

Cheshire West and Chester Council

**Stage Two of the Chester Green
Belt Study: Technical Site
Assessment**

Final Report

Issue | 12 July 2013

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.

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Executive Summary

Purpose

Ove Arup and Partners Limited ('Arup') have been appointed by Cheshire West and Chester Council ('the Council') to undertake Stage Two of the Chester Green Belt Study. This is principally a site assessment piece of work, which looks to identify the constraints and potential opportunities for releasing land within 10 Areas of the North Cheshire Green Belt.

The purpose of the study is to provide an independent, technical assessment of 10 Green Belt Areas previously defined by the Council, before evaluating the resultant land parcels against the purposes of the Green Belt as defined by national policy.

The outcome of the study will be used by the Council, alongside their wider evidence base and objectives for growth, to inform decisions on options for releasing land from the Green Belt through the local plan making process.

Background

The study does not start from scratch and is framed by the history, policy direction and changing nature of the North Cheshire Green Belt. The study recognises the important role that the Green Belt has played in shaping the borough and the city of Chester; and allows this to be considered against the objectives for growth and the need to provide sufficient homes to meet future demands and maintain Chester's pivotal economic role.

The debate about whether land should be released from the Green Belt has been had before. Since 1979, the argument that the long term success of Chester must be maintained by a greater land supply, has been countered by commentary that one of the reasons for the city's success is the urban, brownfield focus achieved via a policy approach which restricts development in the Green Belt.

A key conclusion from the progression of policy over time came in the finalised Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG 13), which in March 2003 noted at Policy SD5, that "*there is no need to undertake a strategic study of Green Belt within Greater Manchester, Cheshire or Lancashire before 2011*" (RPG 13, page 34). This cemented the urban, brownfield-first policy approach and has subsequently been re-iterated in local policy.

Reform of the planning system, particularly since 2004 and certainly since 2008, has required Local Authorities to adopt an evidence-led approach to Local Plan-making. This approach has been reinforced by the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012). In seeking to produce its new Local Plan, Cheshire West and Chester Council has reassessed the evidence for delivering the necessary growth and change within the borough to achieve a sustainable future.

These are major drivers for future development and have significant implications for locations identified to accommodate growth. The emerging Local Plan

(preferred Policy Directions 2012) recognises Chester's importance as a sub-regional centre and identifies it as a key location for growth, identifying 25% of its overall housing requirement to the city.

In so doing, the emerging Local Plan recognises the role of Green Belt land in the future development scenarios for Chester. Whilst at a Local Plan level the Council's objective is to limit Green Belt land release, it concedes that a different approach may be required for Chester, noting "*...with the exception of land needed to meet Chester's future housing development requirements the boundaries of the Green Belt will remain unaltered*". This decision has been reached on the basis of the City's urban site capacity, which could have a limiting effect on the city's potential to accommodate projected growth within the existing urban area.

Due to the economic and functional importance of Chester to the borough, the Preferred Policy Directions document stated that it is important that land supply does not unacceptably restrict the city's ability to grow and change. As such, the Council supplemented the emerging Local Plan evidence base with a Green Belt Background Paper. The document makes the case for selective Green Belt land release on the basis that even the level of development needed to accommodate natural population change in the city cannot be provided for on sites within the existing urban boundary.

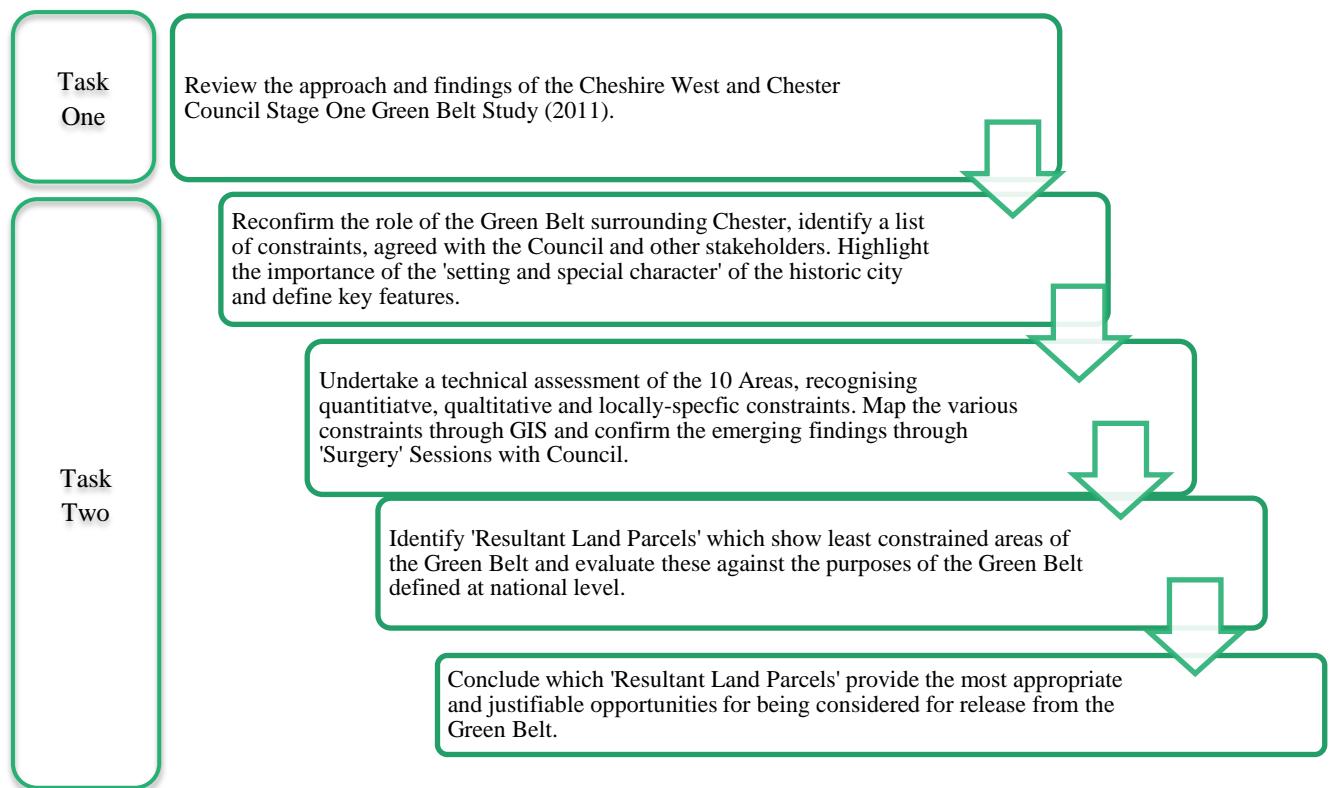
This approach to considering the release of land from the Green Belt through the Local Plan-making process is supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that: "*Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.*" (NPPF, paragraph 83). It is against this backdrop of evidence and emerging policy that the Chester Green Belt Study has been developed.

Methodology

The approach to completing this study was predicated on a two stage approach. Task One was a review of the Stage One Green Belt Study undertaken by Cheshire West and Chester Council. This was followed by Task Two which was a technical, site-based constraints assessment of those Green Belt Areas defined by the Council in the Stage One study.

The study takes the premise that the 10 Green Belt Areas defined in the Stage One study are the broad areas of search for potential release of land from within the Green Belt to meet Chester's future development needs. The technical site-based constraints assessment identifies 'Resultant Land Parcels' which are then assessed against the purposes of Green Belt to identify which, if any, could be regarded as appropriate for release from the Green Belt.

The methodology by which the study was undertaken is outlined in the following steps:



At the heart of the methodology are a series of assumptions which allow for a robust and transparent approach. These practical and technical assumptions were agreed with the Council and applied consistently across the assessment of all 10 Areas.

Practical assumptions are those which facilitate the technical assessment and allow work to remain manageable and achievable, they are:

- The 10 Areas defined by the Council in the Stage One Green Belt Study are agreed and not subject to change during the course of the assessment;
- The work is predominantly a desk-based study, utilising secondary source material, supplemented by technical analysis and site visits;
- Assessment utilising Council Officer's professional insight through the Workshop, Surgery sessions, and informal meetings; this helped calibrate emerging findings; and
- The assessment focuses on the potential for Resultant Land Parcels to be developed for the purposes of residential development, but also considers employment purposes where relevant.

Technical assumptions are those which help ensure the analysis is robust, they are:

- Land within Flood Risk Zone 3b is immediately discounted from consideration as a potential location for release from within the Green Belt;
- Overall, the assessment seeks to identify both qualitative and quantitative constraints and does not rank or prioritise constraints;

- The prominence of the importance of the ‘setting and special character’ of the city of Chester evolved through the course of the study;
- Landscape character analysis is carried out to an agreed methodology, approved by Council Officers;
- Assessments do not take into account previous or to be determined planning permissions;
- Assessments do not rank or prioritise any Resultant Land Parcels identified; and
- Conclusions do not automatically release land from the Green Belt, but are intended to be a piece of evidence, which together with the complete Local Plan evidence base will inform decisions about the need to release land from the Green Belt as part of the Local Plan-making process.

Conclusions

The Chester Green Belt Study has taken the findings of the Council’s Stage One Green Belt Study and analysed the site-based constraints in each of the identified 10 Areas.

Having concluded the technical site-based constraints assessment, a number of potential ‘Resultant Land Parcels’ have emerged. These parcels have subsequently been tested against the purposes of Green Belt to see how they perform, and to help inform the Council as to whether it would be appropriate to release these parcels from the Green Belt and re-define the Green Belt boundary surrounding Chester.

It is important to reflect that the conclusions reached in this study do not automatically result in the release of land from the Green Belt; and that further decision-making by the Council in finalising the Local Plan will determine which, if any, might be released from the Green Belt.

From the assessment work it can be shown that overall, there are resultant land parcels which could potentially be released from the Green Belt. These parcels would allow the Green Belt boundary surrounding Chester to be redefined whilst still allowing the Green Belt to fulfil the purposes as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

More specifically, the assessment reveals that:

- Area Two has one Resultant Land Parcel – **“Land to the west of Wrexham Road”**. This large parcel should be considered alongside the parcel identified in Area One. This is the largest parcel identified by the assessment;
- Area Four has one Resultant Land Parcel – **“Land to the east of the A41”**; and
- Area Eight has two Resultant Land Parcels – **“Land between Liverpool Road and Moston Road”** and **“Land to the South of Dale Camp Barracks”**.

Further assessment work reveals that:

- No Resultant Land Parcels have been identified in Area One, Area Three, Area Five, Area Six, Area Seven, Area Nine or Area Ten.

Recommendations

These highlight areas of further work which the Council will need to undertake related to any proposed release of land parcels for development. They are:

- Considering the need for Sustainability Appraisal in relation to the land parcels to inform the next stage of Local Plan preparation; and
- Carrying out masterplanning work to investigate more detailed development concept options for any resultant land parcel(s) identified for release from the Green Belt. This work would draw out specific place-making, infrastructure planning and sustainable development principles to guide how any development opportunities could be realised in the most sustainable way.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Cheshire West and Chester Council ('the Council') Spatial Planning Service appointed Ove Arup and Partners Limited ('Arup') to undertake Stage Two of the Chester Green Belt Study, to examine site-based constraints and define potential development land parcels within 10 defined areas of the North Cheshire Green Belt around Chester.

This study, in conjunction with the Council's wider evidence base, will be used to inform decisions on removing land from the Green Belt through the Local Plan process.

1.2 Scope of the Study

The Chester Green Belt Study is framed by the overall strategy and objectives set out by the Council in its current Preferred Policy Directions document (August 2012); as well as the recent changes to national policy stemming from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The study recognises the history, changing nature and importance of the North Cheshire Green Belt and its recent success in facilitating growth and regeneration whilst simultaneously protecting the setting and character of the historic city of Chester.

The study does not start from scratch. Instead, it evolves and builds upon the evidence and analysis already undertaken by the Council, including the Preferred Policy Directions Green Belt Background Paper and the Council's Stage One Green Belt Study.

As a starting point, the study undertakes a short critical review of the Council's Stage One work to validate the assessment methodology used and conclusions reached. The aim of the review was to ensure that the Council's work is robust and provides a suitable foundation for a more detailed analysis of the Green Belt. The review ends with a series of recommendations and actions.

The study then takes an independent, technical approach to analysing the site-based constraints within the areas of the Green Belt identified by the Council. Parts of the Green Belt with limited physical constraints are then re-tested against the purposes of the Green Belt to fully assess whether these locations and sites could potentially be removed from the Green Belt. The emphasis of the study is to be certain that any land considered suitable for removal from the Green Belt a) is sufficiently free from site specific constraints and b) does not unacceptably undermine the purposes of the Green Belt as defined by the NPPF.

The site assessment has regard to, and takes a logical progression from, the background and context provided by a range of historic evidence and previous assessments. The objective is to narrow down the conclusions reached in the Stage One study in terms of identifying those locations which would not undermine the purposes of the Green Belt if released for development.

The study concludes with a summary of findings and key recommendations.

In terms of next steps, the study re-iterates that conclusions reached do not mark the end of the process.

2 Background and Context

2.1 Cheshire West and Chester Policy Approach

The Council is currently preparing its planning policy framework for the whole of Cheshire West and Chester up to 2030. The Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions (2012) set out the Council's draft strategy for delivering sustainable future growth within the borough.

The Preferred Policy Directions identifies the need to deliver "no less than 21,000 new homes between 2010 and 2030" (Policy PD02, page 21), as well as "the provision of 280ha of land to support industrial and business use" (Policy PD02, page 21).

These are major drivers for future development and have significant implications for locations identified to accommodate growth. The emerging Local Plan recognises Chester's importance as a sub-regional centre and identifies it as a primary location for growth by apportioning 25% of its overall housing requirement to the city.

In so doing, the emerging Local Plan recognises the role of Green Belt land in the future development scenarios in Chester. Whilst at a Local Plan level the Council's objective is to limit Green Belt land release, it concedes that a different approach may be required at Chester, noting "*...with the exception of land needed to meet Chester's future housing development requirements the boundaries of the Green Belt will remain unaltered*" (Policy PD03, page 25).

A reduced brownfield site capacity within Chester could limit the city's potential to accommodate future growth within the existing urban area. Due to the economic importance of Chester, it is important that land supply does not stymie the city's ability to grow and change. As such, the Council has supplemented the emerging Local Plan in 2012 with a Green Belt Background Paper. The document makes the case for selective Green Belt land release. It identified that even the level of development needed to accommodate natural population change in the city could not be provided for on sites within the existing urban boundary.

It is clear therefore that an assessment of whether land is fulfilling the purposes of the Green Belt, and whether or not land in the Green Belt could be released for development is required to help formulate a robust and comprehensive strategy for achieving housing delivery in Chester, to ensure an effective land supply for the future.

2.2 Impact of the National Planning Policy Framework

In addition to considering local demands, the Council is also responding to changes in policy at the national level.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) reaffirms the role and need for Green Belt, whilst also setting out the approach to considering Green Belt

boundary changes and the process arrangements for confirming any changes to the Green Belt.

The NPPF is clear in terms of the process arrangements for changing and fixing Green Belt boundaries, stating:

“Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period” (NPPF, paragraph 83).

On this basis, the Council’s approach to considering Green Belt release in its current local plan preparation process makes it in conformity with the NPPF.

The effectiveness of land within the Green Belt can be assessed against the five purposes, as laid out in the NPPF. This was the cornerstone of the work carried out by the Council at Stage One. For completeness, the five purposes are set out below. These provide important criteria for identifying land which could potentially be released from the Green Belt. The NPPF notes the following purposes of Green Belt:

- *“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 special character of historic towns; and*
- *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”* (NPPF, page 19, paragraph 80)

The Council, and this study, must also take into account further wording in the NPPF in terms of the instructions for considering revisions to Green Belt boundaries. Here the NPPF is prescriptive, and states:

“When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.

When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:

- *ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- *not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- *where necessary, identify in their plans areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- *make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of*

safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;

- *satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and*
- *define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent” (NPPF, page 20, paragraphs 84 and 85).*

The five purposes of Green Belt and the approach for considering boundary changes are at the forefront of this study’s assessment methodology.

2.3 History of the North Cheshire Green Belt

The context for any Green Belt review is provided by the history of the North Cheshire Green Belt and the way it has been described in various policy documents.

Important details on the scale, role and function of the North Cheshire Green Belt are found in: the Cheshire Structure Plan (adopted 1979), the Greater Chester Local Plan (1983), Chester Replacement Structure Plan (1991/92), Chester: The Future of an Historic City (1994), RPG 13: North West (2001), Chester District Local Plan (2006) and the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions (2012). Their influence on the North Cheshire Green Belt is briefly summarised below.

2.3.1 Cheshire County Structure Plan (1979)

The Cheshire County Structure Plan (1979) has had a strong bearing on the present-day extent of the North Cheshire Green Belt. Although the boundaries were never formally approved, the Green Belt extent has largely been maintained as proposed by the Structure Plan.

The document clarifies the selection of villages to be inset within the Green Belt. Associated policy explanation stipulates that the exclusion of selected villages from the Green Belt is based on whether a village can accommodate small groups of houses, where existing planning permissions for considerable amounts of new development had been granted, or where spare capacity in public utilities or local features exists.

2.3.2 Greater Chester Local Plan (1983)

The Greater Chester Local Plan was the first formally adopted document to define the extent and detailed boundaries of the Green Belt immediately surrounding the city of Chester, albeit the Green Belt was drawn originally in 1962.

The overall strategy in the Greater Chester Local Plan was to ‘draw back’ the Green Belt in places around the City in order to provide what was seen as the long term need for land for development.

The Greater Chester Local Plan also confirmed the location and principal of development for the Chester Business Park.

The Inspector considering the Greater Chester Local Plan concluded that the scale of development proposed would adversely affect the character of the city and that the major changes, including drawing back the Green Belt could only be determined through the Structure Plan process. Indeed, the Inspector issued a holding direction on the Greater Chester Local Plan, preventing the City Council adopting until the issue had been addressed through a review of the Structure Plan.

2.3.3 Cheshire Replacement Structure Plan (1992/1993)

A key document here is the joint Chester City Council and Cheshire County Council response to the Secretary of State's Proposed Modifications to the County Council's Replacement Structure Plan policies. This document stemmed from the Inspector's conclusions on the Greater Chester Local Plan.

City Council and County Council responses were to the effect that selective Green Belt land release around Chester was an appropriate strategy to manage growth aspirations and environmental benefits. During Examination in Public this strategy was again rejected and it was stressed that Green Belt release around the city of Chester should be avoided.

City and County proposed three separate locations for selective Green Belt land release:

- Land to the north of Mannings Lane;
- Land to the north of the Countess of Chester Hospital; and
- Land to the west of Wrexham Road.

In approving the Cheshire 2001 Replacement Structure Plan in 1992 the Secretary of State concluded that no sufficiently strong case had been made to justify the release of land from the Green Belt and the boundary should remain as was defined in the Greater Chester Local Plan of 1983.

2.3.4 Chester: The Future of an Historic City (1994)

The Future of an Historic City study followed the Secretary of State's decision on the Cheshire Replacement Structure Plan. It was a reaction to the idea that there may be 'limits to the safe growth on the city' and aimed to define the notion of 'environmental capacity' from which to then apply a rationale to the future development of Chester. The emphasis was on understanding the extent to which the impact of development would (directly or indirectly) damage those attributes which make Chester special.

The study concluded that "*there is considerable scope for change and controlled growth in Chester without damaging the critical environmental capacity*" (page 72). The study goes on to state that "*the City has not yet reached its environmental capacity although there are issues that need to be addressed*" (page 72).

Having considered various options for growth and change, the study highlights that "*the outcome of evaluating the options is that none of those selected will allow Chester to continue to grow at an unchecked rate in to the future. Chester cannot accommodate the trend beyond 2011*" (page 72).

A series of other technical conclusions are also reached in the study, particularly in terms of the relationship between development at the edges of the city and its impact upon the character of the historic centre and the city as a whole, vital landscape character areas, and areas where environmental capacity has been exceeded.

The 1994 work identifies that the ‘setting’ of the city forms an integral frame for understanding the uniqueness of areas of the city. Setting was identified as an important physical attribute, founded on the relationship between the setting and the rural and urban landscape and the impression of the countryside in the city.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study analysed land capacity in the city based on a series of constraints and capacity assessments. A strategic assessment of key issues led to the identification of 20 different locations across the city of Chester and 14 locations within the city centre of Chester.

