

2012 APPRAISAL OF THE INNER GREEN BELT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The current development strategy for the Cambridge area stems as far back as 1999, with the work undertaken by Cambridge Futures and the recognition that a change in approach was required in order to redress the imbalance between homes and jobs in and close to Cambridge, and provide for the long term growth of Cambridge University and Addenbrooke's Hospital whilst minimising increases in congestion on radial routes into the City. The strategy makes provision for development within Cambridge or as sustainable extensions to the urban area, at the new town of Northstowe (linked to the guided busway), and at the most sustainable rural settlements. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 also identified the ring of market towns around Cambridge that lie beyond South Cambridgeshire as having a role in the sequence between Northstowe and the rural area.
- 1.2 The 2003 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan identified broad locations to be released from the Green Belt and the strategy was given effect through the Cambridge Local Plan, the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework, and the joint Area Action Plans for North West Cambridge and Cambridge East. All of these Plans were subject to extensive periods of public consultation and examination by a Planning Inspector. Throughout the preparation of these Plans, there was strong local acknowledgement of the growing need for the most sustainable form of development and delivery of new affordable homes in the Cambridge area.
- 1.3 In order to feed into this process, two studies undertaken of the Green Belt surrounding Cambridge to enable land to be assessed and then released for development. These two studies are the Cambridge City Council, *Inner Green Belt Boundary Study 2002* and the South Cambridgeshire District Council, *Cambridge Green Belt Study September 2002*.
- 1.4 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 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.

- 1.5 Ten years on and it was thought pertinent to carry out this current broad appraisal of the inner Green Belt boundary areas in the context of the recent land releases and how those releases have affected the revised inner Green Belt boundary. The appraisal specifically reconsidered zones of land immediately adjacent to the City in terms of the principles and function of the Green Belt. It does not identify specific areas with potential for further release. 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 are raised in the Issues and Options Report, which will be subject to six weeks public consultation.
- 1.6 It should be noted that development proposals have been submitted, and some outline permissions granted, for the following released sites: NIAB, University Northwest site, Trumpington Meadows, Glebe Farm, Clay Farm and Bell School. Cambridge East, the airport site, has also been released from Green Belt.. Proposals, as far as is known, in these released sites have been considered within this appraisal.
- 1.7 As with the 2002 Study, the methodology used in this appraisal is based on the principles of landscape and visual assessment¹. However, the original methodology has been much simplified because this appraisal does not concern itself with specific sectors with potential for further release. It should be noted that the zones assessed are not confined to within Cambridge City administration boundary.
- 1.8 Likewise, this appraisal assumed that areas as defined in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment² (adopted as material consideration in 2003 (to be updated) as essential to the character and setting of Cambridge, should be protected. These areas are identified as 'Defining Character', e.g. the River Cam corridor. Changes to the Green Belt in these areas would compromise the setting and character of the City and were therefore treated as sacrosanct.
- 1.9 Areas, which are identified as 'Supporting Character' in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, are of varying value to the purposes of the Green Belt, e.g. some edges of the City. This appraisal confines itself to those areas of Supporting Character with regard to importance to Green Belt purposes.

¹ The principles set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition 2002, The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment

² Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, April 2003, Cambridge City Council

- 1.10 This appraisal confines itself strictly to Green Belt criteria. It does not assess elements such as economic viability of agricultural holdings, proximity to public transport, employment and services etc.
- 1.11 The conclusions of this current broad assessment are summarised below and shown on the accompanying plan (Plan 1) as broad zones of the City edge which have more or less importance when measured against Green Belt criteria.

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:
1. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
 2. to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
 3. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 4. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns and
 5. 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:

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 perceived 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.

