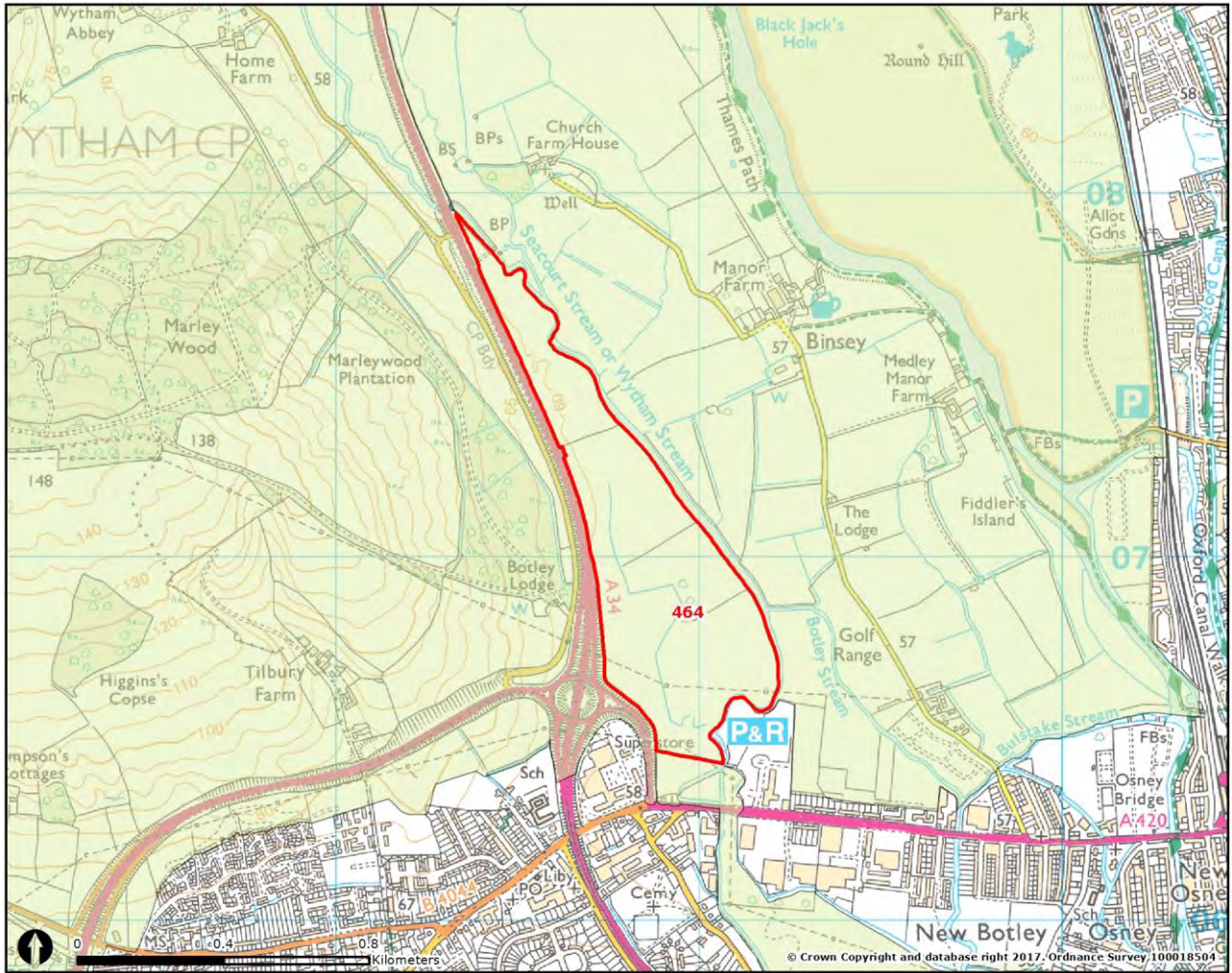
Mostly arable farmland contained between the A34 to the west, the A420 to the south-east and the Seacourt Stream (part of a network of watercourses feeding into the Thames) to the east and north. The site abuts the urban edge on the A34-A420 slip road, but a small block of scrubby woodland separates the southern edge of the site from the A420 West Way. The site is subdivided by weak hedgerows, and contains no built development; much of its northern third is designated a Scheduled Monument - the site of the abandoned medieval settlement of Seacourt.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The A34 marks the edge of the Thames valley floor, with land to the west sloping relatively steeply up towards Wytham Hill. Proximity to major roads and large-scale commercial development at Seacourt has an urbanising influence, and development along the A420 at New Botley provides a continuous urban link across the Thames Valley to the city centre. However the woodland block to the south of the site means that there is only a short frontage with the urban edge, and in terms of its land use, topography and linear form the site has a stronger relationship with the flat, valley floor floodplain landscape of which it is part.

Parcels

The site is relatively large, but has no significant variations in character other than at its narrower northern end, where the Scheduled Monument coincides with a change from arable to pastoral land use. Given the development constraints presented by the Scheduled Monument, it is not considered necessary to define this area as a separate land parcel, so the site is assessed as one parcel.