Of the 20 city-wide locations, eight correspond with locations within the Council’s Stage One Green Belt Study. A comparison between land identified in the 1994 work and the Council’s work is set out below:

Chester: The Future of an Historic City location	Indicative title (given for the purposes of comparison)	Corresponding location in Council’s Stage One Green Belt Study
Three	Land to the west of Wrexham Road	Area Two
Eleven	Land to east of A483 and A55 junction	Area Two
Two	Land north-east of The King’s School	Area Two
Sixteen	Land east of the Duke’s Driveway / west of Eaton Road	Area Three
One	Land west of Butterbache Road	Area Three
Eighteen	Land east of Upton Heath	Area Seven
Seventeen	Land east of Moston Road	Area Eight
Ten	Land north of the Countess of Chester Health Park	Area Eight

It is interesting to note that the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study did not comment on any other of the locations which are identified in the Council’s Stage One Green Belt study area. One other location within the Green Belt was identified in 1994 – land at the former Saighton Camp – but this site sits outside of the study boundary established by the Council.

Whilst the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study did not recommend that these locations were allocated for development, it concluded that these locations could assist in the city meeting its long term development potential. The findings and conclusions in the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study are noted within the respective Area appraisals found later in this document.

Interestingly, the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded by stating that the development options tested for each of the 20 City-wide locations were deliberately devised to examine the effects of a range of planning options on the city’s capacity. The locations chosen and the development options considered

were not deemed to be the only possible choices, and noted that further locations and development locations may arise from further work.

Relevant conclusions from the Chester: The Future of an Historic City state that future locations and development capacities should:

- Respect the identified critical environmental capacity of Chester;
- Balance the sometimes competing issues of environmental capacity and perhaps needing a trade-off between one issues and another;
- Respond to the City's local needs;
- Extend strategic policy for sustainable development as far as one can reasonably foresee;
- Allow for and be sensitive to measures aimed at postponing the time at which capacity is threatened;
- Retain flexibility for successful beneficial change and growth; and
- Provide scope for fulfilling the wide variety of aspirations of the City.

2.3.5 Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) (2003)

The need to review the Green Belt boundary was debated during the preparation of the Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) in 2001.

The finalised RPG 13 (March 2003) notes at Policy SD5, that “*there is no need to undertake a strategic study of Green Belt within Greater Manchester, Cheshire or Lancashire before 2011*” (RPG 13, page 34). This policy approach provides important context for the consideration of whether or not Green Belt land should be identified for future development in Chester.

2.3.6 Chester District Local Plan (2006)

The Local Plan (2006) largely maintained the shape of the Green Belt as designated by the Structure Plan, although the general extent of coverage evolved. The Local Plan (2006) took reference from the wording in RPG 13, recognising that no strategic review of the Green Belt was necessary before 2011. The Local Plan (2006) also identified the importance of restricting development to the north of the city to retain the ‘strategic gap’ between Chester and Ellesmere Port, on ecological and environmental grounds.

The Local Plan (2006) does however take a refined approach from that within the Structure Plan, by identifying a number of specific areas which constitute ‘Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt’. These include: The Countess of Chester Health Park, Chester Zoo, The Dale Barracks, BNFL/URENCO, Huntington Water Treatment Works and Ellesmere Port Waste Water Treatment Works. A policy is dedicated to each area which seeks to agree in principle the concept of development within the Green Belt at each of these sites, yet seeks to limit the impact of development proposals.

2.3.7 Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions (2012)

The Council's Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions (2012) identifies Chester as a principal location for continued economic investment and growth giving rise to the need to consider a review of the City's Green Belt boundary to meet its future development needs, particularly housing.

Overall, as noted previously, the Preferred Policy Directions aims to preserve the general extent of Green Belt coverage and maintain the 'strategic gap' between the urban settlements of Chester and Ellesmere Port, and the individual character of Chester's 'satellite' villages. It does, however, concede that a selective release of Green Belt land on the edge of Chester may need to be considered.

2.3.8 Flintshire County Council

Flintshire County Council adopted the Flintshire Unitary Development Plan in September 2011. This document replaces the Clwyd Structure Plan First Alteration, the Delyn Local Plan and the Alyn and Deeside Local Plan.

Two Green Barriers exist along the Cheshire boundary which restrict development; Barrier 15: Broughton – Cheshire Border and Barrier 16: Sealand – Cheshire Border (N River Dee). Green Barriers resemble the function of Green Belts in protecting key areas of open land and preventing the coalescence of settlements. The key difference is that green barriers are local, non-statutory designations and maybe less permanent than their statutory counterparts.

The Flintshire Green Barrier adjacent to the built-up part of Chester has been contemplated as an option for meeting some or all of Chester's growth needs. The Green Barrier in Flintshire features significant development and has been subject to recent intensification of use. However, the Green Barrier area immediately adjacent to the Chester local authority boundary is subject to significant flood risk, as is categorised in Flood Risk Zone 3b due to the proximity to the River Dee. The River Dee corridor is also protected by nationally recognised biological and ecological designations. In combination, the risk of flooding and the designations serve to severely restrict the amount of land that would be suitable for residential development, and hence restricts its ability to contribute to Chester's needs.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study (1994) also notes that both the A5104 through Saltney and the A548 Sealand Road approaches to the city have value as gateways into the city. The Saltney approach is the most attractive due to its less developed nature and its line of hedgerows and shelter belts; however, due to the topography of the land both create a strong sense of arrival to the city.

These reasons, even setting aside the very considerable uncertainty that would arise for the Council in relying on land over a national boundary to meet some of Chester's future development needs, render this option unachievable.

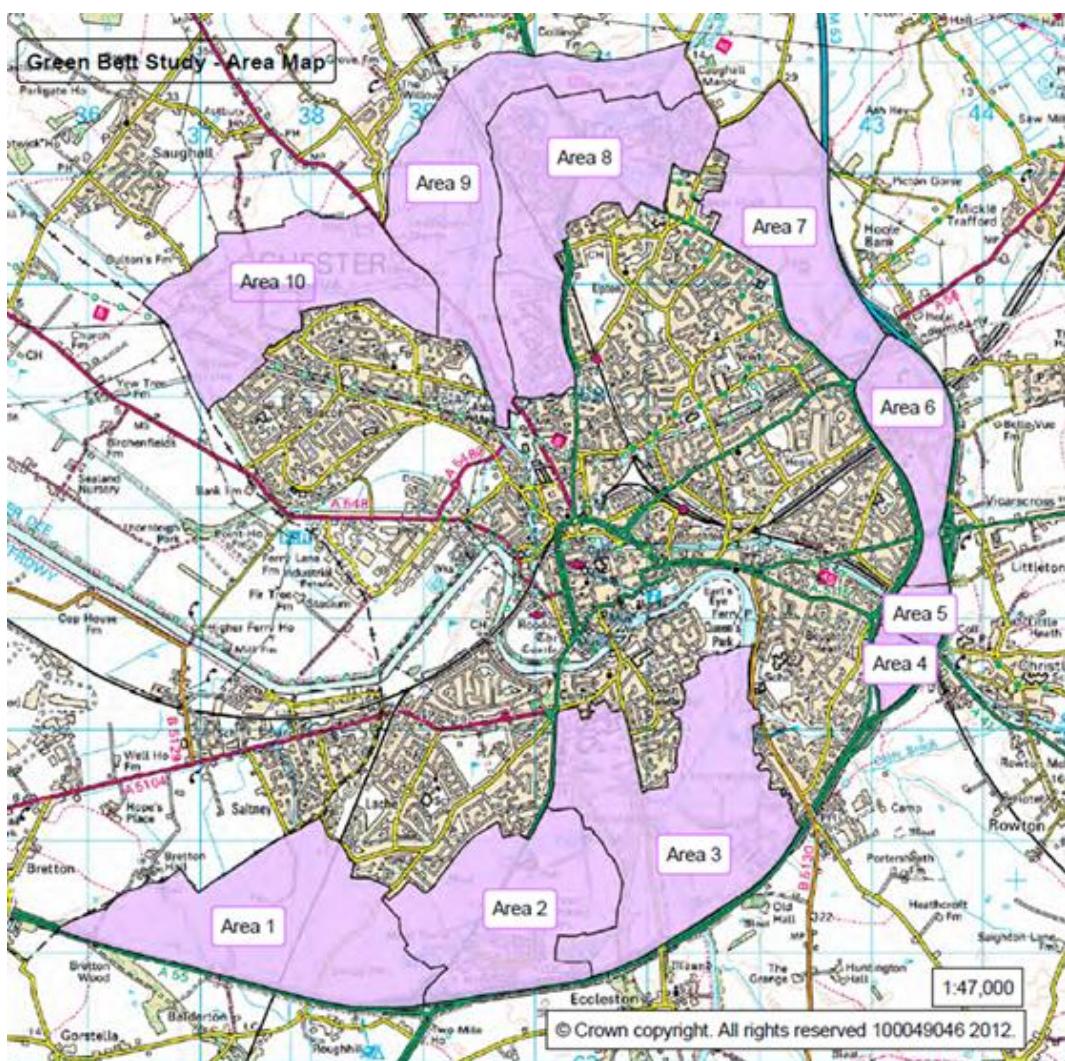
3 Methodology

3.1 Background

Stage Two of the Chester Green Belt Study builds upon the findings from the Council's own Stage One work. The Stage One work, which was reviewed by Arup, considered the extent to which land met the purposes of the Green Belt as defined in the NPPF.

The following 10 Areas were identified in the Council's Stage One study.

Figure 3.1: Cheshire West and Chester Stage One Green Belt Study Area Map

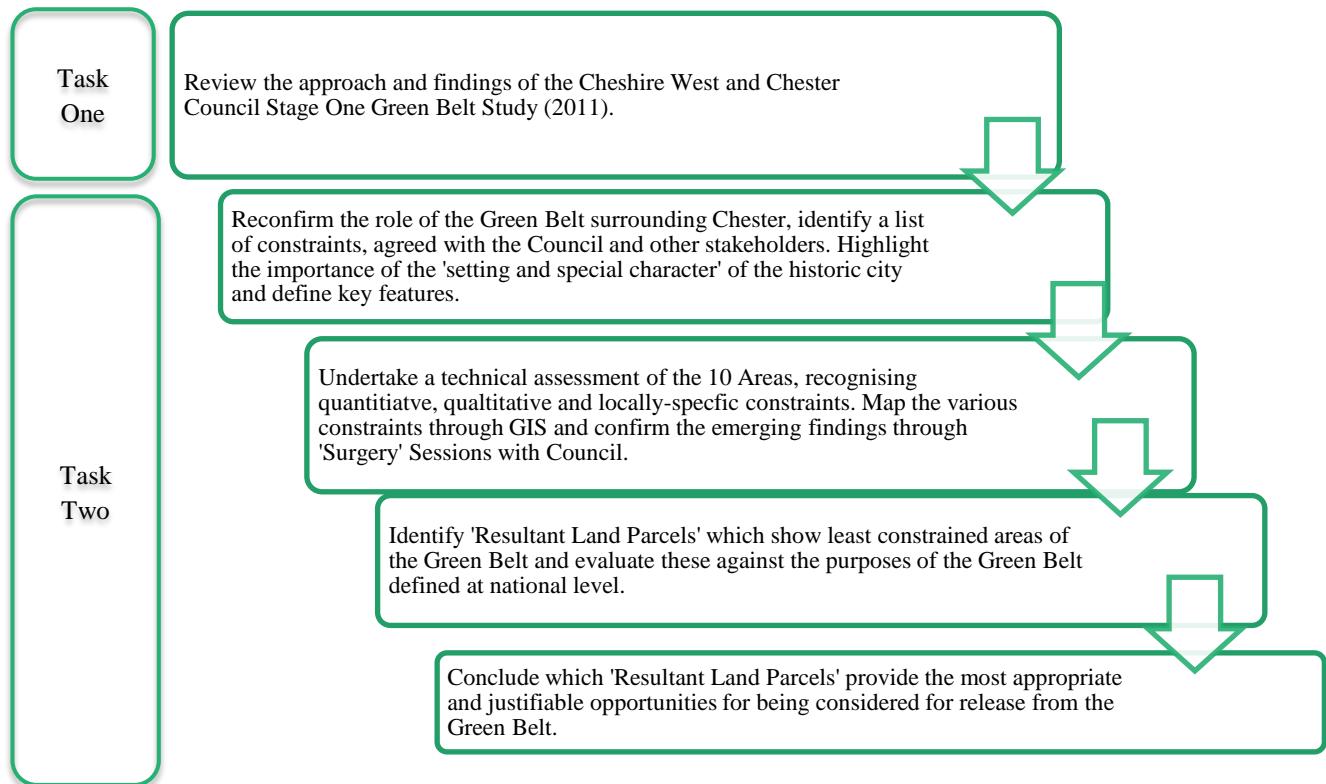


Source: Cheshire West and Chester Council (2011)

The Stage Two technical site assessment takes these 10 Areas as a starting point and seeks to identify land parcels within the 10 Areas which could potentially be released from the Green Belt.

The technical assessment work produced, and the conclusions reached, will then inform further considerations by the Council as to whether or not amendments should be made to Green Belt boundary through the Local Plan process.

An overview of the methodology is set out below:



3.2 **TASK ONE: Reviewing the Cheshire West and Chester Council Stage One Green Belt Study (2011)**

The starting point was to undertake a review of the Council's Stage One Green Belt Study. The rationale for this task was to ensure that the approach taken by the Council was robust and sound, and could support the subsequent analysis.

The approach to the review was:

- to ensure that the work reflected the latest policy, guidance and legislation shaping how Green Belt land can be assessed; and
- to validate the list of criteria and site surveys used to inform the conclusions reached and to consider whether certain criteria should have a more prominent role to play in shaping a sustainable future.

3.3 **TASK TWO: Technical Site Assessment**

3.3.1 **Re-confirming the Role of the Green Belt in Chester**

The Stage One work and validation exercise provided a baseline from which to start a more in-depth assessment of the 10 Areas. To set the context, each

assessment is prefaced by the conclusions on the extent to which each of the 10 Areas fulfils the purposes of the Green Belt.

To tailor the Green Belt Study to recognise the local circumstances which make the Green Belt surrounding Chester unique, it was necessary to consider the attributes which preserve the setting and special character of Chester. These were discussed with Council Officers throughout the study and are documented in more detail in Section 5.

3.3.2 Site-Based Constraints Assessment

A technical site-based constraints assessment was carried out for each of the 10 Areas that featured within the Council's Stage One work.

The theory of supplementing considerations of Green Belt with site-based constraints is to draw attention to the nuances, specifics and site characteristics which need to be factored into the thinking and decision-making on the most appropriate and justifiable opportunities to release land from the Green Belt.

The site-based constraints are defined using the original brief received by the Council and the proposal submitted by Arup.

An initial long list of constraints was agreed with Council Officers.

3.3.3 Agreeing the Site-Based Constraints

A workshop was held on 20th February 2013 with representatives from Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Environment Agency. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an arena for Officers and stakeholders to openly discuss the potential list of constraints and shape the process for appraising the 10 Areas.

The workshop debated additional criteria, whether or not to prioritise certain constraints, and whether some factors were locally more significant or should carry more weight in the assessment.

In addition to reconfirming the conclusions on the extent to which land meets the purposes of Green Belt, an agreed list of site-based constraints was established, which are grouped as follows:

- Flood Risk (referencing Environment Agency Flood Risk Zones 1, 2, 3a, and 3b);
- Statutory Designations (including, but not limited to: Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas etc);
- Land Use and Built Environment (referencing neighbouring and adjacent land use typologies and the form of the built development);
- Access / Accessibility and Connectivity (including pedestrian, cycle and vehicular access, connectivity to and from areas, and proximity to services and facilities);
- Topography (site levels and natural features of the landscape);
- Landscape Character and Visual Assessment (the character, sensitivity and value of an area's landscape and how it might be affected by development);

- Historic Environment (the character, sensitivity and value of an area's historic environment and how it might be affected by development – this constraint would complement the assessment of landscape character); and
- Biodiversity & Natural Environment (including the biological, ecological and natural environmental characteristics of an area, and how it might be affected by development).

It was agreed that the Study would not look at assessments of infrastructure capacity, other than identifying strategic 'show-stopping' infrastructure (e.g. major gas pipeline routes, or significant electricity pylons and substations) which might have an effect on whether land could be developed.

Additional Officer discussions drew attention to the continued relevance of the conclusions reached in the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study, particularly the clarity the study provides in understanding what the Green Belt purpose 'to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns' means in relation to Chester and the attributes that need to be protected in order for this important purpose not to be undermined (see Section 5).

3.3.4 The Need for a Balanced Assessment

The workshop confirmed that the assessment should recognise the difference between quantitative and qualitative constraints. It was decided that quantitative constraints should be considered first and that qualitative constraints should supplement the assessment and give depth to the analysis.

Quantitative

It was confirmed that the two quantitative constraints would be just two criteria – Flood Risk and Statutory Designations.

Qualitative

The remainder of the agreed list of constraints was identified as more qualitative criteria, where there would be an element of interpretation required, based upon a series of assessments. This was particularly true for those constraints where subjective assessments had to be made as to the value and quality of existing features and the scale and severity of impact if development occurred.

Local Considerations

Important local considerations which shape the way that Chester has developed over time and influence the Green Belt surrounding Chester are an integral part of the qualitative analysis. The impact on these features (either positive or negative) on potentially releasing land from the Green Belt is considered throughout the study. Locally important considerations are discussed further within Section 5.

3.3.5 GIS Analysis

The workshop also approved the approach of utilising GIS mapping and GIS datasets to underpin the assessment. Mapping the various constraints and how they interact would help reveal the relative importance of certain criteria and

would support the balanced approach of reconciling both quantitative and qualitative constraints. The agreed GIS datasets are as follows:

- Flood Risk Zones;
- All statutory national/international designations;
- Conservation areas;
- Local natural environment designations (Local Wildlife Sites);
- Local historic environment designations;
- Pedestrian and cycle routes;
- Sport and leisure facilities;
- Schools, hospitals and other community facilities;
- Local green space and open space designations;
- Registered Parks and Gardens;
- Landscape character areas and designations;
- Other features of local importance;
- Green Belt areas and boundaries;
- Vegetation mapping;
- Urban Areas; and
- Ordnance Survey Base Map and 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 raster mapping.

3.3.6 Confirming the Approach -‘Surgery’ Sessions

On the 6th March 2013, a series of ‘surgery’ discussions were held with Council Officers. These sessions had two purposes:

1. To clarify that the approach and the assumptions being used for each of the technical site-based assessments was valid and would prove robust; and
2. To confirm or amend emerging findings and the initial assessment of each of the 10 Areas and the resultant land parcels.

3.3.7 Resultant Land Parcels

Identifying Resultant Land Parcels

The proposed outcome of the technical site-based constraints assessment and the surgery sessions was to identify ‘resultant land parcels’ which could potentially be developed, being largely unencumbered by site-based constraints.

Evaluating Resultant Land Parcels against the purposes of the Green Belt

To complete the analysis, the resultant land parcels were then also subjected to a test against the purposes of the Green Belt. Where a land parcel performs an important role as defined by the purposes of the Green Belt it is considered to be

an inappropriate location for Green Belt release, irrespective of whether the parcel was unencumbered by site-based constraints.

4 Study Assumptions

4.1 Overview

The Stage Two Chester Green Study is predicated on a series of assumptions which were agreed with the Council and applied consistently across the assessment of all 10 Areas.

4.2 Practical Assumptions

These are assumptions that facilitate the technical site-based constraints assessment and allowed the work to remain manageable and achievable. They are:

- The 10 Areas defined by the Council in the Stage One Green Belt Study are agreed and not subject to change during the course of the assessment;
- The work is predominantly a desk-based study, utilising secondary source material, supplemented by technical analysis and site visits;
- Assessment utilising Council Officer's professional insight through the Workshop, Surgery sessions, and informal meetings; this helped calibrate emerging findings; and
- The assessment focuses on the potential for Resultant Land Parcels to be developed for the purposes of residential development, but also considers employment purposes where relevant.

4.3 Technical Assumptions

Technical assumptions are those which help ensure the analysis is robust, they are:

- Land within Flood Risk Zone 3b is immediately discounted from consideration as a potential location for release from within the Green Belt;
- Overall, the assessment seeks to identify both qualitative and quantitative constraints and does not rank or prioritise constraints;
- The prominence of the importance of the 'setting and special character' of the city of Chester evolved through the course of the study;
- Landscape character analysis is carried out to an agreed methodology, approved by Council Officers;
- Assessments do not take into account previous or to be determined planning permissions;
- Assessments do not rank or prioritise any Resultant Land Parcels identified; and
- Conclusions do not automatically release land from the Green Belt, but are intended to be a piece of evidence, which together with the complete Local Plan evidence base will inform decisions about the need to release land from the Green Belt as part of the Local Plan-making process.