- 2.3 It is worth noting that in considering the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework (specific sites proposals) English Heritage stated that. *“Cambridge is a city of major historic significance containing a large number of highly graded historic assets. Appreciation of the historic city is preserved by its compact form and its relationship to the surrounding landscape, particularly on the south and west sides. The historic character and setting of Cambridge is protected by means of Green Belt, designated in recognition of its historic significance, to control the outward sprawl of the city. Cambridge is one of a small number of historic cities nationally for which Green Belts have been designated with this primary purpose,*

3 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF THE INNER GREEN BELT AREA

- 3.1 The Green Belt surrounding Cambridge has been in place since 1954. This encircling planning designation has shaped the way in which the City has grown thus far. It has resulted in Cambridge being a compact city, tightly bound and without significant urban sprawl. This compactness means that the City has close access to the countryside that surrounds it and means the city centre is often unusually close to the urban edge, particularly on the western side. These characteristics have become valued assets to the City.
- 3.2 It might also be argued that the Green Belt designation has also had an effect on the form of the urban edge itself. In many areas around the urban perimeter of the city, the urban edge is well defined and quite abrupt with straight treed or hedged edges. This abruptness results in the City having a very direct and immediate relationship with its surrounding rural landscape. Less often the urban edge is soft, not well defined and merges into the countryside; this is most prevalent on the eastern side of the City.
- 3.3 The SCDC Cambridge Green Belt Study appropriately summarises the different edge characteristics as follows:
- *Level views, with a countryside foreground and a generally soft urban edge (the west side of Cambridge and the north east Cam corridor, including views from the M11, northern and southern railway approaches and sections of the A14);*
 - *Elevated views with a countryside foreground and a generally soft urban edge (from the Gog Magog Hills to the south east of Cambridge);*

- *Level views within little / no foreground and a generally hard edge (housing and science park as seen from the A14 on the north side of Cambridge); and*
 - *Level views with a mixed foreground and a mixed urban edge (The eastern side of Cambridge, which is dominated by the Airport)*
- 3.4 The characteristics mentioned above are essential elements to the setting of Cambridge. Changes to the city edge, if handled in the wrong way, have the potential to significantly and adversely affect the setting of the City as well as affect other purposes of Green Belt.
- 3.5 The countryside around Cambridge is quite distinctive in as much as it is a meeting point of quite differing landscape types; hilly western claylands, chalk hills to the south, the Cam, Rhee and Granta river valleys to the southwest and northeast, and flat fenland edge to the north. It is mainly an agricultural landscape uncluttered by other major conurbations or landscape features. The land is generally arable and divided by hedgerows with scattered remnant woodland or shelterbelts. The land to the north and northeast is mainly flat and open. The land to the southeast, east and west contains low rolling hills encircling those edges of the City. The lowland river valley follows a route roughly southwest to northeast through the City.
- 3.6 The visibility of the City and its urban edge is, of course, an important consideration with regard to Green Belt. Views will depend on the type of edge and also from where it is viewed; how near or far, and how elevated the view. These views will be dictated by the surrounding topography and vegetation.
- 3.7 Views to and from the City from the open and flat landscape of the north and northeast are wide and expansive. The distant views of the City from these areas are of a mass of treed edges with glimpses of the tops of buildings, and it is not until close to the City that the urban edges can be clearly seen.
- 3.8 The views from the hilly surrounds of the City to the southeast and west are closer and much clearer. With the advantage of higher ground distinct buildings, such as Kings' College Chapel, and urban areas can easily be identified. Views outward from the City are mainly contained and confined within the hills themselves with associated agricultural land and the occasional village church spire.
- 3.9 The factors mentioned above are the basic elements used to make this broad assessment of whether the revised Green Belt land immediately adjoining the City upholds the purposes of Green Belt and in particular preserves the setting of the City. The following are the findings of the

assessment and describe zones of land in Green Belt around the City edge taking into consideration recent releases.

- 3.10 It should be noted that the area of study is unchanged from that in 2002 Inner Green Belt Boundary Study. In addition, that Study took the premise that the major physical barriers around Cambridge of the M11 motorway to the west of the City and the A14 to the north would contain development in the future. The 2002 Study recognised that relaxing the Green Belt beyond these barriers, so that the developed area of the City extended over them, would have major implications on the purposes of Green Belt and to the regional context of the setting of Cambridge. It was thus thought most unlikely that boundary changes would be sought in these areas. That principle is still sound today.
- 3.11 To explain, the assessment was carried out geographically from the northern area of the City using the A14 as a boundary line and moves in a clockwise direction around the City.

