

2012 INNER GREEN BELT BOUNDARY STUDY

December 2012

Cambridge City Council and South
Cambridgeshire District Council

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A joint review of the Inner Green Belt Boundary around Cambridge was undertaken in Autumn 2012 by officers of Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. It draws on and reviews the 2002 Inner Green Belt Study prepared by Cambridge City Council. It also builds on and is consistent with the broad appraisal of the Inner Green Belt boundary that the City Council undertook in May 2012 to sit alongside the Issues and Options Report (June 2012) The methodology for the review is set out below.
- 1.2 The purpose of the review is to provide an up to date evidence base for both Councils' new Local Plans. In particular it will help the Councils reach a view on whether there are specific areas of land that could be considered for release from the Green Belt and allocated for development to meet identified needs, without significant harm to Green Belt purposes. To release land from the Cambridge Green Belt, there would need to be exceptional circumstances; this is the subject of separate consideration.
- 1.3 The 2012 Joint Cambridge Inner Green Belt Study follows a similar methodology as the 2002 City Council Study. The difference between the methodology used in 2002 and 2012 is that the new study is a joint study and therefore the assessment criteria have been agreed between the two councils. In addition some of the original criteria, such as the assessment of land quality, adequate access, the presence of archaeological assets etc, have been considered elsewhere in the process. This review addresses Green Belt issues only.
- 1.4 Qualified Landscape Architects from each Council, with experience of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and Landscape Character Assessments, carried out the assessment work. The methodology used is consistent with best practice guidance on landscape character assessments issued by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.¹
- 1.5 The joint assessments for each Sector (see Plan 4) were carried out in Autumn of 2012 and in good weather conditions allowing clear views across landscapes.
- 1.6 The study was carried out firstly to assess the importance of landscape areas surrounding Cambridge to the purposes of Green Belt, and then of the potential impact of developing the areas.

2. PURPOSE OF THE GREEN BELT

- 2.1 The principles of Green Belt remain unchanged in today's planning environment. The National Planning Policy Framework states there are five purposes of including land in Green Belts:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
 - to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns and
 - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land
- 2.2 These five criteria can be applied specifically to Cambridge within this appraisal as follows:

¹ Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment : Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition 2002,

PURPOSE: provide green separation between existing villages and any urban edge of Cambridge

An assessment was made of each sector by using maps and aerial photographs and by considering various factors such as distance between settlements, existing edges, trees and vegetation cover, and risk of one settlement merging into another.

PURPOSE: to preserve the setting and special character of Cambridge.

The character and setting of Cambridge are described in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment.

PURPOSE: ensure the protection of green corridors running from open countryside into the urban area

The existing Green Belt extends along green corridors into and close to the City centre. These corridors should remain protected to preserve the setting of the City.

PURPOSE: a vision of the city and of the qualities to be safeguarded

The qualities of the City are described in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment which in turn informed the vision for the future of development of Cambridge.

3 PREVIOUS STUDIES

- 3.1 Previous studies have been undertaken to review the inner Green Belt boundary surrounding Cambridge to enable land to be assessed and then released for development. These studies are the Buchanan Cambridge Sub-region Study 2001, Cambridge City Council, Inner Green Belt Boundary Study 2002, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge Green Belt Study September 2002 and the Land West Of Trumpington Road Study (2003).
- 3.2 The Buchanan Study and the SCDC study took a wider, more strategic look at the broader Green Belt around the City and how it benefited both the City and the general area. The 2002 City Council study was carried out to assist specifically in identifying sites that could be released from Green Belt for development close to Cambridge without harm to the purposes of Green Belt or the setting of the City. It was an in-house working document, which informed the preparation of the 2006 Cambridge Local Plan.
- 3.3 Ten years on and it was thought appropriate to carry out firstly a broad appraisal of the inner Green Belt boundary areas in the context of the recent land releases; this was carried out by the City Council in the spring of 2012. The appraisal specifically reconsidered zones of land immediately adjacent to the City in terms of the principles and function of the Green Belt. Questions relating to the principle of whether there should be more development on the edge of Cambridge and whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of further land from the Green Belt to meet the housing and employment needs of the area were raised in both Councils Issues and Options Reports (Summer 2012).
- 3.4 Following on from the Issues and Options consultations, the inner Green Belt boundary is now being looked at in detail, but conclusions from the broad appraisal in May 2012 are brought forward and underpin this review. The broad appraisal concluded that areas where the City is viewed from higher ground or generally has open aspects, or where the urban edge is close to the city centre are more sensitive and cannot accommodate change² easily. Areas of the City that have level views and where the edge has mixed