5 The Role of the Green Belt Surrounding Chester

5.1 Overview

Whilst the NPPF clearly sets out the five Green Belt purposes, it is appropriate that the assessment of whether or not land fulfils these purposes recognises Chester's unique local circumstances.

Analysis of previous documents such as the Chester: The Future of an Historic City (1994) and discussions with officers drew attention to the importance of one of the five purposes of Green Belt: "*to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns*".

More specifically, it was agreed that preserving the setting and special character of the historic city of Chester was of critical importance and that the impact of releasing land from the Green Belt in this respect should be a key part of the assessment.

5.2 Understanding the 'Setting' and 'Special Character' of the Historic City of Chester

Following meetings and discussions with the Council it was agreed that a definition of setting and special character for Chester would aid interpretation in relation to purpose four of Green Belt (as defined in paragraph 80 of NPPF) and focus the assessment.

The definition draws from the analysis and conclusions of Chester: The Future of an Historic City (1994). The 1994 study considered the role of Chester, options for its future and how the future development of Chester may be directed, while conserving the historic character and fabric. In our view this study remains an important and robust piece of work and, because of that, a key reference point in taking forward this Stage 2 Green Belt Study. Using the 1994 work as a basis, the following features were put forward, and agreed within the Council, as important elements to be considered in the notion of 'setting and special character':

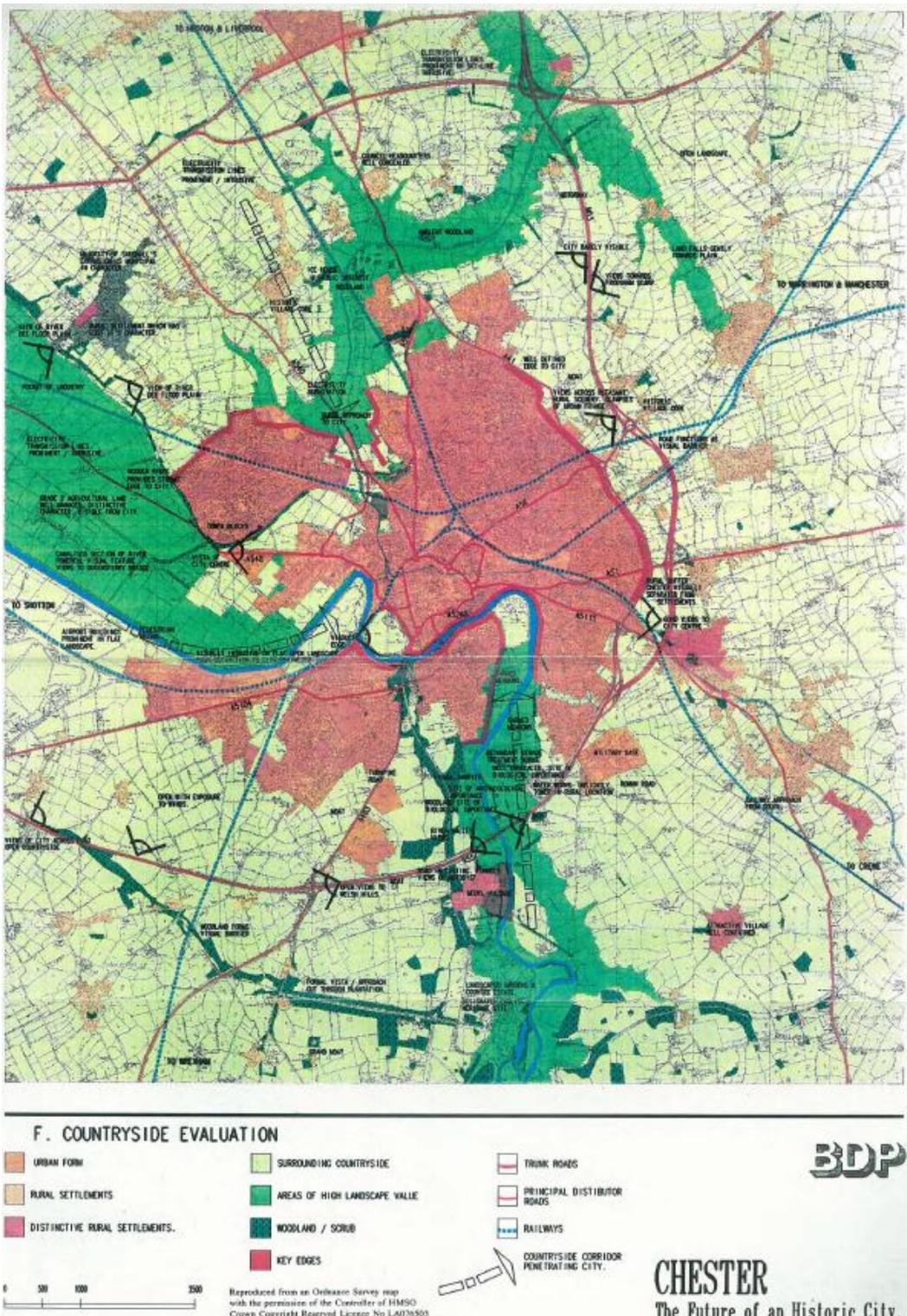
- **Well defined edges of the urban area** – There are a number of key edges where there is a distinct change between the countryside and the urban area of the city. Preserving the relationship of Chester to the surrounding countryside gives the City and villages a clear identity, sense of arrival and separation.
- **The compact nature of the City** – Chester is made up of a series of neighbourhoods that interconnect with the central area, the heart of which is within the City Walls. It is this compact nature and the sense of 'walkability' to the central area of Chester which contributes to the impression of compactness and 'setting' of the city. Preserving this compactness also helps to prevent urban sprawl.
- **Environmental features and townscape** – This encompasses the relationship between the city and landscape character areas, landscape corridors, environmental features and key views.

- **A safeguarded and defined setting of the wider countryside** – The integration of the rural hinterland with the urban form of Chester contributes to the ‘setting’ of the city. The wider landscape, in particular views to the Welsh Hills, forms a legible frame to the urban area of Chester. Landscape corridors are also particularly important in terms of how Chester is perceived when travelling through the countryside towards the city.
- **The relationship of Chester to surrounding settlements** – The compact nature of the city combined with its strong connection to the countryside results in a pronounced and separate relationship with surrounding settlements. To preserve the relationship between city and neighbouring settlements there is a need to maintain actual and perceived distances between Chester and surrounding villages.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City report sets out a number of features, unique to the historical context of Chester, which “*should not be altered if any development pressure is to be released at the edge of the City*”. These distinctive features are set out in the table below and are also clearly indicated in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 below. Figure 5.1 shows “Countryside Evaluation” which also shows key viewpoints and Figure 5.2 which shows “Key Edges and Environmental Features”.

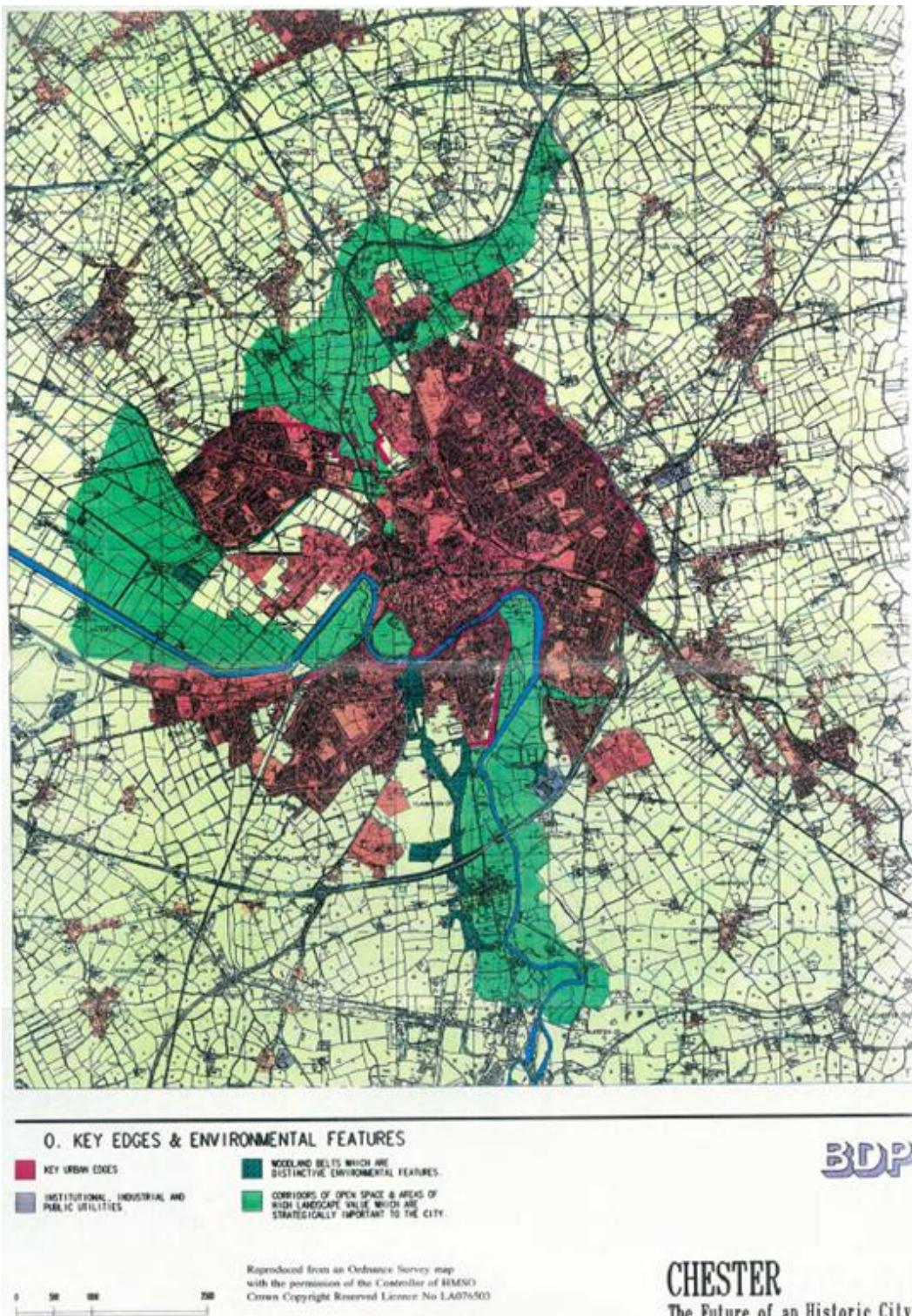
Key Edges to the City
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastern edge of the built up area • Western and northern edges of Blacon • River Dee and its Corridor
Corridors of Open Space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River Dee and its Corridor • The canal and its Corridor
Distinctive Environmental Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodland Belt west of Blacon • Woodland Belt in south of the City • Woodland Belt in north adjacent to rail-line

Figure 5.1: Countryside Evaluation



Source: Chester: *The Future of an Historic City* (1994)

Figure 5.2: Key Edges and Environmental Features



Source: *Chester: The Future of an Historic City* (1994)

6**TASK ONE: Review of the Cheshire West and Chester Council Stage One Green Belt Study (2011)****6.1 Overview**

The purpose of this task was to provide a critical review of the work already undertaken by the Council, to ensure at the outset that the approach to the Green Belt Study was robust and sound to support the validity of the resulting potential land parcels.

The approach to the review was to ensure that the work reflected the latest policy, guidance and legislation shaping how Green Belt land can be assessed, to validate the list of criteria and site surveys used to inform the conclusions reached and to consider those criteria which have a more prominent role to play in shaping a sustainable future.

6.2 Council's Approach to Cheshire West and Chester Stage One Green Belt Study

The aim of the Stage One Green Belt Study (2011) was to assess whether the Green Belt land around the urban area of Chester meets the purposes of Green Belt as detailed in the NPPF. This will then inform the evidence base to establish and support any update to the Green Belt boundary in the Council's emerging Local Plan.

The Council followed a three stage methodology:

- *Stage One: Sub division of Green Belt land around the urban fringes of Chester into parcels for assessment.*

This focussed the study on the urban area of Chester and through a desk-top study, the defined area of Green Belt was divided into ten manageable, logical and well-defined parcels. The division of land is based upon common features and characteristics of land.

- *Stage Two: Assessment Criteria*

A set of criteria was established in order to measure each of the purposes of the Green Belt. No weighting has been applied to any of the purposes.

- *Stage Three: Assessment of Land Parcels*

A site survey of each parcel was carried out in accordance with the assessment criteria.

Whilst the NPPF sets out the purpose of the Green Belt and the considerations that must be taken into account when appraising and defining Green Belt boundaries, there is no statutory guidance to indicate how a Green Belt review should be carried out. Arup therefore compared the Council's approach to other Green Belt reviews undertaken recently in England. These were the: Bath and North East Somerset Green Belt Review, South Gloucestershire Green Belt Review and Purbeck District Council Green Belt Review. It is considered that the three-staged approach methodology is largely consistent with these recent Green Belt studies

and provided a suitable basis on which to progress forward to the Stage Two technical site assessment.

7

TASK TWO: Technical Site Assessment

7.1 Overview

The following sections set out the technical site-based constraints assessment of each of the 10 Areas identified through the Council's Stage One Green Belt Study.

Each Area is described in the following manner:

- **Location** – describing the Area's position in context to the city of Chester.
- **Green Belt** – reviewing, re-stating and clarifying the Council's Stage One Green Belt Study findings and providing a synopsis of the latest thinking on the extent to which land within each of the 10 Areas fulfils the purposes of Green Belt excluding the test '*to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land*'. The rationale for this is explained below.
- **Site Constraints** – detailing the technical assessment for each of the agreed constraints.
- **Conclusion** – setting out the overall findings of the technical site-based assessment and the identification of any resultant land parcels which could potentially be released from the Green Belt. This section also includes a signpost to a detailed 'constraints map' for each of the 10 Areas, which is included in the accompanying Appendices.
- **Justification for Resultant Land Parcels** – showing the resultant land parcel(s) which emerge from the technical assessment, interpretation and constraints mapping. The resultant land parcel(s) is then evaluated against the Green Belt purposes. This is accompanied by a map showing the identified land parcel(s).

An Overview Map setting out the constraints across the whole study area is shown in Appendix A1.

7.2 Rational for excluding Test Five from the Assessment

The existence of Green Belt, tightly defined around the built up extent of the City has assisted in channelling development activity into the urban area considerably. Over many years it has had a very positive effect of supporting regeneration through the use of urban, mostly brownfield sites within the City. Therefore, to date the Green Belt encompassing Chester has very successfully performed its purpose five (of the five purposes set out at paragraph 80 of NPPF) '*to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land*' at a local level.

However, it is evident in the Council's Local Plan Preferred Policy Directions (2012) that the take-up of development opportunities within the urban area has now resulted in there being insufficient urban land to meet the City's future development needs. It could therefore be considered that all the land within the Study area has performed this purpose very well, but its ability to fulfil this

purpose is now diminishing and will diminish further over time as urban capacity reduces still further.

With this in mind, seeking to assess this purpose in relation to each of the 10 areas on a case by case basis will add little value to the study since, in every case, there will be a similar conclusion.

Considering this more strategically, the Green Belt immediately around Chester forms part of the North Cheshire Green Belt. At this level, it is considered that a modest release of Green Belt land around Chester to meet its future development needs would not undermine the urban regeneration purpose of the wider Green Belt.

8 Area One: “The Lache Eyes”

8.1 Location

Area One is located to the south-west of the city of Chester and the western boundary forms part of the national boundary between England and Wales. From a site area of 290 hectares, the current total developed area consists of 1.5 hectares.

8.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area One it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Not contained – approximately 20% adjoining the urban area of Lache. Moderate boundary strength with a durable boundary to the north (urban area) and south (A55). Weaker to west and east.
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Doddleston – 1.9 miles from urban fringe in Area One, and 1.04 miles from southern boundary of Area One.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets three Green Belt opportunities (access, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity). Less than 1% developed.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Landmarks visible from on the A55. Views out of Area One to open countryside and Welsh hills. Significant part of setting for historic city of Chester.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that the northern and eastern sections of Area One have a stronger functional relationship with the existing built form of Chester due to proximity to the suburb of Lache, and with the Park and Ride facility, Holiday Inn hotel and Chester Business Park.

Sections to the west and south-west of the Chester-Wrexham railway line have no such relationship with the existing built form and the release of land from the Green Belt in these locations would represent unrestricted urban sprawl. Furthermore, release of land in these locations would not assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

There are few permanent, defensible boundaries within Area One, however, the Chester-Wrexham railway line; Lache Lane and Balderton Brook qualify as permanent features. The national boundary between the Lache Eyes and the County of Flintshire ‘Green Barrier’ is weakly defined by established hedgerows. There are a number of well-defined tracks, field lines and hedgerows, but these are not as durable as the road and rail infrastructure.

Whilst the existing urban form of Lache provides the current Green Belt boundary, the strength of this boundary, especially where Lache Lane exits the built form could be strengthened.

Land to the west and south-west of the Chester-Wrexham railway line is open countryside and releasing land from the Green Belt here would reduce the strategic gap between Chester and Doddleston. The open, exposed nature of the majority of Area One provides a unique landscape and release of land would jeopardise the setting and special character of the city of Chester.

8.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site-based constraints within Area One to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area One fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

8.3.1 Flood Risk

Large sections of Area One are at risk of flooding. Evidence from the West Cheshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (2008) identifies that substantial parts of Area One fall within Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3a. Flood risk extends south from the urban edge of both Saltney and Lache (and onwards into Flintshire), encompassing the route of the Chester-Wrexham railway line, and extending beyond the intersection of the railway line and the A55.

Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3a serve to divide Area One in half with land to the west of the Lache Eyes, and land to the east of Lache Lane/Decoy Farm not subject to the same severity of flood risk constraint. Whilst this level of flood risk does not in itself rule out the option for releasing land from the Green Belt, it does act as a significant constraint.

8.3.2 Statutory Designations

The central part of Area One is occupied by the Lache Eyes, an area of drained marsh that serves for agricultural purposes. The Lache Eyes are a locally important landscape and classified as a Local Wildlife Site, for their ecological and biological importance. This designation, in combination with the flood risk zone classification, creates a substantial section of Area One which is subject to major site based constraint.

8.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

The only built form within Area One is Decoy Farm, located to the west of Lache Lane. The north and north-eastern sections of Area One abut the suburban residential areas of Saltney and Lache.

The Chester-Wrexham railway line and Lache Lane act as two linear routes which dissect and provide boundaries within the land, serving to segment Area One into a collection of smaller land parcels. Land to the east of Lache Lane has a different land use context and is perceived differently to land west of Lache Lane. This is due to its proximity to the urban form of Chester and the built up areas of the Park and Ride facility and the nearby Chester Business Park.

Balderton Brook acts as a natural linear route through Area One and it too serves to segment the land.

The north-western section of Area One is adjacent to Flintshire, with the border of Area One following the border between England and Wales. Land in this section of Flintshire is designated as a 'Green Barrier', which is intended to perform the same basic functions as Green Belt land although without the same level of permanence. Given the lack of land use patterns in this section of Area One and the lack of any permanent features which could act as a new defensible Green Belt boundary it does not seem appropriate to consider potential release of land within this section of Area One or within Flintshire.

8.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Access to Area One is limited, with only Lache Lane providing a direct through route. The A55 forms the southern boundary to Area One, with the eastern corner framed by the junction of the A55/A483 and Wrexham Road. Improved access to Area One could be delivered by the forthcoming upgrades to the junction of the A55/A483, however an increase in the volume of trips on this route would serve to increase impacts on the already constrained Overleigh roundabout and have consequences for access to the city.

The approach to the city from the south-west, through Area One via Lache Lane, is deemed to be one of the most attractive gateways into Chester, particularly for those travelling from North Wales. In the south-east corner of Area One, the scale and intensity of traffic on the A483/A55 junction connecting to Wrexham Road (A483) means that the perception of the approach to the historic city of Chester is not as tangible as that experienced along Lache Lane.

A prominent Public Right of Way (PRoW) zig-zags through Area One, beginning from the urban fringe at Saltney, extending through the section classified as Flood Risk Zone 3a, passing under the A55, and connecting with Lache Lane near the settlement of Balderton.