4 THE INNER GREEN BELT AREA ASSESSMENT

4.1 Zone 1 – Northern fringe (land south of the A14 between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road)

The land in this zone is low lying, open and flat and is dissected by hedgerows. It is seen from the A14 which forms its northern boundary. The views are mainly from the north and are level views and are presently of the urban edge with a landscape (soft) foreground.

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone ranged from negligible to medium/very high in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The land south of the A14 is flat and dissected by hedgerows and holds no important views of the city and therefore appropriate development would not harm the setting of the City.

The land was assessed in the 2002 Study as negligible to very high for importance to Green Belt. Impact on the purposes of Green Belt, such as coalescence with Girton, has been avoided by the retention of a green corridor between Whitehouse Lane and the edge of the proposed development in Green Belt. It should be borne in mind that parts of this zone are Defining Character to Cambridge in the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment.

Following the 2002 Study, the area to the west of Windsor Road was subsequently released from Green Belt for development. The area between the A14 and the NIAB development site has also been released from Green Belt (NIAB extra).

The effect of developing this area will be to move the urban edge closer to the A14 and bring developed land closer in view of a major transport route. It will create a new urban edge. This will result in the strip of land between the A14 and the developed edge increasing in importance to the setting of the City and to Green Belt. It is recommended that the strip of land immediately south of the A14 be used as a landscape buffer zone to protect the setting of the City and make any development more pleasant to inhabit.

Zone 2 - Land between the A14 and Newmarket Road and between the river Cam and the A14/Quy junction

The land in this zone is low lying, open and flat and is dissected by mature hedgerows alongside roads and field boundaries. It is partially seen from the A14 which forms the northern boundary. The views are mainly from the north and are level views and are presently of a fragmented urban edge with a landscape (soft) foreground.

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone ranged from negligible to medium/high in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The lower category being closer to Newmarket Road. The land south of the A14 is flat and holds no important views of the city and therefore appropriate development close to the existing urban edge would not harm the setting of the City.

The importance to the purposes of Green Belt were negligible to high with the more important area near to the River Cam. The Cam corridor and the rural strip of land south of Fen Ditton prevent coalescence between the village and Cambridge. The river corridor is a Defining Character to Cambridge.

The areas north of Newmarket Road, east and west of the Park and Ride have been released from Green Belt.

The effect of developing this area will be to move the urban edge closer to the A14 and bring developed land closer in view of a major transport route. Although the developed land will create a new urban edge, part of it will be partially screened by an existing hedgerow. However, as with the NIAB site, the strip of land between the A14 and the developed edge will increase in importance to the setting of the city and to Green Belt. It is recommended that the strip of land immediately south of the A14 be used as a landscape buffer zone to protect the setting of the City and make any development more pleasant to inhabit.

4.2 Zone 3 – Land south of Newmarket Road, north of Fulbourn village and centred around Teversham

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone were low in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The land to the northeast of the city edge is flat until it rises east of Bottisham. Therefore views are indistinct and of a mixed soft edge without important views of the historic core of the City.

In the Study, the areas ranged from between low and high for importance to Green Belt because their openness and because some areas prevented the merging of Cambridge and Teversham.

The airport area has been partially released from Green Belt but proposals to develop the land have been withdrawn.

Were the airport land to be developed with appropriate proposals the impact to the setting of the City would be negligible. Impact on the other purposes of Green Belt, such as coalescence with Teversham, have been avoided by the retention in Green Belt of a substantial green corridor from Coldham's Common eastward to Airport Way.

The land north, east and south of Teversham village is flat and open and crisscrossed with power and other communication lines and is typical of a fen edge landscape. On a comparative basis with other areas of city edge, it has a negligible contribution to the setting of the City.

4.3 Zone 4 – Land south of Fulbourn Road and north of Wort's Causeway

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone were medium to very high in terms of importance to the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes. The land rises to the west and south of Fulbourn at the western end of the Gog Magog chalk hills. The highest point of these undulating hills, Wandlebury, is the highest point nearest to Cambridge City. Views therefore are mostly elevated with clear vistas over the City. Views of the Gog Magog Hills are also clearly seen from southern parts of the City. The urban edge of the City is often abrupt and clearly defined in this area resulting in a very direct relationship between city and its surroundings.

The fact that the majority of the land in this zone is elevated with important views, accords it more importance to both the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes in general.