Looking north-east from the A420, opposite the Seacourt Tower Retail Park.
Oxford City Green Belt Study

Site:	464	Seacourt	Site size (ha):	37.25
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Parcel:	464	Parcel area (ha):	37.25
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
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Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel lies adjacent to the large, built-up area of Oxford. Aside from development at New Botley and New Hinksey the river valleys associated with the Thames and the Cherwell, and their subsidiary streams, have remained largely free from development in the 20th century and beyond. Although the parcel has strong boundary features, development downslope from the Seacourt Tower Retail Park, crossing the tree-edged A420, encroaching on the functional floodplain (flood zone 3) and representing a new direction of urban growth in the locality, would constitute significant sprawl.
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Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel is not close to any inset settlement areas other than that which it abuts to the south, and the A34 and Seacourt Stream provide strong containment. Therefore no significant contribution is made to this purpose.
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Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	The parcel forms part of an area of Green Belt that is contained by the A34 to the west, by the inset settlement of Wolvercote to the north, and by the main urban area of Oxford to the east, extending across the valley to the south of the site to Botley. However this contained Green Belt area is a sizeable expanse of flat, floodplain countryside, bisected by the Thames and subsidiary streams, that has a homogeneous character and little built development. Most of the built development that does exist - principally the hamlet of Binsey - is historic and rural in character. The parcel is contained by the Seacourt Stream, and associated tree cover, but this does not mark any significant change in the relationship between settlement and countryside: there is a greater urban influence close to the southern edge, but all of the area is considered to relate more strongly to the river valley countryside than to the urban area, and although this wider area is largely surrounded by development it also retains, through the Thames and the Seacourt Stream, countryside characteristics that provide connectivity with similar landscapes beyond. The parcel therefore plays a significant role in safeguarding countryside.
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Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The largely undeveloped river valleys that penetrate into the heart of Oxford are recognised as a key component in the City's special character. The parcel lies beyond the riverside areas that form part of the direct setting of historic city centre, but its openness nonetheless contributes to the retention of Oxford's rural setting. Any increase in the sense of containment experienced in the vicinity of Thames - e.g. at Binsey - would detract from rural, historic character. The parcel therefore makes some contribution to this Green Belt purpose.
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Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.
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Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The A420 forms a strong existing Green Belt edge adjacent to the parcel. Although the parcel's boundary features are also strongly defined, they would represent a considerable lengthening of the Green Belt edge, defining a form that would not relate well to existing urban development to the south. The southern edge of the parcel, following a hedgerow, is a weaker boundary than the A420.

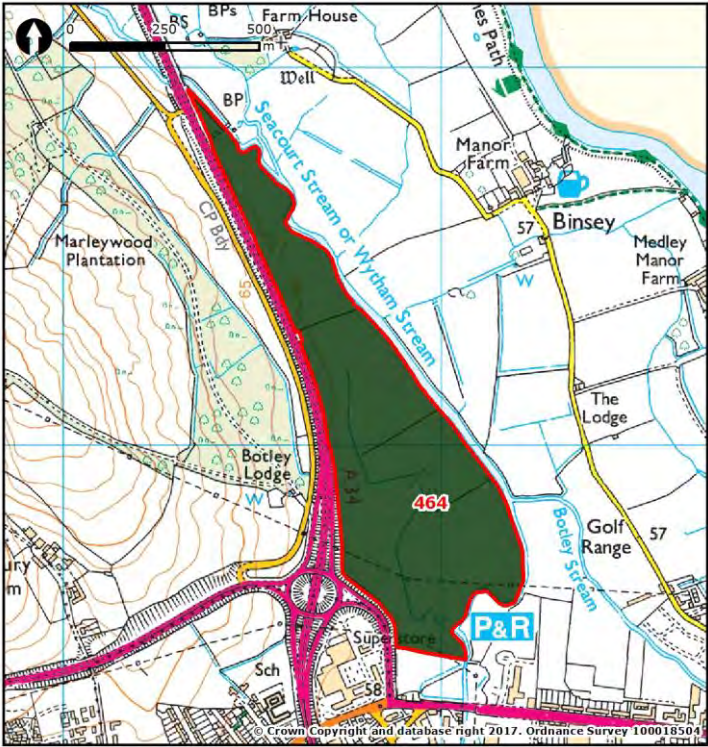
Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

