



East Herts Green Belt Review

Final Report
CONFIDENTIAL

On behalf of **East Herts District Council**



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Contents

- 1 Introduction 1**
 - 1.1 Purpose of the Green Belt review 1
 - 1.2 The Green Belt in East Herts District 1
 - 1.3 Green Belt and the spatial strategy for East Herts District 2
 - 1.4 Approach..... 2
 - 1.5 Development Plan..... 3
 - 1.6 Previous Green Belt work 3
 - 1.7 Area of Study 4
- 2 Method 6**
 - 2.1 Introduction 6
 - 2.2 National Planning Policy Framework..... 6
 - 2.3 Assessment against Green Belt Purposes..... 7
 - 2.4 Stages of the Green Belt review..... 7
 - 2.5 Excluding areas subject to strategic absolute constraints 8
 - 2.6 Identifying parcels for the assessment..... 8
 - 2.7 Assessing the parcels against the purposes for including land in the Green Belt..... 10
 - 2.8 Identifying the sensitivity of areas to development, according to Green Belt policy 15
- 3 Findings 16**
 - 3.1 Introduction 16
 - 3.2 Interpretation of the Green Belt purposes for the assessment 16
 - 3.3 Matrix of the assessment of parcels against Green Belt purposes..... 23
- 4 Conclusions..... 120**
 - 4.2 Assessment..... 120
 - 4.3 Green Belt assessment according to individual purposes 121
 - 4.4 Green Belt and historic towns in East Herts District 122
 - 4.5 Green Belt and coalescence 123
 - 4.6 SLAA sites and Broad Locations..... 124
 - 4.7 Implications for the spatial strategy 126
 - 4.8 Informing the District Plan - What next..... 127

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Map of Green Belt in East Herts and adjoining districts
- Appendix 2 Map of Absolute Constraints
- Appendix 3 Parcels used in the Green Belt Assessment
- Appendix 4 Maps of the findings of the assessment of parcels against Green Belt purposes
- Appendix 5 Draft District Plan SLAA sites, Broad Locations and Parcels

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Green Belt review

1.1.1 This report by Peter Brett Associates (PBA) has been undertaken on behalf of East Herts District Council to assist in the preparation, explanation and justification of the East Herts District Plan.

1.2 The Green Belt in East Herts District

1.2.1 Parts of East Herts District are designated as Green Belt. The plan at Appendix 1 identifies the land that is within the Green Belt. Green Belt is a strategic designation concerned with the relationships between built and unbuilt areas and between settlements, and so the plan shows the Green Belt within adjoining local authority areas as well as within East Herts. This review however only relates to the Green Belt in East Herts District.

1.2.2 Part of the role of the East Herts District Plan is to establish a spatial strategy within which the development needs of the community for the plan period are addressed, as well as helping bring about the kind of place wanted for the future. The spatial strategy will be driven by the role intended for different settlements in the future, the maintenance and enhancement of the district's environment, and by the infrastructure requirements of the district and how infrastructure and development are to be integrated. The District Council as a plan making authority is under the statutory duty to carry out its plan making role in such a way as to seek more sustainable development.

1.2.3 As there is Green Belt in the District the spatial strategy has to consider Green Belt. Green Belt policy can be seen as a tool for shaping settlement patterns and is in any case something to be addressed when the needs of the District require that additional development is to be accommodated. It should be noted that though there is land designated as Green Belt in East Herts District, these areas of Green Belt are Metropolitan Green Belt. That is, they were included in the Green Belt designated around London in the 1950's under the Ministerial Guidance prevailing at the time that suggested that the Green Belt be drawn 'a few miles wide'. The extent of the Green Belt, which has been largely unchanged since, is rather arbitrary therefore, and has arisen primarily from other considerations than the characteristics of East Herts District.

1.2.4 Green Belt is a powerful planning policy, particularly in relation to development management decisions (the determination of planning applications). Where there is Green Belt, the normal reasoning process is reversed in that rather than the onus being on the planning authority to provide sound planning reasons why development proposal should be refused, if that's its preference, the onus is on the promoter to demonstrate why planning permission should be granted. This makes Green Belt policy an attractive proposition if there is a general resistance to development, and can mean that other considerations, such as the avoidance of increased risk of development flooding, the retention

of productive agricultural land, the protection of wildlife habitats or the maintenance of the most valued landscape features, may attract less concern.