A series of tracks traverse Area One and whilst these provide access to various locations, overall the level of connectivity between the majority of Area One and the existing built form of Chester is poor.

The north-eastern section of Area One includes the protected route for the proposed Chester Western Relief Road (CWRR). This would extend from the junction of the A55/A438, up towards the Park and Ride facility, heading north-west, passing over Lache Lane, and running northwards parallel to the railway line through the suburb of Lache. With funding unlikely to come forward for the scheme before 2019 (or even after) the proposed route will not be considered as an opportunity to deliver a new permanent defensible Green Belt boundary to the south of Lache.

It should be noted that the Ordnance Survey base map shows a path crossing Lache Lane just south of the residential area running east to go south around the Park and Ride to Wrexham Road. This path no longer exists along this line and has been re-routed along the hedgerow field boundary.

8.3.5 Topography

The fields and countryside in Area One are flat, low-lying and typical of fields reclaimed and drained for agricultural purposes. The land rises to the south of Area One to meet the A55, which has been built on an embankment.

Topography would not act as a significant constraint if it was deemed that locations were appropriate and justifiable to be released from the Green Belt.

8.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area One is flat, low lying and dominated by large, regular, open fields bound by low clipped hedgerows. The land is bounded to the north by Lache and Saltney and to the south by the busy A55, which noticeably reduces levels of tranquillity.

The eastern section includes the Park and Ride facility, the A483, Chester Business Park, and the Holiday Inn hotel, which form noticeable man-made features. The Chester-Wrexham railway line passes through this area, with built development limited to Decoy Farm on Lache Lane.

The Lache Eyes forms an important core to Area One and the network of ditches and drainage channels contained within are definitive landscape features. Tree cover is sparse, generally confined to occasional hedgerows trees and linear screens of planting along the A55. A small section of the Eaton Hall Registered Park and Garden extends across the A55 into the south western corner of this area.

Open expansive views of the surrounding landscape and the Clywdian Hills are possible from within Area One. Views of the urban edges of Chester are also possible although frequently screened by intervening vegetation. Views towards the historic core of Chester, including the Cathedral and Town Hall are possible from the A55. However, views from within Area One itself are not as prominent, with the low-lying land, existing woodland screening and other visual barriers serving to limit views back towards the historic city.

On balance, Area One is considered to have moderate sensitivity to change. The Area's sensitivity is related to the open nature of the landscape, the context it provides for the city and its relationship with the busy A55 and existing built development.

8.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment of Area One reflects the flat and open nature of the Lache Eyes Character Area. Lache Eyes is distinctively empty and open in character, emphasised by a lack of structural screening vegetation and a lack of built form.

Area One also contains a legacy of previous earthworks and ridge and furrow field systems. Much of the area is high quality, late medieval landscape with field patterns of regional significance showing little boundary change in the last 150 years and well-preserved contemporary cultivation earthworks. The historic character of Area One provides a setting for the remains of Brereton's Duck Decoy and for the Eaton Hall Registered Park and Garden.

The flat and open nature of the Lache Eyes provides an important feature for framing the setting of the city of Chester; this is particularly true when viewed travelling east along the A55. Erosion of this gateway countryside, particularly to the west of Lache Lane would not only be detrimental to the character of the area, but the setting of the city itself.

8.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Balderton Brook is a prominent feature in the centre of Area One and provides the eastern border for the Lache Eyes landscape character area. Lache Eyes itself is an important site of ecological and biological value.

Area One features a series of field ponds, with greater concentrations in the western and eastern sections respectively, either side of the Lache Eyes.

Bretton Woods, an area of Ancient Woodland is found in the south-western corner of Area One and would preclude development in that location. The south-west of Area One also has pockets of scattered woodland accompanying prominent field lines and field corners.

With the exception of the Lache Eyes, there are no natural environment features which, subject to further consideration and mitigation, would prevent development.

8.4 Area One Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together the assessment of the extent to which Area One fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area One fulfils the purposes of Green Belt to a high degree, especially in terms of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preserving the setting and special character of Chester. The current Green Belt boundaries are moderately durable although the north-east section of Area One, particularly at the urban fringe of Lache, is open to interpretation. The boundary is weakest where Lache Lane exits the built form and is further compromised by the proximity and impact of the Park and Ride facility, the Holiday Inn hotel and Chester Business Park.

A substantial part of Area One is compromised by extent of Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3a and the openness of the Lache Eyes Local Wildlife Site. The Lache Eyes is a prominent and locally important feature which sits centrally within Area One and serves to bisect the land. It is clear that the Lache Eyes' importance in terms of ecology and landscape character should preclude land in close proximity being released from the Green Belt.

The combination of the potential impact on the context this area provides for the historic city of Chester, the disruption to the openness of the countryside, and impact on views of the Cathedral tower and Town Hall from the A55 would show that potential locations for releasing land and re-defining the Green Belt boundary are limited.

However, to the east of Lache Lane there are fewer constraints, although factors such as impacts on landscape character and the historic environment still remain. This section of Area One is not subject to the same severity of flooding and is considered more developed through its relationship with the A55 and the existing built form of the Park and Ride facility, Chester Business Park and Holiday Inn hotel.

Access is constrained by the quality of Lache Lane, albeit Highways Agency proposals to upgrade the Junction of the A483/A55 for development could alleviate congestion and improve overall levels of access. Future proposals for the Chester Western Relief Road also offer long term potential access improvements, however with funding unlikely to come forward for the scheme this benefit has been discounted.

Land in the centre and south-west of Area One offers no functional relationship with the city of Chester and the release of land from the Green Belt would represent unrestricted urban sprawl and should therefore be discounted.

There are no resultant land parcels in Area One.

8.4.1 Constraints Maps

See Appendix A2

9 Area Two: “Land at Wrexham Road”

9.1 Location

Area Two is positioned to the south of the city between the A55, the existing urban form of Lache to the north and a mature woodland belt to the east. From a total site area of 223 hectares, the current total developed area consists of 81.4 hectares.

9.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Two it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Partly contained – approximately 28% adjoining the urban area at Lache/Westminster Park and Handbridge.
	Strong boundary strength with durable boundaries to the north (building line), the east (woodland corridor at Duke’s Driveway), south (A55) and west (Park and Ride).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Eccleston – 1 mile from existing built form within the area e.g. the Chester Business Park.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets three Green Belt opportunities (access, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity).
	Approximately 36% developed with prominent Park and Ride, Chester Business Park and The King’s School.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	No views of the historic city due to the topography.
	Mixture of built form and open countryside.
	Significant part of setting for historic city of Chester.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that Area Two is defined by permanent, durable boundaries to the south, east and west. The boundary to the north, immediately adjacent to the existing built form of Westminster Park is open to interpretation and sections near Lache Lane, Whaddon Drive, Sherbourne Avenue, and Fir Tree Avenue as less well defined.

The section of Area Two to the east and north-east of Wrexham Road has no functional relationship with the city of Chester and release of land from the Green Belt in these locations would represent unchecked urban sprawl and would not safeguard the countryside from encroachment. Furthermore, the release of land here would jeopardise the setting and special character (both landscape and historic environment) of the city of Chester and compromise a key feature of the city (the Duke’s Driveway).

Area Two is dominated by the built form of the Chester Business Park, The King’s School and the Park and Ride facility. As such, release of land from the Green Belt in Area Two would not alter any strategic gaps between Chester and nearby settlements, nor result in potential coalescence as the existing Chester

Business Park is already adjacent to the A55 and the southern boundary of Area Two.

The section of Area Two to the west of Wrexham Road is well defined by the permanent and defensible boundary of the road itself. Release of land from the Green Belt in this location would not represent unrestricted urban sprawl due to the existing built form of the Park and Ride facility and the Chester Business Park to the south.

9.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site-based constraints within Area Two to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Two fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

9.3.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Two is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. Issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

9.3.2 Statutory Designations

A Scheduled Ancient Monument at Fir Tree Farm is found to the west of Wrexham Road. This is a locally important feature but, subject to appropriate mitigation, would not preclude land from being released from the Green Belt.

A listed building is located in the centre of Chester Business Park and has already been incorporated within the built envelope of the Business Park.

9.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

The built environment reflects the dominant land uses of the Chester Business Park, the Park and Ride facility, Holiday Inn hotel and The King's School. The high proportion of urban coverage within Area Two distorts the perception of openness and fragments the character of the area.

Three farmsteads are present – one large holding at Moat Farm and two smaller holdings at Fir Tree Farm and Marlston Heyes Farm. Many buildings within these properties are derelict and so currently serve to detract from the built form and character of this section of Area Two.

To the north-east of Area Two there is a water treatment works, which needs to be considered as a potential 'bad neighbour' in terms of noise and disruption for any future proposals to release land from the Green Belt.

A significant proportion of the north-west part of Area Two is bounded by the Lache / Westminster Park residential areas. It is noted that the Westminster Park residential development is amongst the most recent in the city of Chester and it is advocated that the whilst this new built form provides a reasonable permanent boundary to the current Green Belt, there are sections where this is less strong and

defensible, especially at the south-west corner near Lache Lane and Sherbourne Avenue and Fir Tree Avenue to the north.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identified and appraised ‘Site 2’, ‘Site 3’ and ‘Site 11’ within its land capacity analysis, all of which feature within Area Two.

‘Site 2’ is situated towards the centre of Area Two, east of Wrexham Road. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that this land was “*the lost medieval site of Claverton is in this area and there have been Roman and Medieval finds. A careful evaluation should therefore precede development*” (Chester: The Future of an Historic City, Appendix E).

‘Site 3’ is situated to the west of Wrexham Road. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study noted: “*The moated site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument*” and that “*a desk-top evaluation before development*” should be carried out (Chester: The Future of an Historic City, Appendix E).

‘Site 11’ is situated on the site of the Chester Business Park. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that “*Nothing is known of this site*” and that “*a desk-top evaluation before development*” should be carried out (Chester: The Future of an Historic City, Appendix E).

9.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Wrexham Road (A483) provides a main radial route from the city centre to the A55, with onward connectivity to Wales and Cheshire. Wrexham Road bisects Area Two and serves to provide a permanent boundary between the western and eastern sections of the Area. Wrexham Road also provides direct access to the Chester Business Park and features infrastructure improvements by way of two modern roundabouts facilitating routes in and out of the Business Park.

The southern boundary of Area Two is bounded by the A55 with direct access into the Area facilitated through the junction of the A55/A483. This junction is scheduled for expansion as part of capacity improvements by the Highway Agency. The expansion should provide for increased accessibility into Area Two and also into the city albeit the development footprint of the junction would impose into the south-west corner of Area Two. An increase in the volume of trips on this route would also serve to increase impacts on the already constrained Overleigh roundabout and have consequences for access to the city.

Area Two contains the indicative route of the CWRR if it were to be constructed. Even if at some time in the future this was constructed it would not alter the perception of the built environment as the Park and Ride facility and the Chester Business Park are existing prominent landmarks in the south of Area Two.

The approach to the city from the south is deemed to be an important gateway into Chester, particularly for those travelling from North Wales. However, the type and nature of the built development at the Park and Ride facility, Holiday Inn hotel and the Chester Business Park alters the perception of Wrexham Road being a gateway to the city. The Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Transport Plan, Integrated Transport Strategy 2011 – 2026 notes that congestion along the A438 as a result of traffic accessing the Chester Business Park is amongst the worst in the city. The scale and intensity of traffic on the A483/A55 junction and

along the A483 means that the perception of the approach to the historic city of Chester is not as tangible as that experienced along Lache Lane.

9.3.5 Topography

The topography in Area Two is characterised by flat, low-lying fields reclaimed and drained for agricultural purposes. The land rises in the south of Area Two to meet the A55, which has been built on an embankment. Therefore, topography would not act as a significant constraint if development were proposed.

9.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Two is bisected by Wrexham Road which, combined with the busy A55 at the southern boundary, and the presence of built development to the south reduces the level of tranquillity. Visually, the south of Area Two is dominated by the Chester Business Park with The King's School and the Wrexham Road Park and Ride other notable built features within the area. Vegetation along the Wrexham Road provides some filtering of views of the Chester Business Park and The King's School. The Wrexham Road Park and Ride facility is well screened by tree and shrub planting.

Away from the developed parts of Area Two the area has a rural feel with medium scale arable fields with scattered field ponds in the west and large scale, open fields in the east. A Scheduled Ancient Monument is located within the landscape to the west of Wrexham Road and the Ash Grove Conservation Area extends into the north of Area Two.

Area Two is framed by woodland and woodland features. These features to the east of Area Two are amongst the most significant in the city and the release of land in this location would be of significant detriment to the landscape character of the city.

Topography, vegetation and existing built form limit views towards the historic core of the city. Wrexham Road functions to provide a significant transport gateway to the 'historic core' of Chester.

Taken as a whole, it is clear that the sensitivity to change within Area Two varies. The section nearest the Chester Business Park is considered to have a low sensitivity to change due the reduced tranquillity and the influence of existing built form. Land to the west of Wrexham Road is considered to have moderate sensitivity to change; this reflects the existing field pattern and the presence of landscape features, as well as the reduced tranquillity due to the A55. The east of Area Two is considered to have a high sensitivity to change due to the influence and proximity to the woodland within Area Three.

9.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment in Area Two has a marginally functional relationship with the Eaton Estate Character Area. However, large agricultural fields created in the twentieth century and new areas of strategic built form have diluted some of the historic character.

The landscape to the west of Wrexham Road features field systems dating from the late medieval period and which form the setting to the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Fir Tree Farm. The character of the historic landscape to the west of Wrexham Road has been diluted to an extent by the presence of the park and ride facility.

The openness of land to the east of Wrexham Road provides a visual backdrop for the ancient Eaton Hall Park woodland and the Duke's Driveway. Archaeological excavation and chance finds of metal work show that this area has significant potential to contain archaeological remains of at least regional significance. The 1994 study identifies that a desk-based evaluation would be required in this instance.

Although views towards the historic core are restricted by the topography and vegetation, the area to the east of Wrexham Road plays a critical role in the relationship between the setting and the rural and urban landscape, by promoting the impression of the countryside in the City.

9.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Land to the west of Wrexham Road features a collection of field ponds with a concentration encircling Marlston Heyes Farm. Although this feature would not restrict development, it would act as a constraint which would require mitigation.

Whilst not directly in Area Two, the Duke's Driveway is immediately adjacent to the eastern border and provides a major constraint in terms of any notion of releasing land within the Green Belt in this location. Any proposal here would be of detriment to the setting of the Duke's Driveway and the associated woodland areas extending south towards the Glebe.

Woodland areas feature throughout Area Two, with pockets included as part of screening proposals for both the Park and Ride facility and the Chester Business Park.

Open space is designated immediately to the south of The King's School and in combination with the school's playing fields provides a major constraint within the central part of Area Two.

9.4 Area Two Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Two fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that significant sections of Area Two continue to fulfil the purposes of Green Belt, especially in terms of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preserving the setting and special character of Chester. This is particularly true of land to the east and north-east of Wrexham Road.

Much of the current Green Belt boundary is durable and the Duke's Driveway and associated woodland forms a major constraint to the east. The strength of the

Green Belt boundary in the north and west of Area Two, particularly where Lache Lane and Wrexham Road exit the urban area is open to interpretation.

The boundary where Wrexham Road exits the Westminster Park residential area is compromised by the continuation of built form due to The King's School, the Chester Business Park and then the Park and Ride facility. There is the opportunity to strengthen this boundary to give a greater sense of containment to the urban form and to align with the built development on the eastern side of Wrexham Road.

Access is good within Area Two, with Wrexham Road offering a high quality radial route in and out of the city. Even with highways infrastructure upgrades linked to the Chester Business Park, Wrexham Road does suffer from capacity constraints at peak times. Future upgrades could provide opportunities to further enhance internal access within Area Two.

Area Two is bisected by Wrexham Road and so can be divided into two distinct land parcels.

Land to the east of Wrexham Road, whilst featuring more development, has limited functional connectivity with the urban built form of Chester. Furthermore, with the exception of the Chester Business Park, the east of Wrexham Road is a location of open countryside and strategic green space serving to maintain the openness and attractiveness of the open setting around Chester; and its openness also safeguards the woodland areas to the east from encroachment.

Land to the west of Wrexham Road has some landscape and historic environment constraints. The release of land to the west of Wrexham Road would have no impact on key views in to or out of the city given topography and existing barriers. Land to the west of Wrexham Road connecting the existing built form of Lache/Westminster Park with the existing build development at the Park and Ride facility and Chester Business Park does provide an opportunity to be considered as land that could be released from the Green Belt. This land parcel is considered in more detail below.

9.4.1 Constraints Map

See Appendix A3 and A4.

9.5 Justification for Resultant Land Parcels

This section provides the justification for why the resultant land parcel represents land which could be considered for release from the Green Belt. The justification re-appraises the land parcel against the NPPF purposes of Green Belt, and the steps that would be necessary to allow for the Green Belt boundary to be re-defined around this new land parcel.

N.B. It should be noted that at this stage this does not seek to justify allocation of this land, but merely identifies the rationale should the emerging Local Plan seek to amend the Green Belt boundary. It is advocated that further analysis is carried out to consider the resultant land parcel(s) against the Council's other policy, sustainable development and place-making principles.

Land Parcel 2A – Land to the west of Wrexham Road

Defining the New Green Belt Boundary

The land parcel identified as a potential option to be released from the Green Belt is situated to the west of Wrexham Road and occupies a large part of the western section of Area Two.

Re-defining the Green Belt boundary where Wrexham Road exits the built form at Westminster Park offers the opportunity to create a more permanent, defensible boundary utilising a combination of Wrexham Road itself, the Park and Ride facility and a new boundary connecting to Lache Lane.

The land parcel is subject to some site-based constraints. The Scheduled Ancient Monument at Fir Tree Farm would require a desk-top evaluation as well as appropriate mitigation should the land parcel be considered for release from the Green Belt.

Evaluating the Potential Newly Defined Green Belt Boundary

The following assessment is made on the basis that Land Parcel 2A is removed from the Green Belt. This allows the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary to be tested against the Green Belt purposes as defined within the NPPF, and to ensure that the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary is appropriate, defensible and likely to be permanent.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The newly defined Green Belt boundary would not extend the built form any further south than the existing built up areas of Lache. To this extent it would not represent unrestricted sprawl and it would ensure that the overall compact nature of the city is retained.</p> <p>Wrexham Road to the east and Lache Lane to the south west would provide new permanent, defensible boundaries.</p> <p>The path which extends from Lache Lane towards the north-west corner of the Park and Ride facility would provide a defensible boundary to the south-west.</p>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	The newly defined Green Belt boundary would not materially reduce the gap between Chester and surrounding settlements.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>The land that would be released would be well contained by existing built up areas.</p> <p>Few site based constraints exist west of Wrexham Road therefore the newly defined Green Belt boundary will not have a material effect on encroachment into the countryside, and would not result in a detrimental impact on landscape character or important historical features.</p>
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	The newly defined Green Belt would still function to preserve the setting and special character of the historic city of Chester by retaining the compact nature of the city and better defining the extent of the urban area. The new boundary would not result in a detrimental impact of views in to the historic core.
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	See Section 7.2

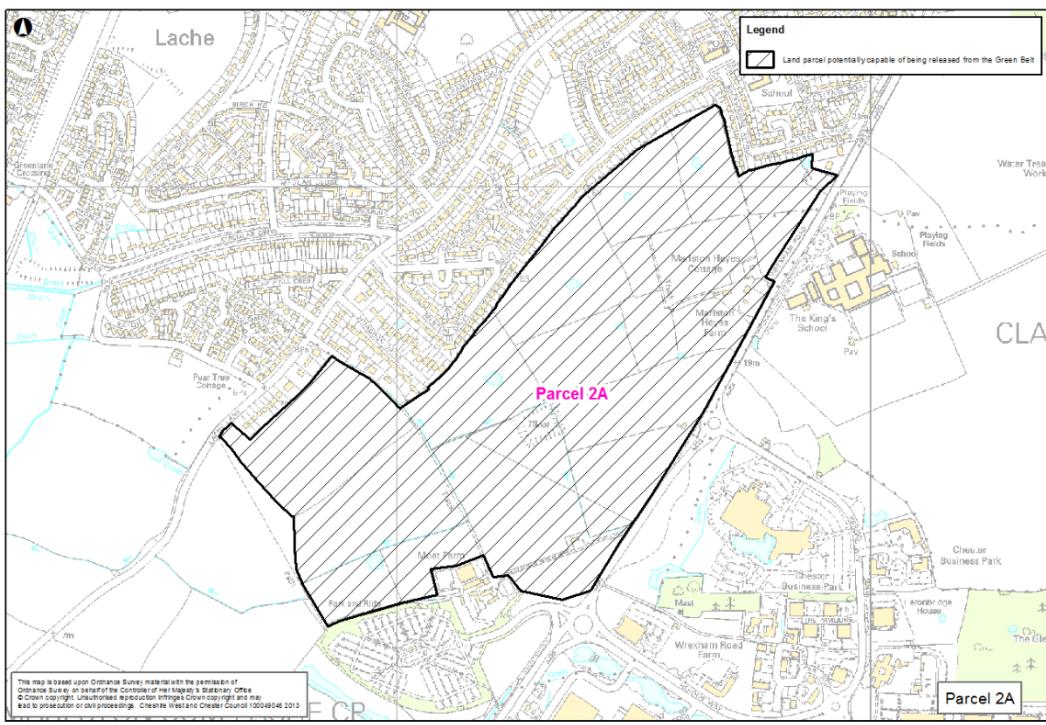
Conclusion

The release of this land from within the Green Belt would serve to strengthen the existing Green Belt boundary to the south of Lache at Lache Lane.