4.4 Zone 5 – Land south of Wort's Causeway and east of the London Norwich railway line

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone ranged from low to very high in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The lowest category was afforded to the areas nearest to the existing built edge of Addenbrooke's Hospital. The undulating land in this area dips southward from Wort's Causeway to the Babraham Road and up to White Hill before descending again towards Shelford and the railway line. Views are mostly elevated with clear vistas over the rural foreground to Addenbrooke's and the City beyond. Not all views are clearly seen as they are interrupted by the topography and vegetation. The urban edge of the City is often abrupt and clearly defined in this area. Parts of the zone are Defining Character to Cambridge.

Again because the majority of the land in this zone is elevated it results in more importance to both the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes in general.

The area immediately to the west and south of Addenbrooke's Hospital was subsequently released from Green Belt for Cambridge Biomedical Campus development and the Bell School development site.

The effect of developing this area will be to move the built edge further south and out into the countryside. It will create a new City edge closer to the elevated land of the Gog Magog Hills which in turn will result in the land south of the hospital becoming more important to the setting of the City and to Green Belt.

4.5 Zone 6 – Land west of the London-Norwich railway line and east Shelford Road (Clay Farm)

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone ranged from medium to high in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The land between the railway and the Shelford Road is flat and was intensively farmed and crossed with footpaths. The area formed a green corridor from the countryside northwards towards the centre of the City. Some of the area can be seen from the elevated viewpoints to the southeast, but mature vegetation often obscures views.

The area immediately to the west of the railway was retained in Green Belt in order to maintain a green corridor. The area between the green corridor and the existing edge of Trumpington was released for housing development (Clay Farm). The developed area south of the City boundary was also retained in Green Belt. Parts of the zone are Defining Character to Cambridge.

The effect of releasing land in this area was relatively insignificant in terms of setting of the City and to the purposes of Green Belt because of the screening properties of existing vegetation. The development is

also lessened in impact because of the retention of a green corridor. However, in terms of Green Belt, it was prudent to confine the development to the area within the City boundary as any further south would seem like encroachment into the countryside.

4.6 Zone 7 – Land east of Hauxton Road and west of Shelford Road

The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone ranged from negligible (west of Shelford Road) to high (east of Hauxton Road) in terms of importance to the setting of the City. The land is open and exposed and is mainly on high, flat ground which falls away slightly to the south towards the M11. There is a plateau area immediately to the west of Shelford Road that is less visible because of the landform. A few mature hedgerows dissect the area and create field boundaries. It is arable farmland. There are clear views in and out of the area.

The land between the Addenbrooke's Road and the existing Trumpington edge, east of Hauxton Road, was released for housing development (Glebe Farm).

The Addenbrooke's Road and the developed area bring the urban edge further into the rural landscape and closer to the M11 than at present, and will make the land between the M11 and the new urban edge more important to the setting of the City and to Green Belt. This is particularly true of a major part of the site that is situated on relatively higher and open land. The small area of land immediately to the west of Shelford Road is more discrete being slightly lower than the highest part of the area.

It should be noted that in considering the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework (specific sites proposals) the Inspector stated that *"The landscape and visual assessment for the site [E154] acknowledges that it forms part of the historic city and that its development would affect the character of an important approach to it,"*

4.7 Zone 8 – Land between Hauxton Road and the river Cam and from the existing Trumpington edge to the M11 - Trumpington Meadows site

The 2002 Study found that all areas within this zone were of medium/high – high importance to the setting of the City and high importance in terms of Green Belt purposes.

Much of the zone is open and on a south facing slope flattening on higher ground towards Trumpington village. The area has distant views to and from the surrounding high ground to the southwest

(Haslingfield). Views towards the City reveal that Trumpington church tower can clearly be seen. Parts of the zone are Defining Character to Cambridge.

The adjoining areas outside the City administration boundary were released from Green Belt and the area inside the City boundary was retained as Green Belt. The outline permission for Trumpington Meadows remains mainly on the flat higher ground adjacent to the existing village, but does extend partially down the slope southwest towards the M11.

As with other zones which expand the City edge further into the countryside and moving it closer to a major transport route (M11), it will result in the urban area being more visible than it is at present. In turn this will make the land between the M11 and the urban edge more important to the setting of the City and to Green Belt.