² 'Change' means the introduction of a different feature into the rural/agricultural landscape. This could be an electricity pylon, built development or even a bio-mass crop. In this instance we consider built development.

foreground can accommodate change more easily. On a comparative basis these areas have a lesser importance to the setting of the City and to the purposes of Green Belt.

3.5 It should be noted that areas with a lesser importance to the Green Belt surround Cambridge are very limited and should be considered bearing in mind the value that is put on the City in its setting. Getting it wrong will have permanent and irretrievable consequences on the historic City of Cambridge.

4 METHODOLOGY - ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE METHODOLOGY

4.1 As with the 2002 Inner Green Belt Study, areas, which are essential to the character and setting of Cambridge, should be protected from development. These areas are identified and referred to as 'Defining Character Areas' as outlined in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment 2002 and include landscape features such as the green corridors and views of the city skyline. These Defining Character Areas are specifically excluded from the study, and are shown on Plan 1.

4.2 Areas, which are identified as 'Supporting Character' in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, are of varying value to the purposes of the Green Belt. This review determines the importance of these areas to the purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt.

4.3 In South Cambridgeshire the rural setting, scale and character of the ring of necklace villages, and their separation from each other and from Cambridge, are important components of the Green Belt and contribute strongly to Green Belt purposes.

4.4 If any land is released from the Green Belt, it would not all necessarily be built upon. A landscape framework including landscape buffer areas, green corridors to enhance amenity, increase biodiversity and provide opportunities for recreation and access would need to be planned into any future development to mitigate any harm to Green Belt purposes.

4.5 Features and urban edges which presently detract from the setting of Cambridge are assessed and opportunities identified that could be taken in design proposals for any development to enhance the setting of Cambridge and improve amenity.

4.6 Issues such as economic viability of agricultural holdings, transport, access, employment and services are not assessed as part of this study.

4.7 **Area of Study** - The Area of Study is confined to land on the edge of Cambridge and within any major physical barriers around Cambridge such as the M11 motorway to the west of the City and the A14 to the north. On this basis land around the necklace villages has not been included in the study area except where a site abuts the boundary with Cambridge or is very close to it. The study area is shown on Plan 4.

4.8 This constraint is recognition that any removal of land from the Green Belt beyond these barriers, so that the developed area of the City extends over them, would be inconsistent with the following Green Belt purposes:

- a) preserving Cambridge as a compact city
- b) preventing coalescence between Cambridge and necklace villages
- c) maintaining the quality of the setting of Cambridge

4.9 The potential effect of changing the Green Belt boundary, and for built development to change the special character of Cambridge and its setting, has more direct and profound implications close to Cambridge and between Cambridge and its ring of necklace villages.

4.10 Development producing any of the above results would either disregard green belt purposes or be inappropriate development. No assessment in this study was therefore undertaken outside the study area. This principle was taken in the 2002 Study and is still sound today.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 The following steps were taken following the setting of the Area of Study whereby the Cambridge edge is sub-divided into Sectors (Plan 4), and each Sector is further sub-divided into land areas. It should be noted that not all land areas follow recognisable field boundaries. This departure from standard practice is because it was recognised that, when verified on the ground, particular parts of some individual large fields were of less importance to Green Belt purposes than the entire field. This was usually the result of substantial vegetation, a ridge line or change in gradient in the local topography. Also see Table 2 : Guidance notes below for additional information on the site and data assessments.