- 1.2.5 None of these examples of matters to be taken into account in deciding on where development takes place are part of the reason for which Green Belt can be designated, and are not matters that can have a bearing on whether Green Belt should be maintained. The achievement of sustainable development is not any part of the origin of Green Belt policy, and the designation of parts of a district or the country as Green Belt was not intentionally the spatial expression of a strategy for sustainable development.

1.3 Green Belt and the spatial strategy for East Herts District

- 1.3.1 The Council's task in establishing its preferred spatial strategy for the District Plan is to have regard to all material planning considerations, and given that there is Green Belt in the district, the future of that Green Belt is one of the considerations. Another of the considerations in making a spatial strategy is the need for a local planning authority to cooperate with other local planning authorities on strategic issues, as has always been the case, and is currently provided for in legislation and policy (specifically in the test of soundness of a local plan set out in national planning policy as the 'duty to cooperate'). Green Belt is a strategic issue and some groups of local planning authorities are undertaking joint Green Belt reviews, but this has not been the case here, with Epping Forest District Council for instance undertaking a review separately.
- 1.3.2 This report is specifically and exclusively about Green Belt. PBA was not asked to consider other matters that are part of determining the most appropriate spatial strategy for the District, and the report does not present a spatial strategy. It is for the local planning authority to take Green Belt issues into consideration alongside all other relevant considerations, informed by this report alongside other views on Green Belt, as it wishes.
- 1.3.3 How Green Belt is considered within the mix of different planning considerations leading to the spatial strategy, having regard to the Framework, is a matter for the local planning authority. A reasonable interpretation of legislation and policy might be that development should take place in locations that promote more sustainable development patterns and where more sustainable forms of development can be promoted, and other locations should only prevail if there would be significant harm to the integrity of the Green Belt as whole or to the role it is there to perform.

1.4 Approach

- 1.4.1 The examination of the Green Belt in East Herts District has been undertaken according to its contribution to the five purposes set out in the Framework for the inclusion of land in the Green Belt (see section 2 of the report). It is improper to take any other considerations into account when considering the contribution of Green Belt (as opposed to the use of land as part of the spatial strategy set out in the local plan).

- 1.4.2 In the absence of a separate strategic level of plan in the current planning system, it falls to a local plan to identify the general extent of the Green Belt and to define its boundary. This examination of the Green Belt in East Herts cannot propose a new Green Belt boundary however, as this will depend (amongst other things) on the amount of development the plan seeks to provide for. At this stage the Council is proposing to bring forward a District Plan with some of the development need provided for at 'broad locations', so that the development boundaries will not be determined until a further component of the local plan is produced, or a planning application is determined.
- 1.4.3 It is to be noted in any case that the new Green Belt boundary is unlikely to be drawn co-terminous with the extent of the allocations made for development in the District Plan, because of the provision in the Framework for the identification of 'safeguarded land'.
- 1.4.4 One of the requirements set for local planning authorities with Green Belt in their areas in the Framework is that in making a plan for their area, they *'should satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period'*. The Framework continues that they should, *'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 well beyond the plan period'*.
- 1.4.5 It will be for the Council in setting out proposals in its District Plan to determine how to address this requirement for safeguarded land when drawing up new boundaries for the Green Belt.

1.5 Development Plan

- 1.5.1 The East Herts Local Plan was adopted in 2007. The Local Plan will be replaced as the development plan by the District Plan. Preparation of the District Plan with a plan period to 2031 is currently at the Preferred Options stage, and has included a period of public consultation which ended in May 2014. The next stage in the preparation of the District Plan is intended to be a 'Pre-Submission' consultation in late 2015/early 2016, followed by submission of the plan for Independent Examination later in 2016.