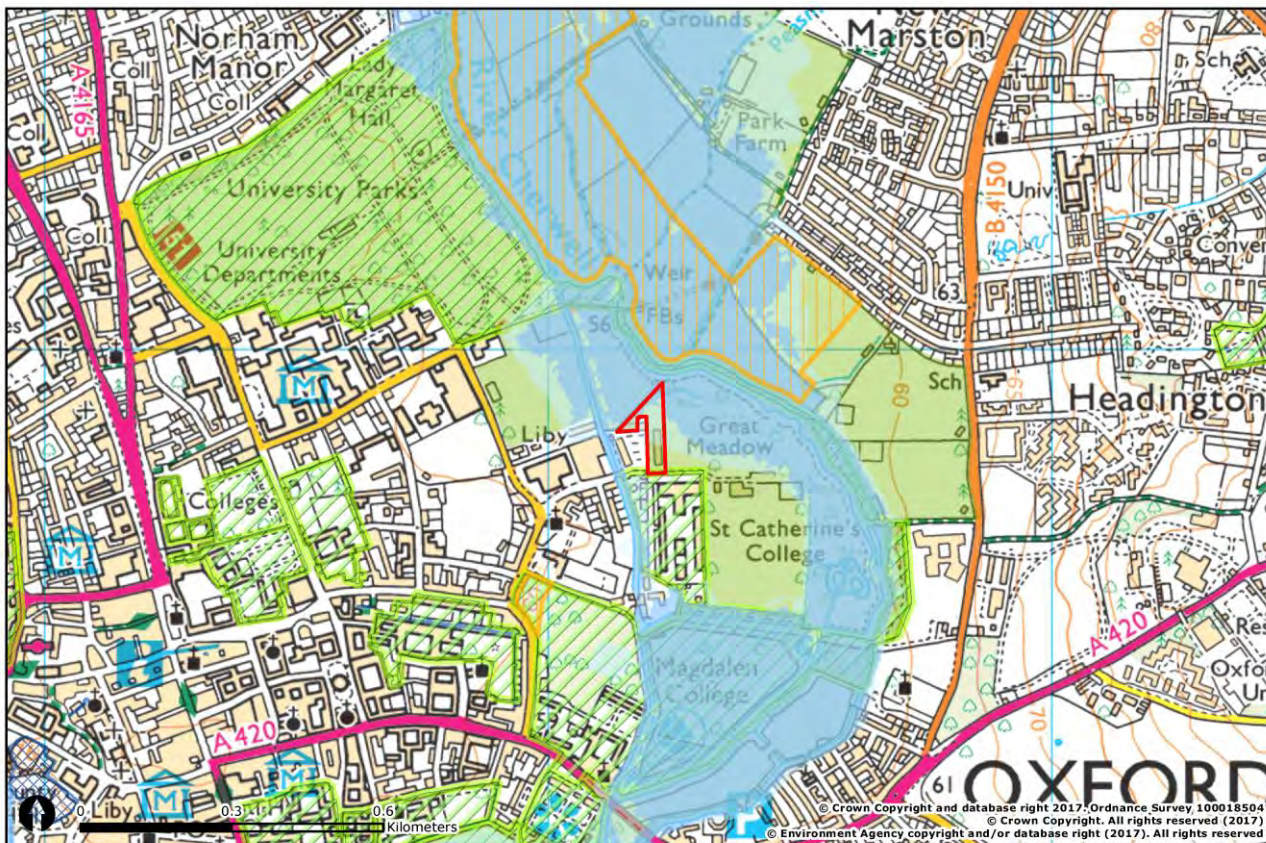
Scenario	Comments	Rating
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Release of all or part of the parcel.	The parcel has a weak relationship with the existing urban form, and development within it would represent significant sprawl and encroachment into an undeveloped landscape which is contiguous with a wider rural landscape that shares its valley setting. It would also detract from the City's historic setting. Release of this parcel would leave the	High
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scrubby woodland block to the south largely contained by the urban edge, leaving little justification for its Green Belt status, and it would sever the already negligible Green Belt link across the A420. Even a more limited release of land on the parcel's urban-influenced edge would represent a significant encroachment, with no containing landscape elements to reduce the association between this area and the rest of the parcel.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





- Site boundary
- Green Belt
- Area of outstanding natural beauty
- Ancient woodland
- Special area of conservation
- Special site of scientific interest
- Flood Zone 2
- Flood Zone 3
- World Heritage Site
- Historic park and garden
- Scheduled ancient monument



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	562	St Catherines College	Site size (ha):	0.69
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Site description