5.2 Step 1

Areas that have been identified as 'Defining Character Areas' in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment 2002, represent 'key resources that are essential to the special qualities of Cambridge and its setting' and are automatically retained as Green Belt. An example of a 'Defining Character Area' are the green corridors penetrating the fabric of the city from the surrounding countryside or the views to the historic core. The Defining Character Areas were reviewed in relation to this study and are judged to be as valid and relevant today as they were in 2002. They are shown on Plan 1.

5.3 Step 2

• Desk Study

Desktop research was carried out initially and with particular reference to the Landscape Character Assessment 2002 to identify environmental and landscape features which are important to setting and character.

• Field Survey

Field surveys were carried out on a sector-by-sector and area by area basis. Field surveys verified and confirmed local landform, vegetation, and identified important local views, important landscape features and the role of an area in the setting of Cambridge.

5.4 Step 3

Information describing the results of the desk and field study survey were included in tabular form summarising the base data information with accompanying plans and photographs.

5.5 Step 4

Environmental Base Data/Criteria (Plans 2 and 3)

Various environmental base data/criteria was collected and assessed for each location included:

- vegetation,
- height above ordnance datum,
- important views,
- edge type,
- potential to improve urban edge

- importance to separation,
- distribution, physical separation, setting, scale and character of Green Belt villages
- a landscape which has a strongly rural character

5.6 **Step 5**

The detailed survey and analysis allowed judgements to be made about the importance to the purposes of Green Belt of each area. Assessments were made on an area by area basis for the purposes of setting, character and also of separation and described in the tables as very high, high, medium, low, and negligible; the higher the value the higher the worth to Green Belt function. If there were notable variations in the assessment of areas, consideration was given to whether the area should be further subdivided and assessed separately.

5.7 **Step 6**

An area by area comparison matrix (Significance Matrix - Table 1)

The designation of Green Belt is a 'blanket' coverage, which may result in some areas of less importance to the function of Green Belt than others being included. For example, one field may be of an identical importance to another in terms of its own amenity and character but have very different impact on the purposes of the Green Belt if it were to be developed. When examined at a more detailed level, the development of some areas could prove to be more or less detrimental to the special character of Cambridge and its setting.

A Significance Matrix was developed which allows for many landscape and visual factors to be taken into account simultaneously and in as consistent a manner as possible. It allowed comparisons and judgements of the likely impact of development to be made bearing in mind the ability of different local landscape areas to accept³ change without detriment to the setting and character of Cambridge. The Significance Matrix compares sensitivity of setting, character and separation (along its horizontal axis) against the likely magnitude of the impact of any development (along its vertical axis).

To formulate the Significance Matrix, each area examined is assigned a judgement for its importance to the setting and character of Cambridge. Another judgement is made on how great an effect development might have on an area should it be built. The comparison results in a sensitivity score ranged from negligible to major. These 'sensitivity' scores are then included on the tabulated assessment for each sector and area.

5.8 **Step 7**

A sensitivity score of major/high indicates an area was important to the purposes of the Green Belt and very sensitive to change.

A sensitivity score of medium/low/negligible indicated that any change to the Green Belt boundary would have limited an effect on Green Belt purposes.