1.6 Previous Green Belt work

- 1.6.1 The Council undertook a Draft Green Belt Review in 2013. This consisted of Part 1 which provided a District-wide review of broad parcels, and Part 2 which provided the detailed site assessment and boundary review of selected areas of search. This Draft Review identified a number of areas which could be removed from the Green Belt as development sites or broad locations within which development sites would be subsequently refined.
- 1.6.2 The Council commissioned Peter Brett Associates in 2014 to provide a critical friend Appraisal of the Draft Green Belt Review. The appraisal provided a

review of policy and practice; review of the Council’s methodology and application; and a review of Local Plan Policy and Proposed Green Belt Approach.

1.6.3 The key issue raised in the Appraisal was that some of the parcels (based on the Landscape Character Assessment areas) were quite large and the contribution of Green Belt purposes may be quite different in one part compared to another.

1.6.4 Subsequently, the Council have commissioned Peter Brett Associates to undertake a full Green Belt Review. This report addresses the issue above by assessing Green Belt purposes for smaller parcels of land. The issues raised within the Appraisal of the Council’s work were integrated into the methodology of this report.

1.6.5 This report, subject to how the Council deals with it, is intended to supersede all other work previously undertaken by the Council and stand as the only assessment of the Green Belt to be used in evidence to help in the preparation of the District Plan.

1.7 Area of Study

1.7.1 The work is to assist the Council in setting out proposals in the District Plan for the development as part of the overall plan strategy and if necessary to make changes to the current Green Belt. It is proposed to focus on the examination of the Green Belt on the periphery of the main towns in the district and those that edge up to the district boundary, together with several villages in the Green Belt. These are set out in the table below:

Main Towns	Villages
Bishop’s Stortford	Watton-at-Stone
Hertford	Tewin
Sawbridgeworth	Hertford Heath
Ware	Stanstead Abbots/St Margarets

1.7.2 In terms of the villages within the Green Belt, Watton-at-Stone is designated in the Draft District Plan (Preferred Options) as a Group 1 Village, as these are deemed to be the most sustainable villages in the District.

- 1.7.3 The other villages in the Green Belt are Group 2 Villages which are identified for limited infilling.
- 1.7.4 The Draft District Plan (2014) identified a number of Broad Locations for potential future development as set out below. Green Belt parcels within these broad locations have been assessed against Green Belt purposes.

Broad Locations
East of Welwyn Garden City
Gilston North of Harlow
North and East of Ware

1.7.5 Not all of the land in the District outside the settlements is designated as Green Belt, but those parts where development is most likely to be appropriate for other reasons is generally Green Belt. That is, land on the periphery of the main settlements in the district (and some settlements in neighbouring districts that adjoin the district boundary) are designated as Green Belt. In terms of where population change and growth is occurring and where economic growth with new jobs is likely to arise, the main settlements are naturally the locations where most of the development should be accommodated, and in terms of the location of facilities and services together with access to public transport services and opportunities, the periphery of the main settlements is where new development should achieve the greatest accessibility, once the opportunities for satisfactory development within the settlements has been taken into account. As such, land to the East of Stevenage is being reconsidered as an option for development of a smaller scale than that previously tested.

Locations Reconsidered
East of Stevenage

1.7.6 This study has therefore focussed on the periphery of the settlements identified, to accommodate development to meet the needs of that particular settlement as part of the wider development requirement.

2 Method

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The method followed for the Green Belt study is described here.

2.1.2 The Council consulted on a proposed methodology and comments were received. The main issues raised are detailed below, including consequent changes to the methodology:

Key comment	Changes to methodology
More detail is required to why the review has not assessed parcels against Green Belt Purposes 4 and 5.	Further explanation provided in the method to why the review has not assessed Green Belt Purpose 5. The review does undertake an assessment of Purpose 4.
The Green Belt parcels should be smaller and each SLAA site should be a parcel.	Method amended to include assessment of SLAA sites within each Green Belt parcel identified as 'high suitability' or 'moderate suitability' for development.
Sustainability/accessibility issues should be included within the Green Belt Review.	Sustainability/accessibility assessment is a separate piece of work which has been undertaken by the Council.
Clarification required to the study area, whether it is the entire Green Belt (Section 4) or periphery of towns, edge of boundary and several villages (para 3.1.1).	Study area clarified

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

2.2.1 National policy on Green Belts is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) published in March 2012. The Green Belt review has been undertaken in the context of this policy. There is no published guidance from Government sources on how a Green Belt review should be undertaken.