4.8 Zone 9 – Land between Madingley Road and the River Cam and the M11 and Trumpington Road)

The 2002 Study found that all areas within this zone were of medium to very high importance to the setting of the City and medium to very high importance to Green Belt purposes.

The majority of this zone is on flat farmland with some slight elevation to the north and south of the area. The land is mostly arable and divided into relatively small fields with managed hedgerows and ditches. Grantchester Village is located in the southern part of this zone. Also in the southern part of this zone is the river Cam and its associated river valley landscape. The elevated parts of the zone create small plateaus that are sometimes screened by their landform and by vegetation.

Views are usually open and of abrupt urban edges with a soft green foreground. There are distant views from the rolling clayland hills to the west of Cambridge, particularly around Haslingfield. The tower of Haslingfield church can be seen from the edge of the City and there are clear views of the historic collegiate core of Cambridge seen above the urban edge in the near distance.

The land between the River Cam and Trumpington Road rises up gently from the river and includes sports and recreational uses as well as arable land and tree cover. There is a mature tree belt along the eastern boundary with Trumpington Road and several tree belts within the site and along the River Cam which forms its western boundary. On the opposite (western) side of the river lie Grantchester meadows

and village. There are some some interrupted views over the river valley to the west.

This part of the western edge provides separation between the City and Grantchester and is also part of the rural river corridor that reaches into and through the City. The river corridor is a Defining Character.

This Green Belt western edge of Cambridge is one of the most sensitive areas of landscape around the City because of a combination of topography, open views and the proximity of the historic core of Cambridge to the edge of the City. All of these factors result in a landscape which very important to the setting of the City and for the purposes of Green Belt.

4.9 Zone 10 – Land between Madingley Road and Huntingdon Road - University Northwest site

The 2002 Study found that areas within the zone ranged between medium to very high in terms of importance to the setting of the City and high to very high for the importance to Green Belt. One area at the top of the slope and towards Huntingdon Road was found to be low in importance to Green Belt and setting. This was due to the landform protecting views into the area.

The majority of the land is on a western facing slope and clearly seen from the M11 and areas to the west (Madingley Hill). Views of the zone are mainly from the west and are of a well treed, abrupt urban edge at the top of an incline. Also included in the view is Girton College tower. Parts of the zone are Defining Character to Cambridge.

All areas except the area immediately adjacent to the M11 were subsequently released from Green Belt for development. The effect of developing this section will be to move the urban edge westward and closer to the M11. It will have a significant effect on the view from the elevated land to the west and from the motorway and will change the view from agricultural and pastoral fields to developed land and create a new urban edge to the city.

This will result in the strip of land between the M11 and the developed edge increasing in importance to the setting of the city and to Green Belt.