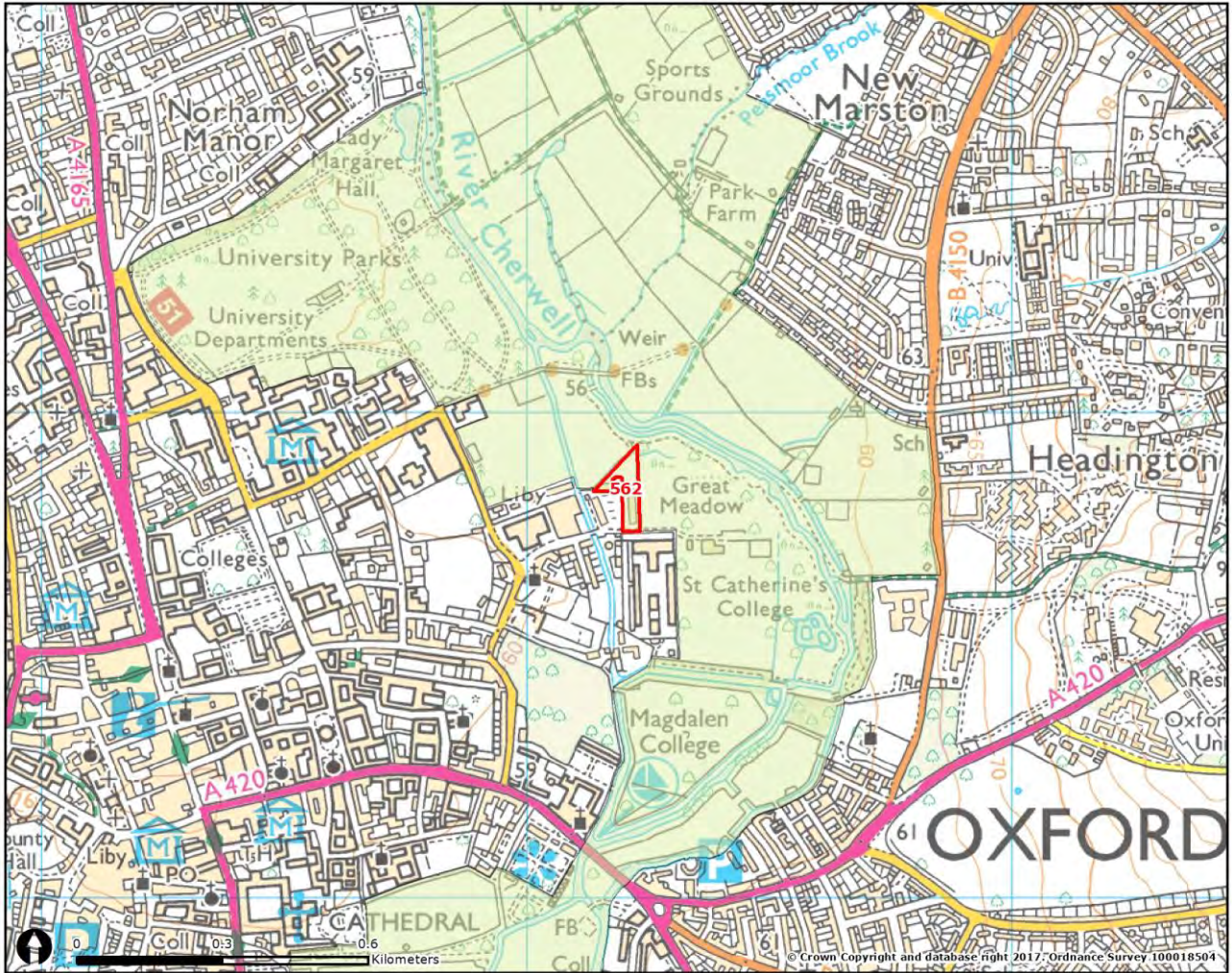
The site is occupied by a series of accommodation blocks and a porters lodge / seminar block which form the eastern side, and part of the northern side, of a new quadrangle completed in 2005, to supplement the accommodation provided in the college's original quad to the south. To the north of the buildings, occupying the space between the northern end of the quad and a tree-lined drainage channel, the site consists of a roughly triangular area of lawn, with several young specimen trees, and a strip of lawn also runs along the western edge of the site, alongside the accommodation blocks, separating them from the car parking that occupies the centre of the quad. A surfaced track, hedged along its eastern side and with a low wall to the west, forms the eastern edge of the site alongside Great Meadow, and a tarmac college access road forms the southern edge. The college buildings to the west and south form part of the defined urban area, whilst land to the north of the site (Music Meadow) and to the east (Great Meadow) is part of the Green Belt.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The extent of built development on the site and its role as part of a quadrangle of buildings gives it a strong relationship with the urban edge. The remain open land functions as open space associated with the built development (the strip of lawn along the western edge aligns with a lawn that forms part of the gardens around the original St Catherine's college buildings. The Green Belt meadow to the east is strongly contained by the woodland-fringed River Cherwell, and by the tree-lined channel that runs along the northern edge of the site, linking into the Mill Stream. Merton College Recreation Ground, also within the Green Belt, lies to the south of Great Meadow.

Parcels

The site is assessed as a single parcel of land.



Looking south toward accommodation buildings in parcel; the wall and hedge mark the eastern boundary.