2.2.2 The Framework provides for changes to the Green Belt to be made through the development plan, and with the removal of strategic plans, the district plan necessarily defines the Green Belt boundary as well as making strategic

changes that are required. This will need to be the case in East Herts District, with the District Plan now in preparation.

2.3 Assessment against Green Belt Purposes

2.3.1 The Framework establishes five purposes for including land within the Green Belt. These are:

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

2.3.2 The Framework does not give numbers to the five purposes, but this has been done for convenience in this report (numbering the purposes in the order presented in the box). Neither does the Framework attach any hierarchy to the purposes so that they are assumed to all be of equal importance, and this is the approach followed in this review.

2.3.3 The review does not assess all of the Green Belt in East Herts against all of the purposes. This is not a reflection on the significance of the different purposes but simply on their relevance to different places and the practicality of their application. This is explained further, in section 3.2.

2.4 Stages of the Green Belt review

2.4.1 The Green Belt review has been carried out in a number of stages:

- Identifying the study area and excluding areas subject to absolute constraints
- Identifying land parcels for the assessment
- Assessing the parcels against the purposes for including land in the Green Belt

- Identifying the sensitivity of areas to development, according to Green Belt policy.

2.4.2 These stages are described below.

2.5 Excluding areas subject to strategic absolute constraints

2.5.1 This stage considered the entire Green Belt in East Herts and identified areas which are subject to absolute constraints. These areas have been excluded from the study prior to the division of the study area into parcels, and hence play no further part in the study undertaken, and reported here.

2.5.2 These absolute constraints were agreed with the Council and are as follows:

- Large areas of land at risk from flooding – flood zone 3
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Protection Area (SPA) and associated buffer
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and associated buffer
- Ancient Woodland
- Registered Parks and Gardens.

2.5.3 The map at Appendix 2 shows the locations subject to these absolute constraints.

2.5.4 There are not many areas where absolute constraints precluded the identification of parcels of land for subsequent consideration in relation to the Green Belt purposes. The main strategic absolute constraint is where land is at risk of flooding and some areas were excluded from the study on this basis, such as the north edge of Harlow and the area between Ware and Hertford.

2.6 Identifying parcels for the assessment

2.6.1 In order to carry out a meaningful assessment of the way in which different areas of land performed in Green Belt terms the study area has been divided up into separate parcels. This division has been informed by site work carried out in parallel with the desk review. Parcels have been defined wherever possible along identifiable physical/visual features, particularly where these are consistent with a change in physical or visual characteristics (see also reference to the district landscape character assessment below); however in some places, where features are weak, a parcel boundary may be defined along less robust features which may not be considered to be an entirely suitable enduring boundary for the definition of a new Green Belt edge. In such areas, further consideration may need to be given to the strengthening of

such boundaries by additional measures (such as woodland planting) as part of any potential release of land to meet development needs.

- 2.6.2 It is a benefit to this study that a (separate) landscape character assessment has already been carried out which '*establishes landscape character areas and identifies the distinct landscapes describing their key characteristics and natural, historical and cultural features*'. The descriptions of the landscape character areas can be found on the East Herts website at <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/landscapecharacterspd>. This division of the area according to the landscape character assessment is useful in managing the study, and helpful in understanding how the area works.
- 2.6.3 Whilst necessary in understanding the area, the character areas are not sufficient on their own for the purposes of this study.
- 2.6.4 A map of the parcels used for the assessment is presented in **Appendix 3**.