5 CONCLUSIONS

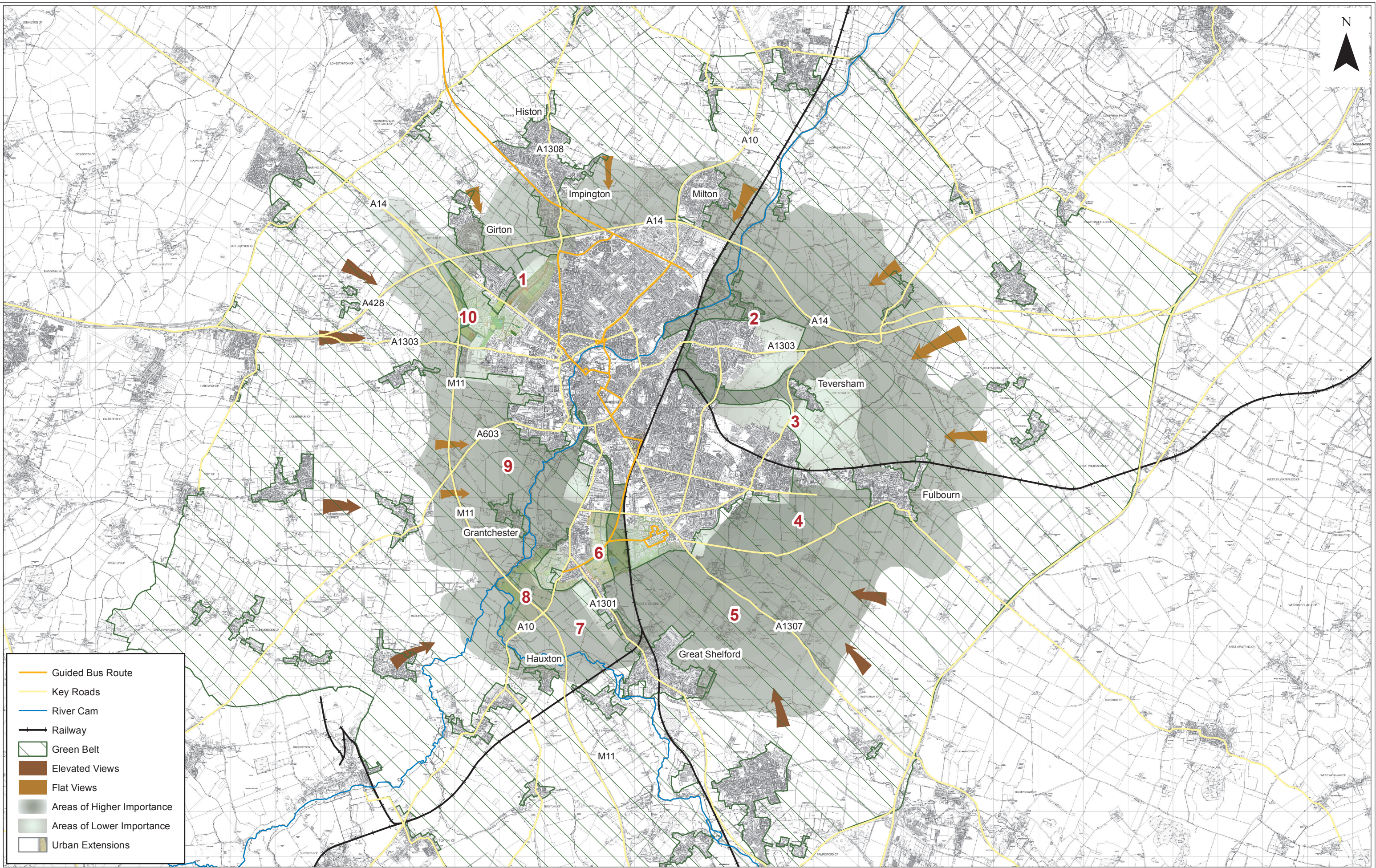
- 5.1 The most important factors that arise from this broad appraisal are summarised below:

- a) The difference in topography around Cambridge has a consequence on the views in and out of the City. This is a vital element to be considered and should not be underestimated. As discussed in the body of this report, the elevated land to the southeast will give clear views of the City, whereas views from the north are flat and level with very few or no distinguishing landmarks seen.
- b) On the whole, changes to the edge of the City through development makes the adjacent rural land more important to the setting of the City. However, the location, the type of urban edge and where it is viewed from has an important role to play as to whether changing the edge, i.e. developing it, would adversely affect the setting of the City and Green Belt.
- c) The tight and abrupt urban edge on the western side of the City, with clear and near views of the collegiate City centre, could not easily accommodate change without harm to the purposes of the Green Belt and setting of the City. A less sensitive zone of the City edge is located to the east of the City where the existing edge is mixed (not residential only), not well defined and merges into the surrounding countryside, i.e. the City tends to bleed out to the countryside.

5.5 In summary, it has been found in the course of this appraisal 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 change easily. Areas of the City that have level views and where the edge has mixed 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.

5.6 It should be noted that areas with a lesser importance 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 irreparable consequence on the historic City of Cambridge.

5.7 This appraisal has highlighted that in areas where changes to the City edge are currently envisaged and are adjacent to important view points such as motorways or elevated vantage points, there needs to be a meaningful area of land between any future changes to the edge and the view/vantage point, i.e. a landscape buffer zone. This buffer zone should be retained as Green Belt. This need is vital because development requires a minimum distance between it and the view point to avoid a harmful effect on the setting of the City.



Plan 1 Areas of Significance to the Green Belt and the Setting of the City

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