Site:	562	St Catherines College	Site size (ha):	0.69
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Parcel:	562	Parcel area (ha):	0.69
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel is already to a large extent developed, and the form and function of the remaining open land relate strongly to the built development within the parcel. Any additional built development within the parcel would not therefore be viewed as uncontained sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The site is more closely associated with the settlement edge than open Green belt, and the River Cherwell and associated woodland form a strong barrier between, on the one side, the site and Great Meadow, and on the other New Marston, which is situated over 300m to the east. The parcel therefore makes no significant contribution to this purpose.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	Land to the west of the Cherwell, both here and to the north (Music Meadow and University Parks) and south (Merton Recreation Ground) has a strong association with the university colleges, and the site itself is too developed to be considered to play any significant role in safeguarding countryside.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	The riverside meadows are a very important element in Oxford's special character but the site's boundary hedge and tree-lined watercourse mark a clear distinction between formal landscaping, associated with college buildings, and the meadows alongside the Cherwell. The parcel therefore makes no significant contribution to this purpose.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

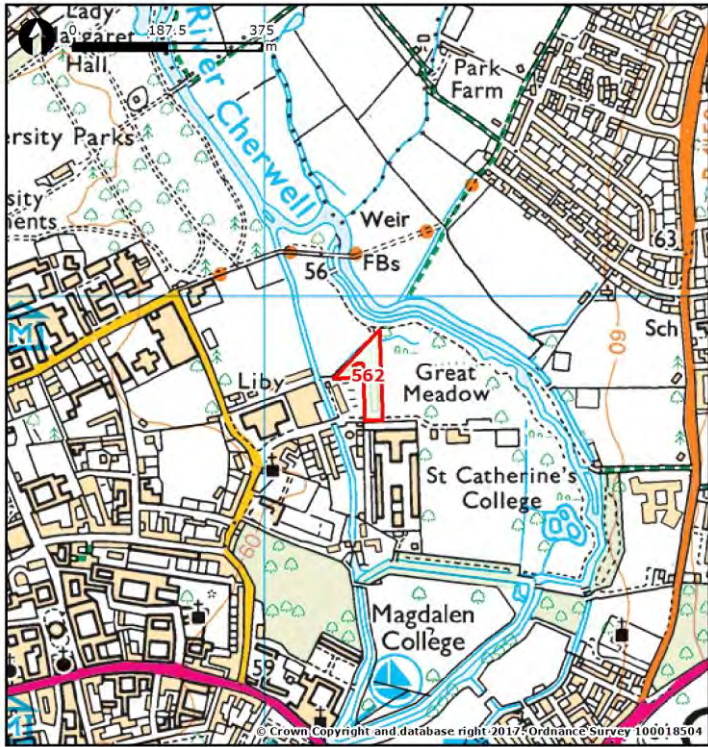
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

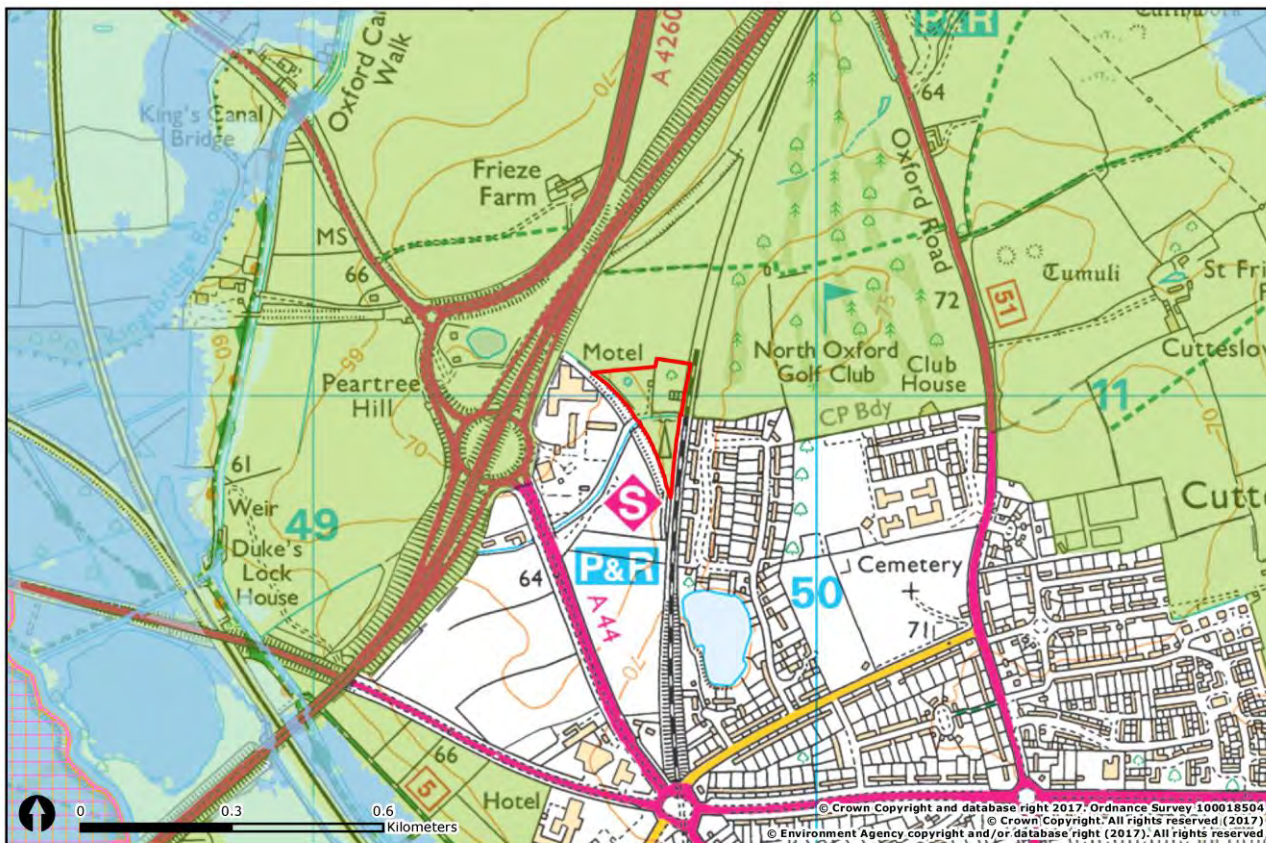
The quad's boundary wall, and the fence and young hedge that form the short stretch of parcel edge to the north of this, clearly define the developed area. The existing Green belt edge to the west of the new buildings does not mark any distinction between urban and open land.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the whole parcel.	The construction of the eastern and northern sections of the new quadrangle at St Catherine's College has rendered the existing Green Belt boundary meaningless as a distinction between urban development and open land. Release of the parcel would result in a boundary that clearly distinguishes between the college and the adjacent riverside meadow. There would be no adverse impact on the contribution of adjacent land to Green Belt purposes.	Low