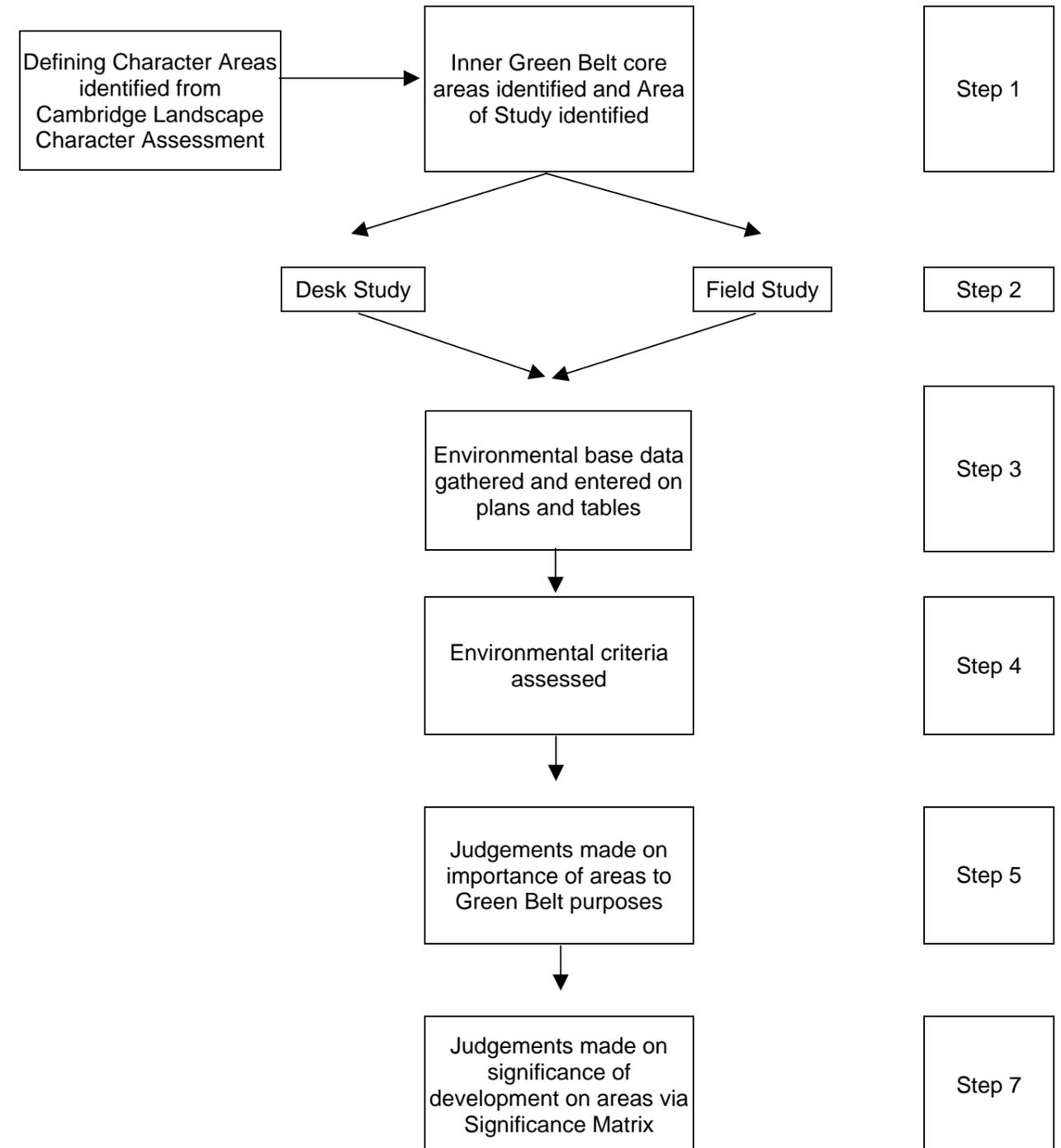
6 **RESULTS**

The results of the survey, importance to the Green Belt, and potential impact of development are set out in the Sector Tables and accompanying plans. Conclusions were made about the importance of land in the study area to the purposes of the Green Belt and level of impact on those purposes.

³ the ability for a landscape to accept change will be dependent on its features. A landscape with an enclosed character, flat topography and mature vegetation would have a greater capacity to accept change (development) without significant harm to the Green Belt. Whereas an open, exposed landscape on higher ground would not.

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METHOD PLAN



**JOINT LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT
TABLE 1 : SIGNIFICANCE MATRIX**

SENSITIVITY FOR IMMEDIATE SETTING AND CHARACTER OF CAMBRIDGE

MAGNITUDE OF EFFECT OF A DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL		VERY HIGH Very distinctive character and setting susceptible to relatively small change	HIGH Distinctive character and setting susceptible to relatively small change	MEDIUM Character and setting reasonably tolerant of change	LOW Character and setting tolerant of change	NEGLIGIBLE Character and setting tolerant or potentially improved by change
	VERY HIGH Development proposals are potentially highly visible with adverse impact	MAJOR --	HIGH --	HIGH/MEDIUM-	MEDIUM 0	MEDIUM/LOW +
	HIGH Development proposals are potentially significant	HIGH --	HIGH/MEDIUM -	MEDIUM 0	MEDIUM/LOW +	LOW +
	MEDIUM Development proposals are noticeable	HIGH/MEDIUM -	MEDIUM 0	MEDIUM/LOW +	LOW +	LOW/ NEGLIGIBLE ++
	LOW Development proposals barely noticeable	MEDIUM 0	MEDIUM/LOW+	LOW +	LOW/ NEGLIGIBLE ++	NEGLIGIBLE ++
	NO CHANGE No discernable change	NEGLIGIBLE ++	NEGLIGIBLE ++	NEGLIGIBLE ++	NEGLIGIBLE ++	NEGLIGIBLE ++