This land parcel could be indicatively identified for development, with potentially opportunities for residential-led mixed use linked to existing land uses.

9.5.1 Resultant Land Parcel Map

Land Parcel 2A – Land to West of Wrexham Road



10 Area Three: “Duke’s Driveway”

10.1 Location

Area Three is located directly to the south of the city, with elements extending right into the heart of the city and other sections continuing south towards the A55. From a total site area of 330 hectares, the current total developed area consists of 29.4 hectares.

10.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Three it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Well contained – approximately 57% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Handbridge, the city centre and Huntingdon.
	Strong boundary strength with durable boundaries to the north (urban area), east (urban area), south (A55) and west (the Duke’s Driveway).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Eccleston – 1.1 miles from urban fringe in Area Three, and 0.33 miles from southern boundary of Area Three.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets four Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport & recreation, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 9% developed, including waste water treatment works and the Eaton Estate.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Views of the city possible from Beeston View / Duke’s Driveway and across towards the Meadows and Grosvenor Park. View of Cathedral and Town Hall from Sandy Lane.
	Green corridor and wedge in to the city with open spaces and woodland corridors in to the heart of the city.
	Eaton Park, field systems associated with Eaton Estate, Heronbridge and a Roman road.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that Area Three is strongly defined by permanent and durable boundaries to the east, west, north and south. West of the river, Area Three is defined by boundary which the 1994 study described as a key urban edge Duke’s Driveway. North and north-western boundaries are defined by a number of large urban-grained buildings. These features are very effective in checking the unrestricted sprawl of the existing built form of Chester and in turn assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Area Three includes landscape and historic environment features which are amongst the most definitive in the city.

The Duke’s Driveway corridor and the River Dee corridor (leading up to the Meadows and Earl’s Eye) give rise to important views in to the city and outwards.

Overall, Area Three features land which is amongst the most effective at fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt across the whole of Chester.

10.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site-based constraints within Area Three to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Three fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

10.3.1 Flood Risk

Area Three is dominated by issues of flood risk. The eastern section, to the east of the Eaton Road accommodates the route of the River Dee and as such falls into Flood Risk Zones 2, 3a and 3b as defined by the West Cheshire SFRA (2008).

Although the River Dee has substantial flood defence assets, the designations pose a significant constraint on the Area and directly impact on the Area's ability to be considered for potential Green Belt release.

10.3.2 Statutory Designations

The Meadows and the River Dee corridor form a strategically important area of open space within the city. The Meadows is a highly significant local designation (Local Wildlife Sites), whilst the River Dee corridor is of European Importance Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest. Both of these designations seek to conserve the natural habitat and ultimately preclude development in those locations. The Duke's Driveway is locally-significant woodland which extends through to the Glebe.

10.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

The northern section of Area Three is divided by the urban built form of Handbridge. Handbridge is itself sandwiched between schools, playing fields, with the Duke's Driveway to the west and the Meadows and the River Dee corridor to the east.

The west and south-west of Area Three sees the continuation of the Duke's Driveway and associated woodland, extending to the study area boundary at the A55.

The east and south-east of Area Three sees the River Dee continue its route through to the study area boundary and beyond. The Meadows also occupies a significant proportion of the land within the eastern section of Area Three.

In the south-east corner there is a large water treatment works, which must be treated as a potential 'bad neighbour' for any future proposals to release land from the Green Belt.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identified and appraised 'Site 1', and 'Site 16' within its land capacity analysis, both of which feature within Area Three.

'Site 1' is situated to the east of Area Three, near the community of Huntingdon. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that that "*Nothing is known of this site*" and that "*a desk-top evaluation before development*" should be carried out (Appendix E). 'Site 16' is situated to the west of Wrexham Road. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that "*This site*

contains evidence of medieval agricultural earthworks, and possibly a farmstead and mound. On-site evaluation and recording should precede development" (Appendix E).

10.3.4 Access/ Connectivity/ Accessibility

Access to Area Three is restricted by the natural features and topography of the landscape. Eaton Road, a Roman Road, provides direct access into the Area and onwards beyond the A55 to Eccleston. Internal access is very limited with no other roads, and only a couple of public footpaths and pedestrian through routes.

The Duke's Driveway provides a highly significant pedestrian and cycling route from the city centre to the open countryside beyond the city and beyond the A55.

10.3.5 Topography

The undulating topography and natural corridors of the River Dee and the Duke's Driveway deliver key strategic views toward the city skyline and to the Grade II listed water-tower at Boughton.

The A55 which provides the boundary to the south is elevated and provides for views back across the landscape to the historic city and key landmarks.

10.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Three contains the wide, open shallow sided valley of the River Dee flanked by medium scale irregular fields bound by hedgerows. Development within this area is limited to scattered farmsteads and houses and the Chester Waste Water Treatment Works. The southern boundary abuts the busy A55, whilst the northern border aligns along the locally-significant Earl's Eye area.

The area has a high proportion of tree cover with trees lining the banks of the River Dee, frequent hedgerow trees, small blocks of woodland to the east of the river and more substantial blocks, including the Glebe and the important woodland that lines the Duke's Drive, to the west. The area contains numerous designations, including the Eaton Hall Registered Park and Garden, and provides a strong recreational and ecological green corridor extending into the city centre.

Views towards the historic core of the city are frequently limited from within this area by intervening vegetation, built form and topography. Open views are possible from more open parts of the area including The Meadows in the east of the area. Views of the Welsh Hills are also possible from the southern sections of Area Three and help to contribute towards the attractive southern aspect of the city.

It is considered that Area Three has a high sensitivity to change due to the heavily designated nature of the area and the area's importance as a green corridor to the city centre.

10.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment of Area Three is influenced by the Dee Valley character area to the east, and the Eaton Estate to the west.

To the east of the River Dee, irregular grazing fields and arable fields endure from the late medieval period. The Grade II listed Meadowhouse Farmhouse and barn, and the Grade II listed Heronbridge country house contribute as features of historic significance.

To the north, approaching Earl's Eye, the remains of field boundaries, ridge and furrow and drainage ditches become common features.

To the west of the River Dee, large blocks of woodland persist and define enclosed areas. The historic landscape is dominated by the Grade II* listed Eaton Hall Park and field systems associated with the management of the wider Eaton Estate. Eastern sections also contain the Roman road from Chester to Whitchurch and Roman and post-Roman site of Heronbridge (Scheduled Monument).

Wrexham Road adjoins Grosvenor Road and Eaton Road to form the Handbridge route. The Chester Characterisation study identifies both Grovesnor Road and Handbridge as forming the strongest gateway routes into the historic core of the City Centre. Furthermore, Area Three abuts the Character Areas of Curzon Park, and Handbridge. Curzon Park is highly valued for its consistently high-quality mixed vernacular and distinctive street form exist, and Handbridge is highly valued for its roman street forms and 19th century buildings. Any Green Belt release would need to consider the impact on the significance of these character areas.

External and internal views form a significant framing feature of any historic environment; this is particularly important when the historic environment takes the form of a historic landscape rather than the form of a single historic point with limited setting. Views along the valley to the 'historic core' and across the Earl's Eye area of Chester are considered a positive contribution to the historic character of Chester urban area.

The historic character of Area Three plays a positive, and in some instances critical, role in defining the overall character of Chester. Any new development must respect the critically important Eaton Hall Registered Park and Garden and Handbridge Roman Settlement, and the historic setting surrounding these features.

The city-wide importance of the gateway routes and views into the historic core, the significance of irregular arable field patterns and the regionally-important archaeological find areas all positively contribute to the historic character of Area Three.

10.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Area Three is dominated by sites and locations which provide ecological and biological value. The locally-significant Meadows, European-significant River Dee Special Area of Conservation, the Duke's Driveway, the locally-significant woodland, the Glebe, open space and playing fields associated with the school and college creates a network of inter-connected environments that pose a substantial constraint on any considerations of redefining the Green Belt boundary in Area Three.

The River Dee corridor is a vital and distinctive part of the city and the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that the river corridor acts as a key edge to the to the city.

10.4 Area Three Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Three fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area Three is one of the most effective locations within Chester in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt. Area Three's role in terms of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preserving the setting and special character of Chester and checking unrestricted urban sprawl is probably the strongest in all of the Green Belt areas surrounding the city of Chester. It also offers unique and irreplaceable functions for outdoor recreation and amenity green space.

Access within Area Three is poor with only Eaton Road and the Duke's Driveway allowing for connections through the Area. Internal connectivity across Area Three is also poor with limited opportunities to travel west to east.

Area Three features many of the city's most important natural, ecological and biological features and in considering land for release from the Green Belt is subject to significant constraints which would be insurmountable by mitigation measures.

Area Three is highly effective in terms of meeting the purposes of Green Belt, and in conjunction with the wide range of site-based constraints, it has been determined that there are no suitable land parcels within Area Three which could potentially be appropriate and justifiable to release from the Green Belt.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Three.

Constraints Map

See Appendix A5.

11 Area Four: “Land South of Whitchurch Road”

11.1 Location

Area Four is located to the east of the city centre, at the divergence of the A55 and A41. From a total area of 25 hectares, the current total developed area consists of around 6.95 hectares including a Park and Ride facility, commercial nursery, allotments and a hotel.

11.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Four it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Well contained – approximately 60% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Whitchurch Road and Boughton Heath.
	Strong boundary strength with a durable boundaries to the north (A41 - Whitchurch Road), east (A55), west (A41 – inner ring road), and south (intersection of A55 and A41).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Christleton – less than 1 mile from existing built up area at Whitchurch Road.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets two Green Belt opportunities (outdoor sport and recreation, and retaining landscapes). Approximately 28% developed – Park and Ride facility, nursery and hotel.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	No views in to or out of the city due to topography. City is visible from the A55.
	Open landscape beyond the allotments and when viewed from A55.
	Landscape and setting is fragmented. Features Abbot’s Well.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that Area Four is bounded on all sides by permanent, durable boundaries in the north, west, south and east created by the existing road network. The current Green Belt boundary is created by the A41 inner ring road, itself a strong boundary. Although this is a permanent feature, the boundary appears to have been fragmented to an extent by land uses to the north and north-west of Area Four, as well as development adjacent to Whitchurch Roundabout. The Chester: Future of an Historic City study identified a key urban edge to Chester running along the A41 extending south as far as the Chester-Crewe railway line. The presence of the development at Toll Bar Road (in Area 5) and the development along the southern side of Whitchurch Road (in Area 4) would provide a rationale for why the key urban edge notation in the study stops at that point. This differentiates Area 4 from Areas 5, 6 and 7.

The presence of the Mecure Abotts Well hotel in the north-eastern corner of Area Four serves to extend the sense of built form along Whitchurch Road to the

intersection with the A55; as does the section of residential development at Toll Bar Road to the north of the A41.

The combination of dominant highway infrastructure and topography serves to limit views into or out of Area Four.

The urban green corridor, which follows the route of the A55 and the A41, serves to ensure that the southern tip of Area Four feels distinct and separate from the urban area of Chester and has a reduced functional relationship with the urban form.

Land within Area Four also serves to maintain the strategic gap between Chester and Christleton, albeit in the north-eastern sections of Area Four the perception is that some degree of coalescence has already occurred. Towards the eastern and south-eastern sections of Area Four the elevated nature of the A55 forms a permanent boundary and prevents full coalescence with Christleton. In preventing this coalescence the area does fulfil a role in preserving the setting and special character of Chester.

11.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site-based constraints within Area Four to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Four fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

11.3.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Four is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. Issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

11.3.2 Statutory Designations

Area Four is not significantly constrained by statutory designations. A Grade-II listed building identified as the Glass House exists to the north of the site.

11.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

The north-western section of Area Four includes a variety of built form and a diversity of land uses including: Beechmoor Garden Nurseries and Boughton Heath Allotments, as well as the Park and Ride facility and Abbot's Well Hotel.

To the south and east of Area Four, between the line of the allotments and the A55 there are a number of large agricultural fields. The allotments and adjacent open space provide for recreation and amenity space in good proximity to the urban centre of Chester. Access to the open space is limited, with only a pedestrian subway beneath the A41 providing a single point of entrance.

There are a range of land uses and built forms already within Area Four. The built development either side of the A41 Whitchurch Road and at the Whitchurch

Roundabout constitute a degree of urban sprawl and do compromise the gap between the urban form of Chester and the village of Christleton to some extent.

11.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Area Four is well-connected to the strategic highway network, with Whitchurch Road, the A41, and the A55 providing connections to the north, west and east respectively. The Chester-Crewe railway line passes through in a cutting in the north-east corner of Area Four.

Internal access is constrained with vehicular and pedestrian movements restricted by the very nature of the strategic highway network. Issues of severance do occur within Area Four and pedestrian connectivity is very limited, although two bus stops exist which service the Park and Ride facility. The existing built form reflects the difficulties in access, with development more prevalent in the north and north-eastern sections where access is more direct.

Historic development patterns and historic road layouts with dominant radial routes in to and out of the city have left a legacy which now poses a challenge in terms of highway capacity. The Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Transport Plan: Integrated Transport Strategy (2011 – 2026) notes that congestion hot-spots in Chester include the inner ring-road and on key radial routes such as A51 and the A41. In combination with the Saighton Camp Development, releasing land from this Area would increase traffic pressure on neighbouring junctions.

Increasingly high levels of congestion have resulted in the formation of an Air Quality Management Area in proximity to Area Four. The lack of highway capacity and constraints linked to air quality are important consideration in identifying suitable candidate land parcels that could be considered for release from the Green Belt.

11.3.5 Topography

Area Four is largely flat in nature with land rising towards the A55 to the east. The nature of the topography means that should land be released from the Green Belt it would not impact on views in to, or out of, the city.

11.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Four is a relatively small parcel of land which has a very mixed landscape character. It contains an assortment of development types – a commercial nursery, a hotel, several residential properties, and the Park and Ride facility. Area Four also contains the Boughton Heath Allotments in the west and irregular arable fields in the east. It is bound on all sides by busy roads.

Tree cover is relatively strong with hedgerow and field trees, linear belts of planting along the roads and around the Park and Ride facility and the hotel. Views both out of and into the site are restricted by this intervening vegetation and also the topography of the site.

Area Four is considered to have a low sensitivity to change.

11.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment of Area Four is fragmented and disrupted by its location between the inner ring road and the A55. Bounded by the built form of the nursery, Park and Ride facility and the hotel, Area Four only has a limited functional relationship with the Backford-Christleton and Cheshire Plain Character Areas.

The Grade II-listed Glass House which fronts Whitchurch Road and Abbott's Well, the medieval aqueduct for St Werburgh's Abbey are two locally important features. The location of the Abbott's Well would require appropriate mitigation should land within Area Four be identified for release from the Green Belt.

11.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

The nature of the hard infrastructure boundaries and fairly high level of development (27.8%) reduces the biological or ecological value of the land within Area Four.

Prominent field ponds, including Abbot's Well, are centrally located within Area Four. These pose challenges in terms of suitability and deliverability should any suitable candidate land parcel be identified which could be released from the Green Belt in Area Four and would require appropriate mitigation should land in Area Four be forthcoming for release from the Green Belt.

The western boundary of the Area Four features pockets of woodland, which have been created to help screen and minimise the impact of the A41 road corridor.

11.4 Area Four Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Four fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

Area Four functions moderately well in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt. Although compromised to some degree already, it still has some role in preventing the coalescence of Chester with Christleton. This is important in preserving the setting and special character of the city.

Area Four also provides an opportunity for outdoor recreation and amenity, through the allotments and open space in the southern section of Area Four. The urban greenway and the areas of greenspace also give a sense of openness between the inner and outer ring roads.

The existing Green Belt boundary is provided by the A41 inner ring road. This is a permanent feature; however there is development to the north and north-west of Area Four.

Access to Area Four is good and it is well served by local and strategic highways. However concerns exist surrounding the impact of development on the capacity of the A41 junction. Internal connectivity is poor with only a subway in the south-

west corner providing access from Boughton to the open spaces stretching to the A55.

Area Four contains relatively few site-based constraints, although there are challenges linked to air quality and Area Four is operating within an Air Quality Management Area to help mitigate traffic related pollution impacts. The location of field ponds and the locally important Abbott's Well would also require effective mitigation measures should land be identified as a candidate for consideration to be released from the Green Belt.

It is important to consider the potential coalescence of Chester with the village of Christleton. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identifies Christleton as a 'distinctive rural settlement' in its countryside evaluation assessment. Whilst the existing boundary of the Green Belt is at the inner ring road, it is noted that the residential development at Toll Bar Road and the built form of the hotel and nursery already serve to reduce the perceived gap between Chester and Christleton. The infrastructure of the Chester-Crewe Railway line and the A41 and A55 prevent the full coalescence of Chester and Christleton although the physical gap will be significantly reduced.

Consideration of Area Four has been finely balanced. As it does not fulfil all the purposes of the Green Belt to the fullest extent, and it is also relatively unencumbered by site-based constraints, one suitable land parcel is available within Area Four which could potentially be considered for release from the Green Belt. This land parcel is considered in more detail below.

11.5 Constraints Map

See Appendix A6 and A7.

11.6 Justification for Resultant Land Parcels

This section provides the justification for why the resultant land parcel represents land which could be considered for release from the Green Belt. The justification re-appraises the land parcel against the NPPF purposes of Green Belt, and the steps that would be necessary to allow for the Green Belt boundary to be re-defined around this new land parcel.

N.B. It should be noted that at this stage this does not seek to justify allocation of this land, but merely identifies the rationale should the emerging Local Plan seek to amend the Green Belt boundary. It is advocated that further analysis is carried out to consider the resultant land parcel(s) against the Council's other policy, sustainable development and place-making principles.

Land Parcel 4A – Land to the east of the A41

Defining the New Green Belt Boundary

The land parcel identified includes the total land defined within Area Four. The new Green Belt boundary would extend to the A55 outer ring road. The northern boundary would be created by the A41 Whitchurch Road and so would be permanent and defensible.

The land parcel is relatively unencumbered by any site-based constraints although mitigation measures would be required to safeguard and sensitively manage the various field ponds, Abbot's Well and allotments if this land parcel was identified as a location to be released from the Green Belt.

In identifying this resultant land parcel for potential release from the Green Belt it is recognised that some constraints do exist and pose challenges in terms of site development, deliverability and accessibility. For example, internal access by vehicles and pedestrians is currently poor and would need upgrading, as would measures to avoid further impact on air quality. Clearly not all of the resultant land parcel would be capable of accommodating new development. The existing land uses would be expected to remain and are likely to preclude (re)development.