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site





- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Site boundary | Ancient woodland | World Heritage Site |
| Green Belt | Special area of conservation | Historic park and garden |
| Area of outstanding natural beauty | Special site of scientific interest | Scheduled ancient monument |
| | Flood Zone 2 | |
| | Flood Zone 3 | |



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Site:	590	Pear Tree Farm	Site size (ha):	2.03
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Site description

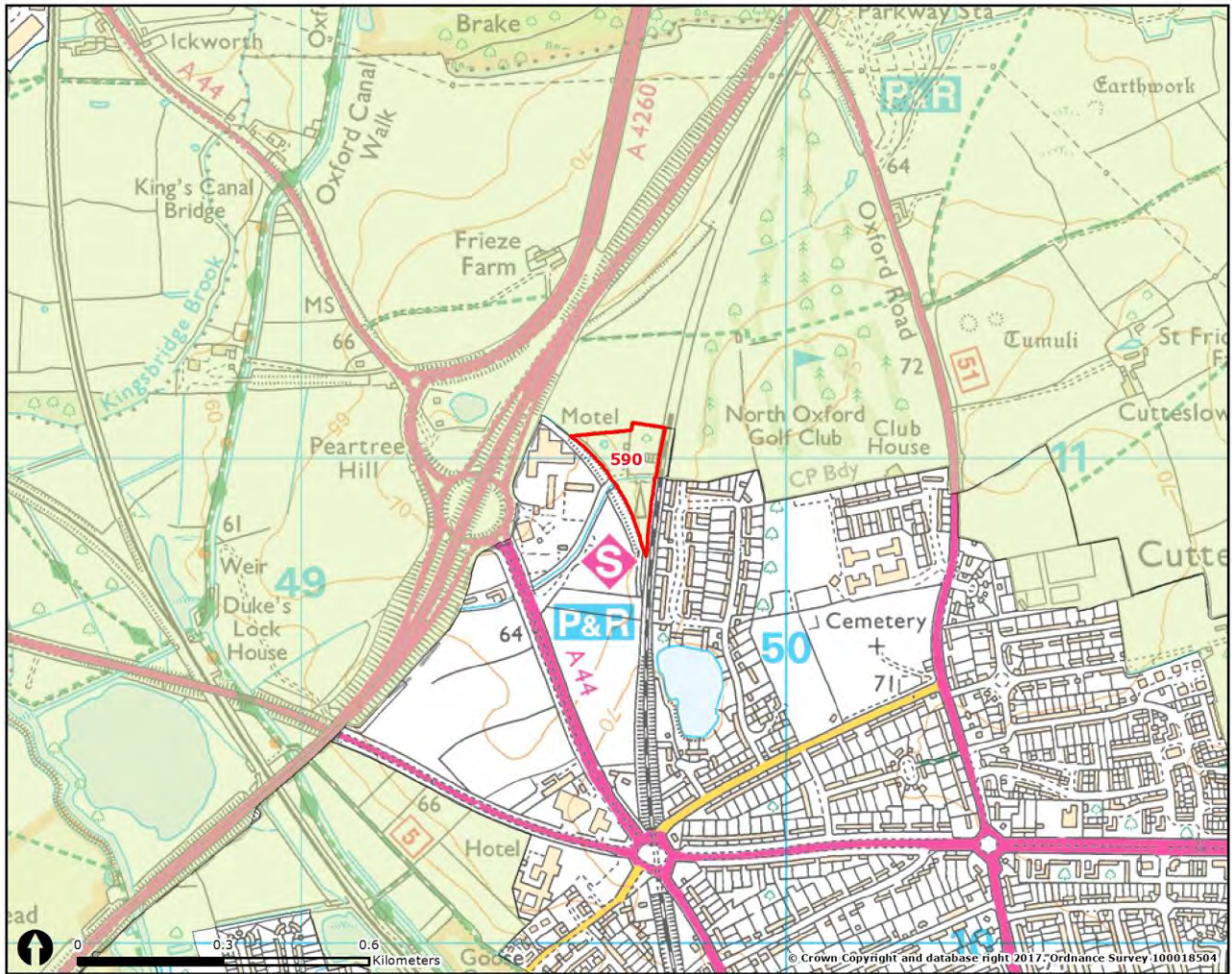
The buildings of Pear Tree Farm and an adjacent mobile phone mast, contained to the east by the railway line and associated vegetation, and to south/west by a belt of trees marking the route of a former railway line and also the urban edge.