Consideration of boundaries

- 2.6.5 As part of the assessment, consideration has been given to the nature of the existing boundaries of the Green Belt. The NPPF (paragraph 85) states that boundaries should be defined 'clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent'. Features that are most likely to fulfil this requirement are roads, railways, watercourses, woodlands and strong tree belts. Green Belt designation has rarely considered the permanence (and sometimes the rationality) of 'inner' boundaries, such boundaries simply being drawn along the edge of development wherever it existed at the time of designation. This means that boundaries are often defined along the boundaries of back gardens. However, such boundaries can be quite easily (and sometimes surreptitiously) changed and they also often form poor visual boundaries meaning that development is poorly contained and there is a sense of visual encroachment and adverse effect on the character of the adjoining countryside. Stronger features, such as those mentioned above (although some will not form visual boundaries), are well-defined and less likely to change, although garden boundaries can be considered stronger boundaries where they follow other features, such as tree belts or strong hedgerows.
- 2.6.6 When considering the potential for new boundaries, consideration has been given to the availability of alternative or stronger boundaries which may form a new boundary consistent with the NPPF advice; however, in some areas no such features exist. In such circumstances, if land is to be released from Green Belt, such enduring boundaries are likely to need to be created by new enduring features on the ground, preferably supported by strategic woodland planting (where this is appropriate in character terms) to contain the influence of development and strengthen the boundary (such as has occurred along the eastern side of Stevenage for example).

2.7 Assessing the parcels against the purposes for including land in the Green Belt

- 2.7.1 Each of the parcels has been assessed in terms of its performance in fulfilling the purposes for including land in the Green Belt set out in the Framework and presented in this report at para. 2.3.1.
- 2.7.2 The purpose ‘*to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*’, is only considered to be relevant to the area around Hertford. This is the only historic town where there is any relationship between the older part of the settlement and the wider landscape setting designated as Green Belt. There are also local ‘setting/special character’ considerations at Bishop’s Stortford where ‘inner’ parts of the green fingers that penetrate the urban area lie within the town’s Conservation Area. This is considered further in the consideration of this purpose in section 3 below.
- 2.7.3 The purpose ‘*to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict land*’, is not used at all in the assessment. If there is any effect at all in this respect, it is the overall restrictive nature of having Green Belt policy that encourages regeneration and the re-use of previously used land by stifling the supply of other land. That said, the modern evidence-based planning system is intended to deal with the supply of land primarily through positive provision in a development plan rather than through the piecemeal consideration of planning applications for development proposals. Either way it is generally not possible to judge how any given parcel of land would contribute to the fulfilment of this purpose, or to distinguish between different parcels on this basis. This is particularly so in East Herts where there are no parts of the District distinguished from other parts of the District by their need for regeneration.
- 2.7.4 The table below outlines the criteria used in the assessment against which the parcels have been assessed in respect of the Green Belt purposes. The assessment is based on the significance of the impact on the particular purpose of Green Belt that would arise from development of a parcel of land rather than leaving it open. The criteria seek to establish a consistent set of characteristics for use in assessing the significance of change and hence to provide the basis for categorising different pieces of land against the different Green Belt purposes.
- 2.7.5 The use of the purposes in the assessment is described further at the start of section 3.

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas		
Paramount importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of paramount importance	Paramount	Land where strategic level of development would conflict fundamentally with Green Belt purpose. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land provides a distinct, well-defined area that contains the town/large village and provides strong containment that prevents the perception of ‘sprawl’. There may be/is no alternative strong

		<p>physical/landscape boundary(s) further from the edge of the town/large village that would perform a similar role in containing growth and ensuring a 'good fit' for development - strategic level of development may lead to perception of uncontained growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land may/may not be affected already by the existing physical/visual presence of the town/large village and may have a varied character.
<p>Major importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of major importance</p>	Major	<p>Land where strategic level of development would conflict substantially with Green Belt purpose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land contains/contributes to the containment of the town/large village (although its character may be influenced by it). Strategic level of development has potential to create perception of poorly contained growth, although other physical/landscape boundaries may exist further from the town/large village edge that could define and contain growth and prevent the perception of 'sprawl' (although these may require reinforcement to achieve a well-defined limit to development and a new Green Belt boundary).
<p>Moderate importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of moderate importance</p>	Moderate	<p>Land where strategic level of development would conflict significantly with Green Belt purpose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land provides some containment of the town/large village although it is significantly influenced by its presence and related features/land uses leading to a poorly defined edge, or it may be slightly removed from the town/large village edge and therefore contribute less to the purpose (other land closer to the edge performs the function of containment).
<p>Slight/Negligible importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of minor/negligible importance</p>	Slight/ Negligible	<p>Land where strategic level of development would have limited/negligible impact on this purpose of Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land may be physically <u>and</u> visually related to the town/large village and already perceived to be part of/or closely related to the built up area, giving a poorly defined edge and possibly the perception of 'sprawl'; or is an area that has very little relationship to the town/large village and of little importance to containing 'sprawl' (land closer to the settlement fulfils this function to a greater degree) Development may allow opportunities for enhancement of degraded land and the definition of a stronger long-term Green Belt boundary, or there are other strong boundaries that would contain development.
<p>No importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of no importance</p>	None	<p>Land where strategic level of development would have no impact on this purpose of Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land is largely contained by existing development and already forms part of, and is perceived as, part of the town/large village; or