Evaluating the Potential Newly Defined Green Belt Boundary

The following assessment is made on the basis that Land Parcel 4A is removed from the Green Belt. This allows the 'new' Green Belt boundary to be tested against the purposes as defined within the NPPF, and to ensure that the 'new' Green Belt boundary is appropriate, defensible and likely to be permanent.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The A55 would form a new permanent and defensible Green Belt boundary to the east. Whilst this newly defined boundary could contribute to some urban sprawl, the collection of built forms either side of the A41 Whitchurch Road and at Whitchurch Roundabout means that there is a perception that sprawl has already taken place to some degree.</p> <p>The redefinition of the Green Belt boundary has the potential to strengthen the boundary against future sprawl and form a permanent boundary for the long term.</p>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	<p>The release of this land does risk the coalescence of Chester and Christleton; however their separation is already compromised by built development to either side of the A41. To this extent a new, permanent, defensible Green Belt boundary could serve to halt any further risk of coalescence. However it could be argued that the need to keep this parcel free from further development is important to retain what separation exists between the two settlements.</p>
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>Any sense of encroachment through new development would be mitigated to some degree by the presence of existing built development in this area.</p>
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	<p>The removal of this parcel would impact on the area's ability to maintain the remaining gap between Chester and Christleton and affect its role in helping to define the setting and special character of the historic city.</p>
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the	See Section 7.2.

recycling of derelict and other urban land.	
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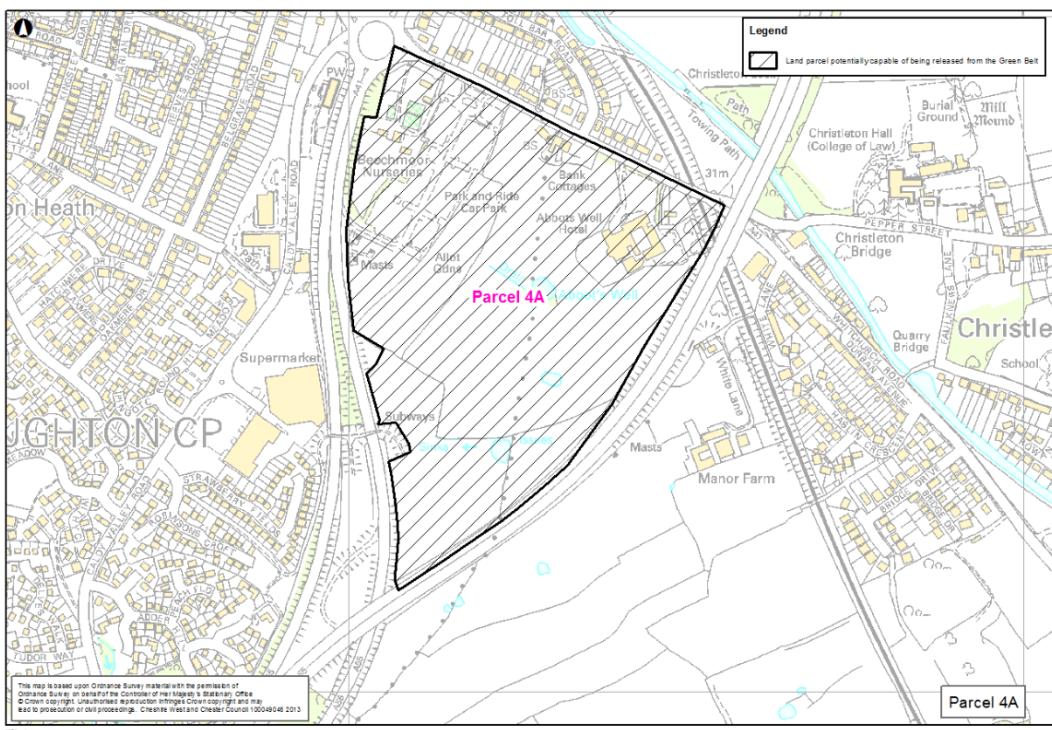
Conclusion

The release of land would have an impact on the coalescence of Chester with the village of Christleton, albeit current land use patterns have already compromised the gap between the city and the village to some degree. So, whilst the new boundary would not reduce the distance between the city and Christleton (as development at Whitchurch Road and the Abbots Well Hotel are already in close proximity) it is appreciated that it could lead to an intensification of land use and consolidates the coalescence of the two settlements.

On balance, this land parcel is indicatively identified for development.

11.6.1 Resultant Land Parcel Map

Land Parcel 4A – Land to the east of the A41



12 Area Five: “Land East of Boughton Heath”

12.1 Location

Area Five is located to the east of the city centre and is contained by the strategic highway to the east and the west. From a total area of 25 hectares, the current total developed area consists of around 5.7 hectares.

Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Five it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Partially contained – approximately 42% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Whitchurch Road and Boughton Heath.
	Strong boundary strength with durable boundaries to the north (Pearl Lane), west (A41 – inner ring road), east (A55 outer ring road), and south (A41 – Whitchurch Road).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Christleton – less than 1 mile from edge of existing built form along Whitchurch Road.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets four Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport and recreation, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity).
	Approximately 23% developed, with the Toll Bar Road residential area prominent.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	No views in to or out of the urban core due to topography of surrounding area. City is visible from the A55.
	Green corridor provided by Shropshire Union Canal and to be designated. High hedgerows restrict views of urban edge.
	Fragmented landscape – feature listed canal lock.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that the Green Belt in Area Five is strongly contained by the existing road network, which provides a permanent boundary to the south, west and east.

There are two very distinct parts to Area Five, separated by the routes of the Chester-Crewe railway line and the Shropshire Union Canal. To the south, the residential development at Toll Bar Road breaches the A41 boundary and extends residential built form into the Green Belt up to the railway line. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study recognises that the development at Toll Bar represents ‘urban sprawl’ in its city-wide evaluation map (see Chester: The Future of an Historic City, page 19). The land to the north of the canal and rail line however is very different. It is open and undeveloped. Here, the A41 provides a very strong boundary, containing the built up edge of Chester.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identifies the A41 here and running north as a ‘key urban edge’. It clearly defines the edge of the city with a distinct change to countryside beyond. The study noted the sense of containment

which could be described as the ‘City limits’ (see Chester: The Future of an Historic City, page 17). Development in this area would also significantly diminish the gap between the city and Christleton. It would also, arguably, diminish the gap between the city and Littleton. This part of Area Five therefore plays an important role in safeguarding the setting and special character of the city, and development on it would also constitute urban sprawl.

12.2 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site-based constraints within Area Five to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Five fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

12.2.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Five is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. Issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

12.2.2 Statutory Designations

Area Five is not constrained by statutory designations. The Grade II-listed Greenfield Lock is located towards the western boundary of Area Five. With appropriate mitigation this feature would not rule out the release of this land from the Green Belt.

The Christleton Conservation Area extends into the south-eastern section of Area Five which any development would need to have due regard to.

12.2.3 Land Use and Built Environment

Area Five is dissected by Shropshire Union Canal corridor which includes a number of locks, and the Chester-Crewe railway line. The southern and south-western fringes of Area Five comprise an area of residential development, laid out in a cul-de-sac style, which extends beyond the existing Green Belt boundary provided by the A41. A single large, open field, used for agricultural purposes dominates the character of the land to the north of the Shropshire Union Canal.

The northern and southern boundaries of the site are bordered by Pearl Lane in the north and Whitchurch Road in the south. The Chester: Future of an Historic City study notes that the north-eastern urban fringe of the city of Chester is one of the most defined across the city.

12.2.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Area Five is well-connected to the strategic highway network, with main roads forming the boundaries to the east, west and south. However, accessibility is constrained by the highway infrastructure acting as a barrier causing issues of severance.

Internal roads to the south of the canal serve the existing built form, but it is considered that these routes are not capable of modification to allow a southern access point to the remainder of Area Five. Pearl Lane provides access across the northern section of Area Five and serves to link Chester with Littleton and connects back to the A51. Pearl Lane would likely require an upgrade in order to support future development should land in Area Five be considered for release from the Green Belt.

Referring just to the north of Area Five, the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study remarks that the approach to the city from the east along the A51 through Littleton does not give the impression of travelling along a rural approach road, and that this route has a more urban character which is defined by buildings and new tree planting; and that the combination of the railway line and the road network serves to lessen the perspective of an attractive rural approach to the city.

Pedestrian and cycle routes are provided by the onward connections to the Chester Urban Greenway route and the canal side towpath.

12.2.5 Topography

Area Five is largely flat in nature with land rising towards the A55 strategic highway. The nature of the topography would mean that development in Area Five would be less likely to impact on views back to the historic core of Chester from the A55 and A41.

12.2.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Five is a flat landscape which contains residential development in the south and a large arable field with trees and isolated remnant hedgerow trees in the north. These two land uses are separated by a corridor of land that contains the Chester-Crewe railway line and the Shropshire Union Canal, which provides a popular recreational link to the centre of Chester.

Planting along the A55 screens views of Christleton to the south east; however, the Christleton Conservation Area extends across the A55 into Area Five covering the small triangle of woodland in the south east of the area. Views into and out of the urban core of Chester are restricted by vegetation, the built form along the A41 Ring Road and topography.

On balance, Area Five is considered to have low sensitivity to change. The Area's low sensitivity to change relates to the presence of the dominant road network and rail and canal infrastructure, as well as the influence of existing development to the south. On its own, however, the northern part of the area offers a sense of openness beyond the urban edge of the A41.

12.2.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment of Area Five is broadly consistent with the typical land use patterns of the Backford-Christleton Character Area. However, the fragmented nature of the landscape means that Area Five has limited historic environment value, albeit a small element in the south-east section of Area Five, encompassing the Shropshire Union Canal towpath falls within the Christleton Conservation Area.

The section of newer built development along Toll Bar Road dilutes the separation of urban Chester and the character provided by the village of Christleton. The Grade II-listed Greenfield Lock features in the western section of Area Five.

There are no views in to or out of the urban core and no landmarks are visible from within Area Five. Some views of the city are possible whilst travelling along the A55.

12.2.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

The presence of the Shropshire Union Canal offers some biodiversity and natural environment value, which will be enhanced as the canal corridor is designated as a strategic green corridor.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that sections to the east of the city provide a green ‘buffer’ which emphasises the city as being in the countryside. The northern section of Area Five falls into this defined ‘buffer’.

12.3 Area Five Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Five fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

Area Five functions relatively well in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt, although it is a mixed picture; the southern part of the area is largely developed but the northern part, in stark contrast comprises open, undeveloped agricultural land.

Whilst the current boundary at the A41 is a permanent feature, the strength of the Green Belt boundary is weakened adjacent to the residential development at Toll Bar Road; although it is worth noting that this development preceded the establishment of the Chester Green Belt boundary. In other words, the original Green Belt boundary was consciously drawn to exclude this developed area. This developed area already lessens the perceived separation between the city and the village of Christleton, arguably making the remaining undeveloped land between the City and Christleton more sensitive to development.

It should also be noted that the north-eastern section of Area Five lies east of a ‘key urban edge’ as defined by the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study – constituting a distinct change between the City and the countryside. This is, even on its own, considered decisive in rendering this an inappropriate site to be released from the Green Belt.

Land within Area Five does not serve to protect any views into the historic city or any key landmarks, albeit some views are possible whilst travelling on the raised A55.

Access to Area Five is somewhat limited, as whilst in close proximity to the highway network, direct access is restricted by the alignment of the roads. Internal

connectivity is poor, although the canal towpath provides pedestrian access from the urban area of Chester to Christleton and beyond the A55.

Area Five contains few other site-based constraints. There are challenges linked to the existing air quality and the need for an Air Quality Management Area around the A41 Whitchurch Road. The Christleton Conservation Area would require careful consideration should land be identified to be released from the Green Belt.

Area Five is generally unencumbered by site-based constraints. Its southern part, around Toll Bar Road, is developed and offers no opportunity for further development. It existed when the Green Belt was originally drawn over it and there has been no change in circumstances to suggest this should not continue. The northern part of Area 5 is open, undeveloped farmland. It lies beyond a key urban edge to the city which is a clear demarcation line between the urban area and the countryside. As such it plays an important role in safeguarding the setting and special character of the City and its release for development would constitute urban sprawl and the encroachment of the countryside, at the same time undermining the gap between Chester and Christleton and, to a lesser extent, Littleton.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Five.

Constraints Map

See Appendix A8.

13 Area Six: “Land at Piper’s Ash”

13.1 Location

Area Six is positioned to the east of the city, lying between the A41 inner ring road and the A55 (North Wales Expressway). It is bounded by the A56 to the north and the A51 to the south. From a total site area of 102 hectares the current total developed area consists of 8.1 hectares.

13.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Six it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Partially contained – approximately 40% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Vicars Cross and Hoole
	Strong boundary strength with durable boundaries to the north (A56), west (A41), east (A55) and south (Pearl Lane).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Littleton – less than 1 miles from urban edge of Chester. Piper’s Ash is within Area Six.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets four Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport and recreation, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 8% developed, with Piper’s Ash and Hoole Hall Hotel.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Views from Piper’s Ash back to Lead Shot Tower, Cathedral, and Town Hall. Key urban edge along A41. Open areas within Piper’s Ash and beyond Hoole Hall Hotel and motorway. Fragmented landscape, with prominent historic features.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that Area Six is defined by a number of durable defensible boundaries. The intersection of road and rail infrastructure serves to divide up Area Six into a series of individual parcels of land and cannot be considered as one singular area.

The current Green Belt boundary created by the A41 provides a very strong and defensible boundary. It is effective in checking the unrestricted sprawl of Chester and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study sees the A41 here as part of a ‘key urban edge’. It clearly defines the edge of the city with a distinct change to countryside beyond. The study noted the sense of containment which could be described as the ‘City limits’ (see Chester: The Future of an Historic City, page 17). Development in this area would also diminish the gap between the city and Littleton, Guilden Sutton and, to a limited extent, Mickle Trafford. Area Six therefore plays an important role in safeguarding the setting and special character of the city.

13.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site constraints within Area Six to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Six fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

13.3.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Six is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. However, issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan, then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

13.3.2 Statutory Designations

The northern sub-area of Area Six includes features of major historical and archaeological importance. Within the existing Hoole Hall Hotel there are a number of heritage assets which are already managed through the hotel and surrounding premises.

Adjacent to the hotel there is a site of a former Roman practice camp, which is designated as a scheduled ancient monument. This would need very careful consideration if development was to be considered in the vicinity of it.

13.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

Area Six is defined by a fragmented collection of land uses, a dispersed residential development pattern, as well as road, rail and cycle infrastructure.

Within this fragmented land use pattern there is also patchwork of green spaces, woodland, farmland and open countryside. Land to the north of the A51, off Hare Lane, is currently occupied by practice rugby playing pitches and utilised by the adjacent Chester Rugby Union Football Club (outside the study area).

Area Six includes the small settlement of Piper's Ash, which is a pre-war collection of dwellings and cottages; and Area Six also includes a ribbon of post 1970's residential development enclosed by Guilden Sutton Lane and the Chester-Manchester railway line. This ribbon of development has expanded the urban form beyond the current Green Belt boundary, but is relatively self-contained by Guilden Sutton Lane and the Chester-Warrington railway line.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City report notes that the north-eastern urban fringe of the city of Chester is one of the most defined across the city, and identifies it as a 'key urban edge'. The western boundary of Area Six is directly adjacent to this 'key urban edge' and release of land from the Green Belt within this area would have a major, adverse impact on this defined edge and therefore the setting of the City. The study states that the city's form and its relationship with the countryside through the key edges is 'critical environmental capital'.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study also notes how a green 'buffer' sweeps around the east of the city, separating the city and the A55. This green

‘buffer’ emphasises the sense of being in the countryside, again defining the setting of the city.

13.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

A series of roads intersect Area Six, including Pearl Lane, Tarvin Road, Hare Lane, Guilden Sutton Lane, and Warrington Road. Warrington Road roundabout, the Vicars Cross junction and the Tarvin Road roundabout provide potential access routes at the north and the south of Area Six. Area Six is also intersected by the Chester-Warrington railway line and the Chester Urban Greenway.

The dominant radial routes serve to pass through Area Six, with internal connectivity provided by Hare Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane. This internal highway infrastructure is of low quality and would require upgrading to accommodate any significant increase in vehicle movements.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study remarks that the approach to the city from the east along the A56 Hoole Road does not give the impression of travelling along a rural approach road, and that this route has a more urban character which is defined by buildings and new tree planting; and that the combination of the railway line and the road network serves to lessen the perspective of an attractive rural approach to the city.

A pedestrian route is located to the north of the practice rugby pitches, giving access from Hoole to the Hare Lane, connecting with the Public Right of Way which runs through Piper’s Ash and along Hare Lane. However, connectivity is reduced by issues of severance caused by the dominate infrastructure of the A41 and A55.

13.3.5 Topography

Area Six is characterised by a gently sloping topography, with agricultural uses having flattened the landscape. The A55 at the eastern boundary of Area Six is elevated above the rest of the land area.

13.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Six is a gently sloping landscape crossed by several roads. Small pockets of housing are associated with the minor roads. The Grade II listed Hoole Hall and several large detached residential properties are located along the northern boundary of Area Six off the A56, Warrington Road. The busy A55 and A41 form the eastern and western boundaries of the area respectively. The Chester-Warrington railway line and National Cycle Route 5 which follows the route of a disused railway line pass through the north of the area. A single pylon and a small electricity substation are located on the eastern boundary of the area.

The land cover of the area is predominantly small to medium scale arable fields bound by hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Field ponds of varying size are found in several of the fields within the area. Occasional shelter belts and small pockets of woodland are found throughout. Several rugby pitches with associated floodlighting are located in the south of the area.

Views back to the historic city and key landmarks are possible from Hare Lane at Piper's Ash due to its slightly elevated position. However, the majority of Area Six features only limited views back to the historic city with screening provided by built form, vegetation and topography.

On balance, Area Six is considered to have a moderate to high sensitivity to change due to the settled pattern and more intimate scale of the landscape, as well as the presence of designations and notable landscape features.

13.3.7 Historic Environment

Area Six has a fragmented historic environment and character, with a dispersed development pattern combined with diversity in building type. Visual fragmentation of the historic landscape results from being sub-divided by road and rail infrastructure and being contained within the inner ring road and the A55.

To the north of Guilden Sutton Lane, the Grade II-listed Hoole Hall and Scheduled Ancient Monument of a Roman Camp form the two main historic features.

Views exist from the elevated road at Piper's Ash into the historic city of Chester, with views of Chester Cathedral and the Lead Shot Tower possible from this location. However, the entrance to the 'historic core' of Chester through Boughton is described as one of the poorest approach routes to the city and requires the most overall enhancement.

13.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

A patchwork of field ponds exists within Area Six, with concentration to the north between Hoole Hall Hotel and the A56.

A number of woodland areas, which serve to screen various land uses, are found dotted within Area Six. These woodland areas support the strong field and hedgerow lines and prominent hedgerow trees throughout Area Six.

No statutory environmental designations are found within Area Six.

13.4 Area Six Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Six fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area Six functions well in terms in fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. The existing Green Belt boundary provided by the A41 is permanent and defensible, and in conjunction with the key urban edge is effective in checking unrestricted sprawl.

The boundary the A41 provides does help to safeguard the countryside from encroachment and prevent the coalescence of the urban area with the settlements of Littleton, Guilden Sutton and, to some degree, Mickle Trafford.

The Green Belt defined within Area Six provides an important role in preserving the historic context of Chester due to the presence of sites of archaeological and historical interest. These features are unique and critical to defining the approach and context for the historic city. Furthermore, views of the historic city from Hare Lane would constrain any potential opportunities for considering the release of land from the Green Belt in the central sub-area of Area Six.

Views of the historic city from Hare Lane would constrain any potential opportunities for considering the release of land from the Green Belt in the central area of Area Six.

Although the southern part of Area Six is generally unencumbered by site-based constraints given that the whole area strongly fulfils Green Belt purposes, no resultant land parcels are identified.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Six.

13.4.1 Constraints Map

See Appendix A9.

14 Area Seven: “Land off Long Lane”

14.1 Location

Area Seven is positioned to the north-east of the city, lying between the urban form of Upton and Newton and the A55/M53. From a total site area of 199 hectares the current total developed area consists of 9.8 hectares.

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Seven it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Well contained – approximately 51% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Hoole, Upton and Upton Heath. Strong boundary strength with durable boundaries to the north (Wervin Road), west (urban form and A41), east (A55) and south (urban area) and south (A56).
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Mickle Trafford – 1.8 miles from urban area of Chester, 0.92 miles from the eastern boundary of Area Seven.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets four Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport and recreation, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 5% developed, with residential areas at Mannings Lane and Chester Sports Club.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	No key views in to or out of the historic city. Northern part has limited openness. Southern part is largely open. Key urban edge along Long Lane. Post medieval field pattern, large number of Roman practice camps.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that strong boundaries define three edges of Area Seven, with the A41 and urban edge of Upton in the west and south-west, the A56 in the south and south east, and the M53 in the east. Wervin Road/Fox Covert Lane provides a boundary to the north, but this is less defined and does not provide a strong defensible boundary.