Relationship between site, settlement and countryside

The tree belt between the Peartree Park and Ride and Pear Tree Farm site is a relatively strong boundary feature, and the northern edge of the parcel is a hedgerow which only partially bounds it, but the field beyond it (within Cherwell District) is in turn strongly contained by the A34 and the railway line.

Parcels

The site is assessed as a single parcel. The land to the north, contained between the A34 and the railway line, lies within Cherwell District and has also come forward for consideration in a call for sites process as part of a Partial Review of the Cherwell Local Plan Part 1.



Looking south towards the Pear Tree Farm buildings, mostly screened by vegetation, from the railway footbridge alongside the golf course.

Site:	590	Pear Tree Farm	Site size (ha):	2.03
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Parcel:	590	Parcel area (ha):	2.03
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Contribution to Green Belt purposes

Purpose	Comments
Purpose 1: Checking sprawl of Oxford	The parcel lies adjacent to the large, built-up area of Oxford. The belt of trees between the parcel and the Park and Ride forms a relatively strong boundary, but the A34 and the railway line provide strong containment around the site and the adjacent field, which would limit the extent to which any development would be perceived as sprawl.
Purpose 2: Preventing merger of settlements	The parcel's containment and the extent of built development in it already limit its contribution to the settlement gap between Oxford and Kidlington, so its release would constitute only a minor reduction in the gap between the settlements, as perceived from the A34 and the railway line.
Purpose 3: Safeguarding countryside	This is physically and visually part of a fairly contained area that does not relate strongly to the wider countryside. The Pear Tree Farm buildings are not an urbanising influence, but proximity to the A34 and railway line does detract from countryside character.
Purpose 4: Preserving Oxford's setting and special character	There is no relationship between this area and Oxford's historic core, and undeveloped hillsides and river floodplains are recognised as the key landscape elements in the town's setting, but the extent of visibility of built development from the ring roads that largely contain the city can also be considered to play a role in perception of Oxford's rural setting. In this respect the openness of the parcel makes some limited contribution to setting.
Purpose 5: Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

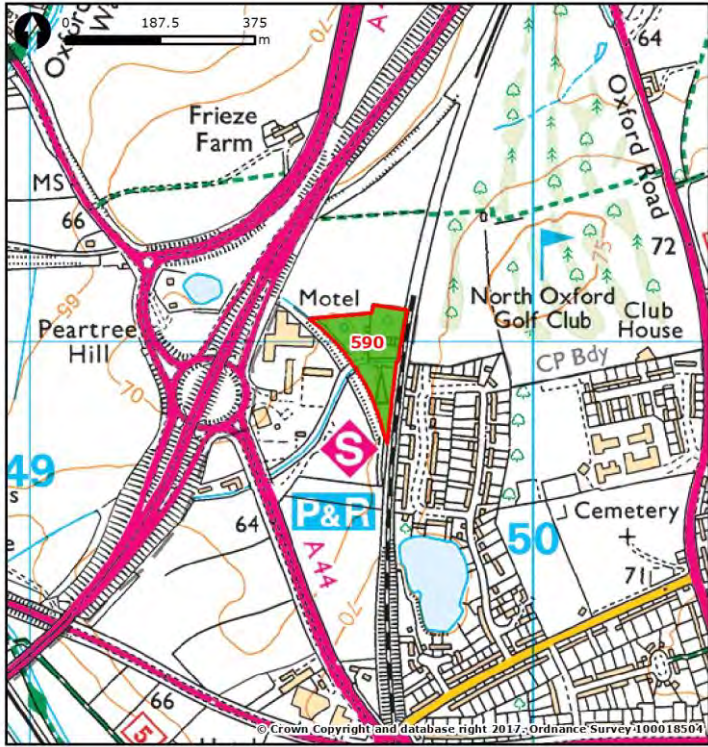
Potential alternative Green Belt boundary

The outer edge of the parcel would be a weaker boundary than either the existing tree belt or the A34, which contains adjacent land in Cherwell District. There is currently a very limited perception of built development from the A34, so there is not a strong sense that this marks a distinction between urban and rural areas; however this may potentially change with the development of the Oxford Northern Gateway on land including, and to the south of, the hotels and park and ride at the Pear Tree roundabout.