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land is not related to a town/large village.
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2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another (see Note 1 below)		
<p>Paramount importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of paramount importance</p>	Paramount	<p>Land that is fundamental to physical separation of neighbouring towns/larger villages (either within or adjoining Green Belt).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any significant reduction in extent would result in physical coalescence, or a perception of merging that would erode the distinct separate identity and character of either/both settlements.
<p>Major importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of major importance</p>	Major	<p>Land that provides substantial contribution to separation between neighbouring towns/larger villages (either within or adjoining Green Belt).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no significant inter-visibility between these settlements currently. Some development may be possible without causing merger or perception of merging between these settlements.
<p>Moderate importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of moderate importance</p>	Moderate	<p>Land that provides significant contribution to separation between neighbouring towns/larger villages (either within or adjoining Green Belt).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land may be part of a substantial gap (3km or more) between neighbouring towns/larger villages with separate identities. Land where well planned strategic level of development unlikely to result in merger or a perception of merging as a consequence of inter-visibility (although intervening smaller settlements within Green Belt may be affected significantly by reduction of separation, merger or inter-visibility).
<p>Slight/Negligible importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of minor/negligible importance</p>	Slight/ Negligible	<p>Land does not lie between two towns/large villages or makes limited/negligible contribution to separation; or land does not provide strategic level of separation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic level of development would have little impact on this Green Belt purpose, although smaller settlements may be affected by reduction in separation, merger, or inter-visibility depending on their proximity to the existing settlement edge. Other strong/well-defined boundary(s) may exist to restrain growth/prevent merging. Width of Green Belt may already be narrower at an adjacent location.
<p>No importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of no importance</p>	None	<p>Land does not lie between two towns/large villages and makes no contribution to separation.</p>

NOTE 1: Towns are taken to be the main towns Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Harlow, Hoddesdon, Hertford, Ware, Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford, and the larger village of Watton-at-Stone (a Group 1 village) and Knebworth outside the district boundary, it does not include smaller

villages (Group 2 villages, such as Stanstead Abbots/St Margarets, Hertford Heath, Tewin) although reference is made to these and other small settlements as appropriate.

3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment		
<p>Paramount importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of paramount importance</p>	Paramount	<p>Countryside is fundamental to the purpose of retaining land within Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land possesses a strong, unspoilt rural character which Green Belt designation protects. There may be no other fundamental constraint(s) to encroachment (such as a strong landscape feature or environmental constraint that would assist in fulfilling this purpose by containing/restricting development from encroaching into outlying countryside).
<p>Major importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of major importance</p>	Major	<p>Countryside is of substantial importance to the purpose of retaining land within the Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land possesses a predominantly rural character. There may be other constraints (such as a noticeable landscape feature) that would limit encroachment but the Green Belt provides valuable protection.
<p>Moderate importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of moderate importance</p>	Moderate	<p>Countryside is of significant importance to the purpose of retaining land within the Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may already be a perception of significant encroachment by development (or other uses, such as large scale mineral extraction) and land may possess a semi-rural character. There may be other constraints to further encroachment.
<p>Slight/Negligible importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of minor/negligible importance</p>	Slight/ Negligible	<p>Countryside is of limited/negligible importance to the purpose of retaining land within the Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land may possess a semi-urban character and is no longer perceived to be part of the open countryside. It may contain degraded land that provides opportunities for enhancement.
<p>No importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of no importance</p>	None	<p>Countryside is no importance on this purpose of Green Belt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land forms very narrow area between existing parts of the town or other strong boundary and does not make any recognisable contribution to separation. Such areas may be protected by other designations (such as open space or Green Wedge)