In terms of the current boundary of the Green Belt, the A41 is a robust, permanent boundary and features one of the most strongly defined key urban edges in the city. This boundary serves to check the unrestricted sprawl of the urban area of Chester and assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Area Seven forms an integral part of the green ‘buffer’ as set out in the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study.

A few other defensible boundaries are present within Area Seven, including Mannings Lane, Acres Lane and the track which connects Upton Grange with Acres Lane. However, these are less endurable boundaries than the A41. Development, particularly in the southern part of Area Seven, would also lessen the gap between the City and Mickle Trafford.

14.2 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site constraints within Area Seven to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Seven fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

14.2.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Seven is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. Issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

14.2.2 Statutory Designations

Area Seven features six prominent scheduled monuments. The northern section of Area Seven, stretching from Upton Grange to beyond Acres Lane, includes a large number of Roman practice camps. The layout and arrangement of these important features compromises the central and northern sections of Area Seven. Their number and siting across the northern and central parts of this area makes it difficult to see how development could acceptably take place across these areas, particularly adjacent to the urban edge of the city.

In the southern section of Area Seven, immediately north of the Chester Urban Greenway there is an extant policy designation for a Park and Ride facility. The need for this facility is being reviewed through the Council's emerging Chester Transport Strategy. Park and Ride facilities have, in principle, acceptably taken place in the Green Belt already elsewhere around Chester.

14.2.3 Land Use and Built Environment

Area Seven is defined by a mix of land uses, including residential, green open space, farmland and open countryside.

Embedded within Area Seven are a number of playing pitches associated with Chester County Sports Club and Upton-by-Chester High School, and also a designated athletics track.

The existing urban built form of Upton, Newton and Hoole provide a residential character setting in the south-west section of Area Seven. Dispersed development has taken place throughout Area Seven, including pockets of small farm buildings, cottages and pre-war housing developments linked to Mannings Lane and Warrington Road. This results in the land south of Mannings Lane taking on a different character to that north of Mannings Lane and occupying the rest of Area Seven.

The built form at Upton Heath also alters the perception of the Green Belt in the north-west corner of Area Seven and this recent residential development does weaken the boundary of the Green Belt in this location.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that the north-eastern urban fringe of the city of Chester is one of the most defined across the city, and identifies it as a 'key urban edge'. The western boundary of Area Seven is directly

adjacent to this ‘key urban edge’ and release of land from the Green Belt within Area Seven would have a major impact on this ‘key urban edge’. The study goes on to highlight that it is at these key urban edges where there is a distinct change between countryside and the city. There is also a sense of containment which could be described as the ‘city limits’. It is clear that the re-definition of the Green Belt boundary in Area Seven would significantly compromise this key urban edge and disrupt the sense of separation between city and open countryside.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identified and appraised ‘Site 18’ within its land capacity analysis. ‘Site 18’ is situated in the north-west corner of Area Seven, adjacent to the residential suburb of Upton Heath. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that this land was “*Medieval Heathland and unlikely to be of great importance*”, and that “*a desk-top evaluation before development*” should be carried out (Chester: The Future of an Historic City, Appendix E).

14.2.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

A number of existing roads intersect the area including Acres Lane, Fox Covert Lane, Mannings Lane, and Warrington Lane. Road routes dominate the length of both the north and south boundaries of Area Seven, but there are only a few through-routes due to the quality of the minor roads.

The A56 Warrington Road is a main radial route into the city of Chester and forms the south-eastern boundary to Area Seven. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study remarks that the approach to the city from the east along the A56 does not give the impression of travelling along a rural approach road, and that this route has a more urban character which is defined by buildings and new tree planting; and that the combination of the railway line and the road network serves to lessen the perspective of an attractive rural approach to the city.

The Chester Urban Greenway is a feature in the south-eastern section of Area Seven and provides clear demarcation of the land cutting across Warrington Road (A56), the A41 and the A55.

Pedestrian routes are limited to the southern section of Area Seven, and are not abundant for a location which features open green spaces and stretches of open countryside. A pedestrian route links the built urban form in Newton and Hoole with Upton Grange.

14.2.5 Topography

The topography of Area Seven is gently sloping, characterised by relatively small-medium scale regular fields currently being used for agricultural purposes. The land rises as it extends away from the built form, and the A55/M53 sits in an elevated position above Area Seven.

14.2.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Seven is a gently sloping landscape containing small-medium scale regular fields bound by hedgerows. Hedgerow trees are common and there are occasional pockets of trees and shelter belts. Field ponds of varying size are relatively common features throughout the Area. Occasionally smaller fields have been

joined together to make larger fields and the hedgerow trees retained as isolated trees in the fields.

Area Seven is bisected by minor roads and the National Cycle Route 5 which follows the route of the disused railway line. The M53 motorway forms the eastern boundary noticeably reducing tranquillity. Views into Area Seven are possible from the motorway; however longer distance views across the landscape are restricted by the strong hedgerows and associated mature trees.

Several playing fields are located in the south and Acresfield Primary School and its associated grounds are located in the north. Several Scheduled Monuments are featured throughout the northern section of Area Seven.

Small clusters and isolated residential properties are associated both with the minor roads within the site and, with the exception of the motorway, the roads bounding the site.

There are no direct views of the historic core, or the key landmarks within the city. The flat topography of the area and the contained nature of the views lead to the Water Tower off Long Lane becoming a notable feature of the landscape. It is interesting to note that the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study highlights that the southern section of Area Seven include “*views across pleasant rural scenery and glimpses of urban fringe*”.

On balance, Area Seven is considered to have a moderate to high sensitivity due to the more intimate scale of the landscape, as well as the presence of several designations and notable landscape features.

14.2.7 Historic Environment

The north/north-western sections of Area Seven feature a significant cluster of Roman practice campsites, with the majority defined as Scheduled Monuments. This cluster, plus the strongly defined regular field pattern extending between Upton Grange and Upton Heath, serves to create a strong historic landscape.

Area Seven has a relatively strong functional relationship with the typical landscape of the Backford-Christleton Character Area. The lowland ridge is dominated by the remains of a strongly agricultural past; field systems dating from the post medieval era overlay the majority of the parcel. To the east, field systems and boundaries remain from an earlier medieval field system, and to the west, a very regular field system endures from enclosure of Upton Heath in the nineteenth century.

14.2.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

A collection of field ponds are featured within Area Seven, including a large cluster running in a linear pattern immediately south of Wervin Road to beyond the junction of Acres Lane and Fox Covert Lane.

It is understood that the field ponds within Area Seven are habited by great crested newts further on-site investigation is required to confirm this, with appropriate mitigation proposed should this be the case and any development is forthcoming.

No statutory environmental designations are found within Area Seven.

14.3 Area Seven Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Seven fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area Seven performs very well in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt. The existing boundary provided by the A41 and the 'key urban edge' of the city at Long Lane is amongst the strongest boundaries to the Green Belt in Chester. It is permanent and defensible and any revision to the boundary would appear unjustified.

The boundary of the Green Belt is effective in checking unrestricted sprawl, and safeguards the countryside from encroachment.

The current boundary also ensures that the 'key urban edge' and the setting of the 'city limits' is maintained, and that the green 'buffer' provided by the land in Area Seven is respected. This in turn ensures that the openness, and recreation and amenity value of Area Seven is secured for the long term.

Whilst no individual feature in its own right would preclude land from being released from the Green Belt, the combination of how well Area Seven meets the purposes of Green Belt; plus the range of constraints and the value assigned to local landscape and historic environment features serves to limit the prospect of revising Green Belt boundaries within Area Seven.

The release of Green Belt land in Area Seven would also draw development eastwards from the city edge and reduce the gap between Chester and the village of Mickle Trafford.

Reflecting on the fact that Area Seven is highly effective in terms of meeting the purposes of Green Belt, and the wide range of site-based constraints listed above, it has been determined that there are no suitable land parcels available within Area Seven which could potentially be appropriate and justifiable for release from the Green Belt.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Seven.

14.3.1 Constraints Map

See Appendix A10.

15 Area Eight: “Land at Liverpool Road”

15.1 Site Overview

Area Eight is positioned to the north, lying immediately north of the urban form of Upton and bounded by Caughall Road to the east, the Shropshire Union Canal to the west. From a total site area of 243 hectares the current total developed area consists of 143.9 hectares.

15.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Eight it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Partially contained – approximately 45% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Upton and Upton Heath.
	Moderate boundary strength with durable boundaries to the south (urban area) and west (topographical features). Weaker boundaries to the north and east.
to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Backford – less than 1 mile from the edge of the existing built form Dale Camp barracks.
to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets five Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport and recreation, retaining landscapes, improving damaged and derelict land, visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 59% developed, with the Chester Zoo, Dale Camp barracks and Countess of Chester Health Park.
to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Views of Cathedral and Town Hall from Countess of Chester Health Park. Key urban edge to west of Countess of Chester Health Park. Area predominantly developed, limited openness north of Health Park and at Moston. Historic landscape has become fragmented.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that the current Green Belt boundary at the urban edge in Upton is weakly defined and at present is not effective in checking unrestricted urban sprawl. On this basis it does not assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Identifying land parcels which would cause least harm to the purposes of the Green Belt could have a positive impact in terms of defining new, more permanent and durable boundaries.

A number of other permanent boundaries are present within Area Eight including, Caughall Road to the east; the A41 Moston Road and A5116 Liverpool Road in the centre; and the Chester-Liverpool railway line to the west. The built development envelopes of the Dale Camp barracks and Chester Zoo also provide boundaries to the north. The boundary provided by the western edge of the Countess of Chester Health Park (CoCHP) is defined by the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study as one of the ‘key urban edges’ which form a distinctive part of Chester’s urban form and the relationship these edges have with the

countryside are identified as critical environmental capital. This are an important aspect of Chester's setting in Green Belt terms. A further key edge exists to the edge of the built up area of Blacon. Together these frame a countryside corridor penetrating the city identified in the study, another important contributory feature in defining the setting and special character of the City.

There are clearly particular locations within Area Eight that make a significant contribution to the setting and special character of the city. Taking Area Eight as a whole, however, its dispersed land use pattern and prominent built development reduces it role in this respect. This opens up the possibility of identifying candidate land parcels for release from the Green Belt without harm to this Green Belt purpose.

Major developments of Dale Camp barracks and Chester Zoo serve to disrupt the openness of the current extent of the Green Belt, as does the CoCHP. Even though these major development sites fall within the Green Belt, their overall effect is to give parts of the Green Belt in Area Eight an urban character and the sense that development has already progressed beyond the existing Green Belt boundary and encroached on the countryside. It is noteworthy, however, that these major developments were consciously included in the Green Belt when it was originally established and clearly are more in character with the urban edge of Chester.

Further development to the northern extreme of Area Eight would constitute unchecked urban sprawl. Even though there is the linear permanent boundary of the Shropshire Union Canal, development in this location would compromise the open countryside. Furthermore, identifying land that could be considered for release from the Green Belt in the northern section of Area Eight would have a detrimental impact on the strategic gap between Chester and Ellesmere Port and also the gap between Chester and the village of Backford.

15.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site constraints within Area Eight to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Eight fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

15.3.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Eight is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints.

The western edge of Area Eight does border the Shropshire Union Canal corridor, which features as an area of Flood Risk Zone 3a. Although of not direct significance, any development proposals in the western section of Area Eight would need to be aware of this issue.

Issues linked to the management of surface water drainage would remain and should any land be released from the Green Belt and allocated for development through the Local Plan then proposals would need to mitigate this issue.

15.3.2 Statutory Designations

There are a number of listed buildings dotted throughout Area Eight, some found within Chester Zoo and some found within the Countess of Chester Health Park. The listed buildings are managed and mitigated as part of the built envelope of these existing development sites. Views of the Tower within the CoCHP are important and should be maintained and protected.

There are a number of features of local importance and “Local Wildlife Sites” within Area Eight, including a prominent strip to the north of the urban edge at Upton.

Area Eight features a patchwork of woodland, with a particular focus around the Dale Camp barracks and along the route of the A5116/A41.

15.3.3 Land use and Built Environment

According to the Stage One Green Belt Study over 59% of Area Eight is already developed. The combination of three strategic development sites, the existing urban area, a network of road and rail infrastructure, and an electricity pylon route gives rise to the perspective that Area Eight is part of the urban area of the city.

Area Eight is dominated by Chester Zoo, a significant employer within the local authority area; Dale Camp barracks, home to the 1st Battalion the Royal Welsh; and the CoCHP, a mixed use development area featuring a hospital, health park and recent residential development. The three major developments divide up the Green Belt land which lies within Area Eight. The A5116, the A41 and the Chester-Liverpool railway line serve to further segment Area Eight into defined sub-areas.

Whilst Area Eight does have a strong built development presence there are also areas of largely undeveloped land.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study identified and appraised ‘Site 17’ and ‘Site 10’ within its land capacity analysis both of which feature within Area Eight.

‘Site 17’ is situated above the north-east corner of the residential suburb of Upton Heath. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that this land was “*Medieval Heathland and unlikely to be of great importance*”, and that “*a desk-top evaluation before development*” should be carried out (Appendix E).

‘Site 10’ is situated to the north of the Countess of Chester Health Park. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study concluded that “*Nothing is known of this site*” and that “*a desk-top evaluation before development*” should be carried out (Appendix E).

15.3.4 Access/ Connectivity/Accessibility

The level of accessibility in Area Eight is good. Two major routes, the A5116 (Liverpool Road) and the A41 (Moston Road) provide dominant north-south radial routes and facilitate access to the city centre and out towards Ellesmere Port and onwards to Liverpool.

Opportunities to move west-to-east across Area Eight are somewhat limited. Pedestrian routes are limited with a route connecting to residential area of Upton with the Dale Camp barracks; and another route connecting Upton with Mollington Grange, crossing the railway line, the Shropshire Union Canal and circling back through the northern edge of the CoCHP.

The Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Transport Plan: Integrated Transport Strategy (2011 – 2026) notes that the A5116 is a congestion hotspot within the city, which is amplified during holidays and bank holidays with people accessing Chester Zoo.

Should any land be identified for release from the Green Belt it would be prudent to undertake further transport modelling to give an insight into the impact on the local network, especially on the A5116 and Moston junction.

15.3.5 Topography

The land in Area Eight is relatively flat with patterns of undulating fields present within the central section of the Area, and to the north beyond Dale Camp barracks and Chester Zoo. The topography of the land drops as you move from east to west heading towards the Shropshire Union Canal corridor.

15.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Eight is a broad plateau of land sloping quite steeply to the west and north towards the Shropshire Union Canal. There are three large areas of existing development within Area Eight – Chester Zoo in the north east, The Dale Barracks in the north-west and the Countess of Chester Health Park in the south. Other development within the area includes a Park and Ride facility next to Chester Zoo, a petrol station and several residential properties in the north of the area. The Chester-Liverpool railway line and a line of pylons pass through the area.

Between the areas of development the land cover is predominantly medium-scale arable fields bound by hedgerows. Field ponds are present in several of the fields in the north of the area. There is good tree cover within the area with pockets of woodland and structure planting associated with the existing development.

The tree cover reduces visibility towards the historic core of the city. However, views of Chester Cathedral are possible from the Countess of Chester Health Park.

On balance, despite the presence of designations, Area Eight is considered to have a low sensitivity to change due to the prominence and scale of existing development within the area.

15.3.7 Historic Environment

The once rural setting of Area Eight has become a backdrop for strategic developments. The expansion of residential areas and the Countess of Chester Health Park, Dale Camp barracks and Chester Zoo have fragmented the historic environment.

Few of the original rural features remain. For example, the Grade II-listed Countess of Chester Hospital block, the Grade II-listed Countess of Chester Hospital church and the Grade II-listed Bache Hall are now embedded within the larger development footprint of the site. Similarly, the Grade II listed Oakfield House and Oakfield stables now feature as part of the overall Chester Zoo site.

Key views exist from the CoCHP to the Cathedral Tower and spires within the historic core. These views enhance the historic legibility of this highly developed plot. The tower at the CoCHP is also visible from St Martin's Way within the centre of the city.

As Liverpool Road re-enters the city it becomes a Conservation Area valued for its Victoria architecture. Whilst infill developments have diluted the character of the Conservation area, it remains an important gateway into and out of the city centre.

15.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Area Eight includes a patchwork of woodland and locally important green spaces, prominent hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees in central and northern sections. Area Eight includes Moston Community Nature Park and the woodland areas surrounding Dale Camp barracks are mature and form an important component part of screening and breaking up the 'urban' look to the northern edge of the barracks.

Both Chester Zoo and the CoCHP feature tree planting and screening to minimise their impact, but these green areas are not deemed to be of significant ecological or biological value.

Land to the west of the CoCHP is identified for a country park. This will enhance the existing environmental corridor; will complement the green corridor which will be designated alongside the Shropshire Union Canal and serves to reinforce that location as a 'key urban edge' to the city.

15.4 Area Eight Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Eight fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that sections of Area Eight continue to fulfil a number of the purposes of Green Belt. The existing boundary to the south-west of Area Eight near the CoCHP and the Shropshire Union Canal corridor is one of the strongest in the city and is defined as a 'key urban edge'.

However, the existing northern boundary at the urban fringe of Upton and Upton Heath performs less well and the boundary is weak and not permanent or durable. At present this weak boundary, in conjunction with the dispersed development pattern to the north do not appear to check unrestricted sprawl, nor do they assist in safeguarding the open countryside. It is concluded that a revision to the Green Belt boundary could create a more permanent and defensible boundary which would help the land within Area Eight to better fulfil the purposes of Green Belt.

Area Eight is dominated by two large, developed sites which sit within the existing Green Belt, albeit that they are more open in character than the urban edge of Upton.

Notwithstanding this there are locations within Area Eight where the existing Green Belt provides views back to the historic core and provides landscape value and areas for recreation amenity. A revised boundary would help ensure these are protected for the long term. At present, because of the weak boundary these features are under threat due to the prospect of urban sprawl.

Land at the western border of Area Eight must take account of the Flood Risk Zones identified in conjunction with the Shropshire Union Canal and the fact that the canal corridor has been identified as a strategic green infrastructure route in the recent Ellesmere Port and Chester Green Infrastructure Links Action Plan (2012).

Redevelopment of land within the CoCHP is currently being implemented, with residential development intensifying the northern section of the site, further contributing to an increasingly urbanised feel in this part of Area Eight.

Views back to the historic city of Chester (Cathedral and Town Hall) are possible within the CoCHP and any new development would need to respect these uninterrupted views. Elsewhere in Area Eight there are no significant or important views in to or out of the city given topography and existing barriers.

Without the definition of a new Green Belt boundary there is the potential that unchecked sprawl could impact on the potential coalescence of Chester with the village of Backford, and on the strategic gap between Chester and Ellesmere Port.

Reflecting on the fact that only certain sections of Area Eight are effective in the extent to which they fulfil the purposes of Green Belt, and the few site-based constraints listed above, it has been determined that there are two suitable land parcels available within Area Eight which could be considered for release from the Green Belt. These land parcels are considered in more detail below.

Constraints Map

See Appendix A11 and A12.

15.5 Justification for Resultant Land Parcels

This section provides the justification for why the resultant land parcel represents land which could be considered for release from the Green Belt. The justification re-appraises the land parcel against the NPPF purposes of Green Belt, and the steps that would be necessary to allow for the Green Belt boundary to be re-defined around this new land parcel.

N.B. It should be noted that at this stage this does not seek to justify allocation of this land, but merely identifies the rationale should the emerging Local Plan seek to amend the Green Belt boundary. It is advocated that further analysis is carried out to consider the resultant land parcel(s) against the Council's other policy, sustainable development and place-making principles.

Land Parcel 8A – Land between Liverpool Road and Moston Road

Defining the New Green Belt Boundary

The land parcel identified as a potential option to be released from the Green Belt is located between the urban area of Upton, the A5116 Liverpool Road and the A41 Moston Road. The release of this land would serve to enhance and strengthen the current boundary of the Green Belt. The current boundary is fragmented due to the irregular built form of Upton and the more recent residential development of Upton Heath.

The new Green Belt boundary would be defined by the A41 Moston Road to the east and the A5116 Liverpool Road to the west. The inter-section of these roads would form the northern boundary. The road and road junction serves as a permanent and defensible boundary which can endure of the long term. Highways improvements to the roundabout on the A41 facilitate access to the land parcel and the parcel also features a prominent public footpath providing connectivity back to the residential area of Upton.