JOINT LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT - Table 2 Guidance Notes

SECTOR TABLES

	AREA 1	AREA 2	AREA 3	AREA 4
BASE DATA/SURVEY DATA				
CHARACTER AREA/TYPE	Base data taken from the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment 2002 where included.			
DEFINING OR SUPPORTING AREAS	Base data taken from the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment 2002. Defining Character Areas are 'key resources at are essential to the special qualities of Cambridge and its setting' e.g. Stourbridge Common. These areas are automatically retained as Green Belt.			
PROXIMITY TO HISTORIC CORE	An approximate measurement from the Area to the City centre. The distance is relevant as it demonstrates the compactness of the City.			
HEIGHT	The Ordnance Datum heights given because of its relevance for high, visually exposed sites or sites that are viewed from surrounding elevated areas.			
VEGETATION	Vegetation data surveyed in order to demonstrate importance to the environment, ecology or visual screening.			
IMPORTANT VIEWS	View data in and out of a site given in order to demonstrate whether an area possesses important views in and out of Cambridge, e.g. to a spire or college, or whether it is highly visible from the surrounding area.			
EDGE TYPE	Survey data to show whether a site has a soft (vegetated) edge or a distinctive built edge of merit or not. Data gathered on whether the existing urban edge is valuable and worthy of retention.			
PROXIMITY TO GREEN CORRIDOR	An approximate measurement to the nearest Green Corridor or Defining Character Area and an assessment of whether there would be a loss of land or an affect on a green corridor.			
ASSESSMENT DATA				
IMPORTANCE TO SETTING	This is an assessment on whether the area has an important role for the setting of Cambridge. One of the purposes of Green Belt is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. This applies to Cambridge as a city presented within a rural, mostly agricultural, setting with a soft green edge. The setting also has historic and social associations; for instance, if it had views to Kings College Chapel or views to Grantchester meadows, it would be important for the setting of the city and therefore important to the purposes of Green Belt.			
IMPORTANCE TO CHARACTER	An assessment, guided by the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment 2002 and the purposes of Green Belt as above where included.			
IMPORTANCE TO SEPARATION	An assessment of whether the area is important for the purposes of avoiding coalescence between the City and its necklace villages of Fen Ditton, Teversham, Impington, Fulbourn etc.			
IMPORTANCE TO PHYSICAL SEPARATION, DISTRIBUTION, SETTING, SCALE AND CHARACTER OF GREEN BELT VILLAGES	The villages surrounding Cambridge, separated by a predominantly rural agricultural landscape, form a fundamental part of the setting and special character of Cambridge. Assessment of whether an area is important to separation between villages, and on their setting, scale and character will also inform the areas importance to the landscape setting of Cambridge.			
IMPORTANCE TO RURAL CHARACTER	The rural nature of the landscape around Cambridge is a defining quality of the setting and special character of the city, particularly in providing a setting to the urban form when seen from key views, and to provide settings to necklace villages. Assess the impact on rural character particularly in the immediate vicinity of the city.			
IMPORTANCE TO GREEN BELT	An overall judgement of how important an Area is to the purposes of Green Belt, made from the base data and the assessments of importance to setting, character and separation.			
PROJECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS				
SIGNIFICANCE OF DEVELOPMENT ON GREEN BELT	A judgement, using the Significance Matrix, of how visually and environmentally significant a development would be on the purposes of Green Belt, if it were to be built in a particular area.			
POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE EDGE	Identification of opportunities for edge improvements through landscape and/or built form.			