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release

Scenario	Comments	Rating
Release of the whole parcel.	The development of the parcel would have little impact on countryside or the settlement gap, but by crossing a relatively strong boundary it would constitute a moderate degree of sprawl, and would weaken the Green belt contribution of adjacent land within Cherwell District. Containment of the two sites by the same strong landscape elements, the A34 and the railway line, means that harm resulting from the release of both areas would be limited, although it would to some extent weaken the Green Belt role of the adjacent North Oxford Golf Course by increasing development alongside the A34 and narrowing the gap to Oxford Parkway station.	Moderate

Harm to Green Belt resulting from release of whole site



Summary of Assessment Findings

4.8 Out of a total geographical area of 127.89ha of Green Belt land¹³ assessed within Oxford:

- 96.04ha (75.1%) rated as 'high' in terms of harm to Green Belt resulting from release.
- 6.43ha (5.0%) rated as 'moderate-high' in terms of harm to Green Belt resulting from release.
- 22.11ha (17.3%) rated as 'moderate' in terms of harm to Green Belt resulting from release.
- 2.62ha (2.1%) rated as 'low-moderate' in terms of harm to Green Belt resulting from release.
- 0.69ha (0.5%) rated as 'low' in terms of harm to Green Belt resulting from release.

Table 4.1: Assessment results summary

Site	Parcel	Size (ha)	Harm rating
107		3.95	Moderate
113		3.64	Moderate
115		2.34	High
462		1.56	Moderate
464		37.25	High
112a	112a-1	3.47	Moderate
112a	112a-2	13.53	High
112b	112b-1	1.84	Low-Moderate
112b	112b-2	20.39	High
112b	112b-3	3.02	High
112b	112b-4	7.46	Moderate
112b	112b-5	6.43	Moderate-High
112b	112b-6	19.11	High
112c	112c-1	2.82	Moderate-High
112c	112c-2	7.89	High
590		2.03	Moderate
562		0.69	Low
114d		0.78	Low-Moderate

¹³ Area of land rather than area of sites: so the overlap between sites 112b and 112c is not double-counted.

5 Mitigation and Enhancement of Beneficial use

Introduction

- 5.1 The following chapter sets out 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 Green Belt

The concept of mitigation

- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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. Although any release of Green Belt land will still require 'exceptional circumstances' to be demonstrated,
- 5.4 Mitigation relates to land under the control of the site owner/developer, and could therefore apply either to land being released or land being retained as Green Belt. There is an overlap between the latter and the concept of beneficial use of Green Belt land as set out in the NPPF, in that mitigation can also present an opportunity to enhance beneficial use.

Mitigation themes

- 5.5 The extent to which harm can be mitigated will vary from site to site, but potential measures can be considered under different themes. 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.
- 5.6 **Table 5.1** below lists some mitigation measures that could be considered as part of the development process.

Table 5.1: Potential measures to mitigate harm to Green Belt

Mitigation 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. the railway line along the western edge of Oxford – 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

Mitigation measure	Benefits	Considerations
Preserve/enhance landscape elements which contribute to the historic setting of Oxford, and views which provide an appreciation of historic setting and special character	Preserving setting and special character of Oxford	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 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
Improve management practices to enhance countryside character	Increasing strength of countryside character	Landscape character assessment can help to identify valued characteristics that should be retained and where possible strengthened, and intrusive elements that should be diminished and where possible removed
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
Using sustainable drainage features to define/enhance separation between settlement and countryside	Strengthening separation between urban and open land	

Beneficial Use of Green Belt

- 5.1 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.”

- 5.2 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
- 5.3 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.

Potential opportunities to enhance use

- 5.4 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 5.2** below.
- 5.5 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 para 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 5.2: 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 space 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.

Making Changes to the Green Belt

- 5.6 As noted in **Chapter 2**, 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.
- 5.7 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 whole of the Green Belt based around the five purposes¹⁴. 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.
- 5.8 As outlined in the Housing White Paper (2017), Green Belt boundaries should be amended only in exceptional circumstances when local authorities can demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options including:
- making effective use of suitable brownfield sites and the opportunities offered by estate regeneration;
 - the potential offered by land which is currently underused, including surplus public sector land where appropriate;
 - optimising the proposed density of development; and
 - exploring whether other authorities can help to meet some of the identified development requirement.
- 5.9 Should the City 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, would help to engender public confidence and support, as well as minimise potential harm to the remaining Green Belt.

¹⁴ Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt, Planning Advisory Service (PAS), 2015. (<http://www.pas.gov.uk/documents/332612/1099309/Planning+on+Your+Doorstep+-+The+Big+Issues+Green+Belt.pdf/bb5fcd90-fa29-42a0-9dd9-82b27a43f72f>)