4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns (see Note 2 below)		
<p>Critical importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of paramount importance</p>	Paramount	<p>Land makes a fundamental contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town/large village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land is a highly prominent element on main approaches into the town/large village where the setting and/or special character is readily appreciated. The land is a highly prominent element or defining

		<p>feature in views from within or around the town/large village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic development would have a fundamentally adverse impact on the setting and/or special character of the town/large village.
<p>Major importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of major importance</p>	Major	<p>Land makes a substantial contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town/large village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land is prominent on approaches into the town/large village, or in views from within or around the town/large village. • Strategic development likely to have a substantial adverse impact on the setting and/or special character of the town/large village.
<p>Moderate importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of moderate importance</p>	Moderate	<p>Land makes a significant contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town/large village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land forms a recognisable element in the approaches to the town/large village, or in views from within or around the town/large village, but is not important to its setting and/or special character. • Strategic development likely to have a moderately adverse impact on the setting and/or special character of the town/large village.
<p>Slight/Negligible importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of minor/negligible importance</p>	Slight/ Negligible	<p>Land makes limited/negligible contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town/large village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land is not particularly visible in views from within or around the town/large village, or may have very little relationship to the setting and/or special character of the historic parts of the town/large village. • The land may include degraded land that detracts from the setting and/or special character of the town/large village.
<p>No importance to Green Belt Purpose Continued inclusion within Green Belt of no importance</p>	None	<p>Land makes no contribution to the setting and/or special character of a historic town/large village and/or is unrelated to the historic town/large village.</p>

NOTE 2: This purpose has been assessed at:

- Hertford and north east side of Sawbridgeworth only as these are the only towns that have a noticeable historical character that extends to the edge of the settlement. The other towns have no apparent relationship between their older historic parts and the wider landscape setting provided by the surrounding land within the Green Belt. At Bishop's Stortford, some 'inner' parts of the green wedges that extend into the town form part of the town's Conservation Area. Whilst these 'historic' areas do not contribute to the wider setting of the historic part of the town they do provide a local contribution to setting and have been considered in the context of purpose 4.
- Group 1 villages, of which only Watton-at-Stone lies within Green Belt and has a Conservation Area which extends to and beyond its periphery; for the purposes of this assessment this settlement (which is inset within Green Belt) has been considered a 'historic town'.

Group 2 villages within Green Belt (Hertford Heath, Stanstead Abbots/ St Margarets, Hertingfordbury, High Wych, Wadesmill/Thundridge, Tewin, Aston) have Conservation Areas that extend to their peripheries adjoining Green Belt (and sometimes beyond) but these are not towns so this purpose is deemed not to be relevant to them.

5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

This purpose has not been assessed as it is the overall restrictive nature of the Green Belt that encourages recycling, not the restriction that it places on specific areas of land.

2.8 Identifying the sensitivity of areas to development, according to Green Belt policy

2.8.1 Following the assessment of the parcels against the individual purposes, the separate assessments have been combined to suggest those parcels that could be the most suitable within which to seek development sites, according to Green Belt policy. The way that the assessments against individual purposes have been combined into an overall assessment is set out in the table below. It is to be noted that because of the way the work has been done, the parcels are already in areas **without absolute or major environmental constraints**, as described at para. 2.5.2, and are in locations where it ought to be possible to achieve relatively sustainable development.

Relative Suitability of Land as Area of Search			
Very Low Suitability	Very Low	One or more Green Belt purpose(s) is considered to be of Paramount importance.	Land Fundamental to Green Belt
Low Suitability	Low	One or more Green Belt purpose(s) is considered to be of Major importance; there are no purposes that are of Paramount importance.	Retain Land in Green Belt
Moderate Suitability	Moderate	One or more Green Belt purpose(s) is considered to be of Moderate importance; there are no purposes that are of Paramount or Major importance.	Potential longer-term Area of Search
High Suitability High Development Potential so removal from Green Belt recommended.	High	One or more Green Belt purpose(s) is considered to be of Slight/Negligible importance; there are no purposes that are of Paramount, Major or Moderate importance.	Potential Area of Search