The land parcel is not constrained by any significant site-based constraints. The topography means that no views of the historic city area possible from this land parcel and the land does not preserve the setting or special character of the historic city of Chester.

Evaluating the Potential Newly Defined Green Belt Boundary

The following assessment is made on the basis that Land Parcel 8A is removed from the Green Belt. This allows the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary to be tested against the purposes as defined within the NPPF, and to ensure that the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary is appropriate, defensible and likely to be permanent.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The new Green Belt would create a permanent defensible boundary to the west, east and north formed by the inter-section of the A5116 and the A41. The southern boundary would have a direct functional relationship with the existing urban area of Upton.</p> <p>The newly defined Green Belt boundary creates a well-defined, defensible barrier which effectively places a check on the irregular and unconstrained urban sprawl of the Upton neighbourhood.</p>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	<p>The location of development sites to the north of Area Eight means that newly defined Green Belt would not reduce the gap between the existing urban areas of Chester and the settlement of Backford. The new boundary would not reduce the strategic gap to Ellesmere Port.</p> <p>The compact nature of the city will be strengthened for the long term through the implementation of a newly defined, permanent and durable Green Belt boundary.</p>
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>The newly defined Green Belt does not extend beyond the strategic development sites of the Dale Camp barracks or the Chester Zoo and so would not result in encroachment on the countryside.</p> <p>The land parcel would result in the loss of some open green space within the city but appropriate mitigation could manage this impact.</p>

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	The newly defined Green Belt would not impact on the setting or special character of the historic town.. The re-defined boundary could positively contribute to the compact nature of the city by consolidating disparate land uses.
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	See Section 7.2

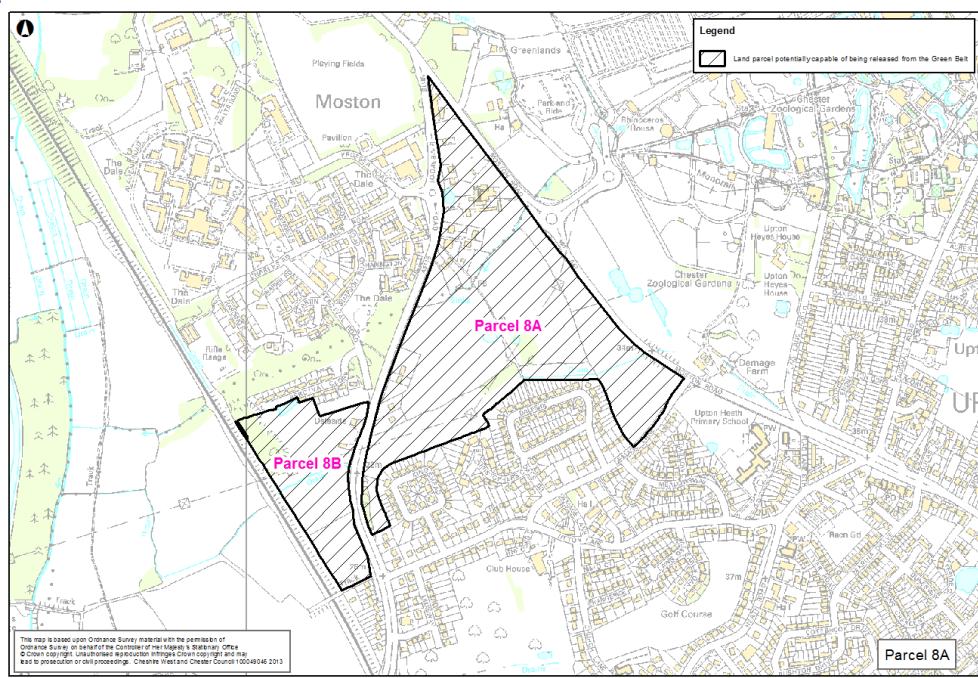
Conclusion

The land parcel provides an opportunity to provide permanent and defensible boundaries that will restrict urban sprawl, prevent encroachment, and protect the setting and special character of the city. The land parcel is not subject to any significant site-based constraints and the release of this land from within the Green Belt would serve to bring some coherence to the irregular and unconstrained urban development patterns in Upton.

This land parcel is therefore indicatively identified for development.

15.5.1 Resultant Land Parcel Map

Land Parcel 8A – Land between Liverpool Road and Moston Road



Land Parcel 8B – Land to the South of Dale Camp Barracks

Defining the New Green Belt Boundary

The land parcel identified as a potential option to be released from the Green Belt is located to the south of the Dale Camp barracks, the Chester-Liverpool railway line and the existing urban area of Upton.

The new Green Belt boundary would be defined by the Chester-Liverpool railway line to the west, the Dale Camp barracks to the north and the A5116 Liverpool Road to the east. The southern boundary has a direct functional relationship with the urban form of Upton. These new Green Belt boundaries would be defensible and permanent.

The new Green Belt boundary would offer the opportunity to overcome the dispersed land use patterns experienced within this section of Area Eight and contribute to a more coherent sense of place for this part of the urban area of Chester. It would also enhance and strengthen the Green Belt boundary edges, solving the irregular built form of Upton and the fragmented land use patterns.

The land parcel does feature an element of undulating topography, and also features the route of the electricity pylons, which are factors that will impact on how the site could be developed. It is also likely that highways improvements to the A5116 would be required to facilitate access.

Evaluating the Potential Newly Defined Green Belt Boundary

The following assessment is made on the basis that Land Parcel 8B is removed from the Green Belt. This allows the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary to be tested against the purposes as defined within the NPPF, and to ensure that the ‘new’ Green Belt boundary is appropriate, defensible and likely to be permanent.

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The new north, west and east boundaries of the Green Belt will be permanent and defensible.</p> <p>The southern boundary of the newly defined Green Belt has a direct functional relationship with the existing urban area of Upton.</p> <p>The newly defined Green Belt boundary creates a well-defined, defensible barrier which effectively places a check on the irregular and unconstrained urban sprawl of the Upton neighbourhood, whilst better strengthening the compact nature of the Chester urban area.</p>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	<p>The newly defined Green Belt would not impact on the merger of neighbouring settlement of Backford nor reduce the strategic gap to Ellesmere Port. The Dale Camp barracks still extends beyond the proposed new boundary.</p> <p>The newly defined durable Green Belt boundary would bring coherence to the fragmented nature of the irregular built form.</p>
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>The newly defined Green Belt would assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The defensible boundaries which the road and rail infrastructure create, ensures that the new boundary prevents encroachment.</p> <p>The newly defined Green Belt does not extend up to the Dale Camp barracks site and so does not materially encroach on the countryside.</p>

To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	The new boundary will also offer a better-defined edge to the urban area whilst strengthening the compact nature of the city.
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.	See Section 7.2

Conclusion

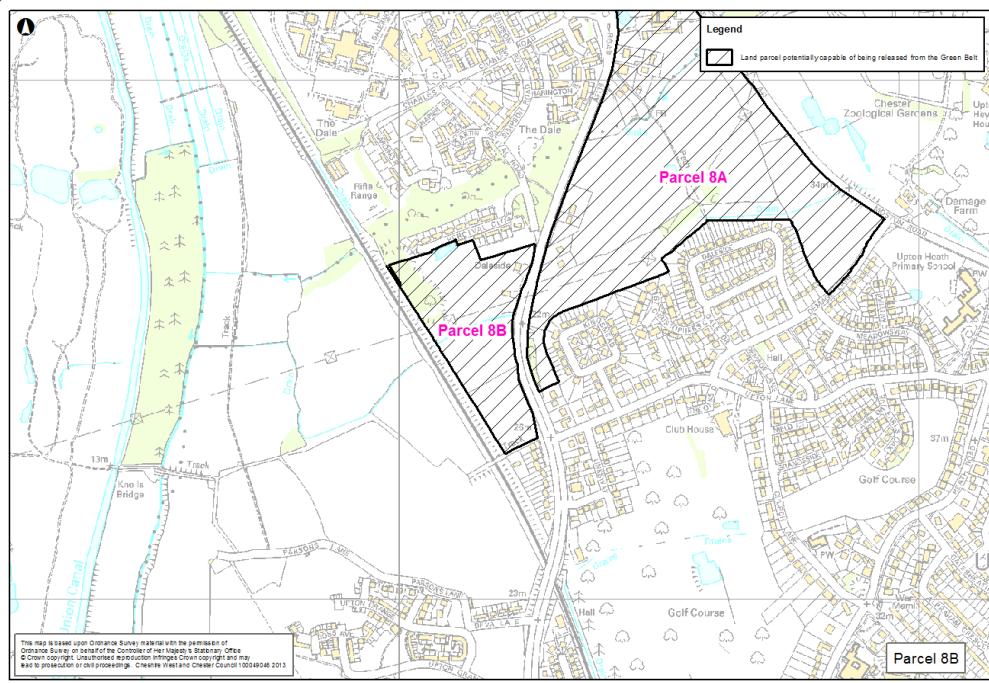
The newly defined boundary would ensure the Green Belt here strongly fulfilled its purposes. The land parcel provides an opportunity to provide coherence to the fragmented land use patterns in this section of Area Eight and also delivers permanent and defensible boundaries that will restrict urban sprawl, prevent encroachment, and preserve the setting and special character of the city.

The land parcel is not subject to any significant site-based constraints although some matters that will need to be addressed through any development proposals.

This land parcel is therefore indicatively identified for development.

15.5.2 Resultant Land Parcel Map

Land Parcel 8B- Land to the south of Dale Camp Barracks



16 Area Nine: “Shropshire Union Canal Northern Corridor”

16.1 Location

Area Nine is positioned to the north west of the urban area of Chester, adjoining the urban area of Abbot's Mead to the south, Blacon to the south west and curving up and over Area Eight to connect with Chester Zoo to the north. From a total site area of 304 hectares, the current total developed area consists of 6.9 hectares.

16.2 Green Belt

The Council's Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Nine it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Not contained – approximately 14% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Upton Heath, Dale Camp barracks and CoCHP. Weak boundary strength with limited hard features along the boundary and based on topographical features and edges of major development sites.
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Backford – 0.4 miles from build development, and 0.24 miles from edge of Area Nine.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets five Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sports and recreation, retaining landscapes, improving damaged and derelict land, and visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 3% developed, with Mollington Grange business park.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Clear view of Cathedral, Town Hall from Parkgate Road. Area visible from the city walls and St.Martins Way. Key urban edge and green corridor into the city with open countryside to north of Blacon. Mix of field systems (largely late medieval). Character influenced by canal.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

The Shropshire Union Canal corridor and Parkgate Road serves to check unrestricted sprawl and preserve the open countryside and prominent green corridor entering the city – however, these features do not act as the Green Belt boundary. A stronger boundary exists to the south, adjacent to the existing built form. The notion of releasing land from within the Green Belt could therefore provide an opportunity to create a more permanent and more defensible series of Green Belt boundaries.

What is perhaps more important is the value and nature of the Green Belt land in Area Nine. It is this value which prevents the land being subject to unrestricted sprawl and is almost self-regulating. The combination of the Shropshire Union Canal corridor, the strategic open spaces, woodland areas, green corridor running along Parkgate Road; and indeed the key urban edges of the CoCHP and Blacon

which mean that Area Nine is able to fulfil almost all of the Green Belt purposes and is one of the most effective areas of Green Belt in the city.

The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that 'key urban edges' are to be found on the western border of the CoCHP and on the eastern border of Blacon. The study notes that these key urban edges where the distinct change between countryside and city is noticeable and where there is a sense of containment which could be described as the 'city limits'. The study goes on to point out that Parkgate Road has an almost direct connection to the M56 and passes through some of the most attractive countryside in the city's landscape setting; whilst also providing views across to the canal corridor.

Sections to the north and north-west of Area Nine that are greater in distance from the city centre have little functional relationship with the existing urban area. Release of land from the Green Belt in these locations would represent unchecked sprawl and would not safeguard the countryside from encroachment.

Green Belt land in Area Nine also offers considerable access to open countryside and amenity features via the Shropshire Union Canal footpath, Sustrans Cycleway, outdoor sport recreation areas, retained and enhanced landscapes and the provision of visual amenity and biodiversity. These features are vital for the city and Area Nine is one of only a few locations where these assets can be accessed.

Release of land from the Green Belt to the east of the A540 and north of the canal would appear to contribute towards encroachment on the countryside, would reduce the strategic gap between Chester urban area and the village of Backford, and could jeopardise the setting and historic, preserved character of the city of Chester.

16.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site constraints within Area Nine to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Nine fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

16.3.1 Flood Risk

Area Nine is dominated by the Shropshire Union Canal and Finchet's Gutter /Backford Brook. An area designated in the West Cheshire SFRA (2008) as Flood Risk Zone 3a forms a corridor which follows the course of both the canal and the brooks. Flood risk therefore presents a potentially significant constraint to the potential release of land from the Green Belt.

Flood Zone 3a represents an area with a high probability of flooding. Although the designation of Flood Zone 3a does not act to restrict development, it would be contrary to sustainable development policies to allocate large plots within Flood Risk Areas.

16.3.2 Statutory Designations

Area Nine is not constrained by any statutory constraints; however the Shropshire Union Canal corridor, which was recognised within the Local Plan as an Area of

Nature Conservation Value with significant conservation value, has become a locally important Local Wildlife Site.

16.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

Area Nine is predominantly undeveloped in nature, reflecting the inherent value and prominence of the natural environment. Minor development comprises residential dwellings to the south and near Mollington Grange Business Park to the east.

The north western boundary of the parcel adjoins the village of Mollington, and the northern area neighbours the village of Backford. The town of Ellesmere Port exists 6.5km to the north-east of the parcel. The proximity of Chester Zoo, The Dale Camp barracks and CoCHP give the eastern boundary edges of Area Nine a more urban context.

Area Nine is intersected by a Chester-Liverpool railway line and two electricity transmission lines which traverse the Area to connect to the sub-station at the western boundary.

16.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Two main roads intersect Area Nine in the north-east and south-west. The A41 dissects the north-east portion of Area Nine, continuing through Area Eight and connecting with the urban area of Chester at Upton. The A540 cuts through the south-west section and connects with the urban area of Chester at the Blacon roundabout.

As with the majority of radial routes into the city, there are constraints linked to capacity at peak times and the resultant disruption to journey times and decreases in air quality.

Internal access within Area Nine is very constrained, with only limited west to east connections between existing residential areas to the south of the Area.

The Sustrans cycle path and public footpath along the canal towpath indicates that pedestrian accessibility across the site is fairly good. This is complemented by Area Nine providing numerous opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, landscape appreciation and visual amenity.

16.3.5 Topography

Area Nine features prominent undulating hills and gently rolling hillocks which descend to the canal and brook.

Following the course of the Shropshire Union Canal, this undulating section of Area Nine is very open and undeveloped in nature.

16.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Nine follows the relatively well wooded valley along which the Shropshire Union Canal runs. The Mollington Grange Golf Course occupies a large area of land in the west of the area. The golf course with its closely own and highly

maintained grass and large water bodies forms a very distinctive land use compares to the surrounding agricultural fields.

There are several residential properties located along Parkgate Road within Area Nine. A small substation is located in towards the south of the area with two lines of pylons extending north and east from this location. The Chester-Liverpool railway line passes through the area crossing the Shropshire Union Canal on a viaduct.

Recreational usage of the area is high with the National Cycle Route 56 and the Canal Towpath Trail recreational route following the canal towpath, the canal itself, a Public Right of Way footpath link to Upton across the valley, National Cycle Route 5 in the north of the area and the golf course. Otherwise access to the area is limited to Parkgate Road which passes through the south of the area and the A41, Liverpool Road which passes through the north of the area.

View of Chester Cathedral and Chester Town Hall are possible from Parkgate Road and conversely the area is visible from St Martin's Way and the City Walls.

On balance, Area Nine is considered to have a moderate to high sensitivity due to the visibility of the site and the more intimate scale of the landscape, as well as the presence of several designations.

16.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment of Area Nine is influenced by undulating, gently rolling hillocks which are cut by the Deva Spillway. The Spillway was exploited as a suitable route for the Shropshire Union Canal. Although Area Nine has limited functional relationship with the Backford-Christleton Character Area, the presence of the canal and brook has largely dominated the land.

Area Nine comprises a mix of field systems originating from various dates, although largely of late medieval roots. Field systems are supported by features such as ridge and furrow and other earthworks.

A range of various quality listed buildings and structures are dispersed across Area Nine. Mollington Grange, a Grade II listed 16th century farmhouse, and the Railway Viaduct over the Shropshire Union Canal dated 1839 by Geo Stephenson and John Dixon are two significant features of historic importance. A 19th Century Grade II listed Footpath Guidepost near the substation cottages and Icehouse, a Grade II listed late eighteenth century icehouse form other listed features of historic importance.

External and internal views form a significant feature of any historic environment. The historic legibility of the Green Belt parcel is reinforced by clear views from Parkgate Road along the Canal Valley to Chester Cathedral and Chester Town Hall.

16.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Area Nine is dominated by features of ecological and environmental importance, with the valley becoming a wildlife corridor with significant conservation value.

Major corridors of open space and areas of high landscape value which are strategically important to the city pass through Area Nine.

There are a series of Local Wildlife Sites identified within the area, including Knolls Bridge Fields/ Shropshire Union Canal Tow Path, Little Stanney to Waverton/ Shropshire Union Canal and Collinge Wood. Canal Woods, which were originally recognised as a Site of Biological Interest, have been recognised as a Local wildlife site a result of the Cheshire West and Chester review of SBI/SNCV.

Area Nine also features Mollington Golf Course which provides openness, recreation and amenity value.

16.4 Area Nine Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Nine fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area Nine performs very well in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt. Whilst the boundaries of the Green Belt in Area Nine are only relatively weak – with the boundary in the east area only defined by the built development of the CoCHP and Dale Camp barracks, and the boundary to the west defined by the urban area of Blacon, it is the value and importance of the Green Belt land within Area Nine which ensures that it fulfils its purpose and becomes a critical part of the Green Belt in Chester.

This value and importance of the Green Belt land is strengthened by the influence of two 'key edges' identified within the Chester: Future of an Historic City Report 1994; one to the west of Area Nine which follows the urban boundary of Blacon, and one to east which borders the rear of the Countess of Chester Health Park. These boundaries should be maintained and in turn would serve to ensure that the Green Belt boundary is maintained within Area Nine and the interrelated 'setting' between the urban area of Chester and the rural hinterland is maintained. Area Nine also provides a countryside corridor penetrating the City, underlining further still the importance this area in safeguarding the setting and special character of the City.

Therefore, the current Green Belt within Area Nine is effective in checking unrestricted sprawl and also in terms of assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Green Belt land also provides a vital role in terms of preserving the setting and special character of the historic city. This occurs in spite of the relative weak boundaries and is more a function of the topography, landscape characteristics, environmental designations and flood risk classifications.

The impact of the Shropshire Union Canal corridor, Finchet's Gutter /Backford Brook watercourse, and the Cheshire-Liverpool railway line serves to segment Area Nine with those sections to the north and north-west having little functional relationship with the urban area and thus remain largely undeveloped. The undisturbed character provides for the historic mix of field system and incidences of ridge and furrow. The release of land from the Green Belt in these sections would represent unrestricted sprawl and would compromise the strategic gap to Ellesmere Port and to the more immediate gap to the village of Backford.

The uneven topography, limited access and strategic views back into the historic city serve to further constrain land in terms of it being appropriate and justifiable for release from the Green Belt.

Reflecting on the fact that Area Nine is highly effective in terms of meeting the purposes of Green Belt, and the wide range of site-based constraints listed above, it has been determined that there are no suitable land parcels available within Area Nine which could potentially be appropriate and justifiable to release from the Green Belt.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Nine.

16.4.1 Constraints Map

See Appendix A13.

17 Area Ten: “Land North of Blacon”

17.1 Location

Area Ten is positioned to the north west of the urban area of Chester, adjacent to the area of Blacon. From a total site area of 229 hectares, the current total developed area consists of 12.6 hectares.

17.2 Green Belt

The Council’s Stage One work sought to identify to what extent each Area was fulfilling the purposes of Green Belt. For Area Ten it concluded:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Partially contained – approximately 34% adjoining the urban area of Chester at Blacon.
	Strong boundary to the south and east (urban area and Parkgate Road), weaker to the north and west with hedgerows and field boundaries.
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Nearest settlement is Saughall – 1.02 miles from urban area.
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Meets four Green Belt opportunities (access, outdoor sport and recreation, retaining landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity). Approximately 6% developed, with linear development along Parkgate Road and Saughall Road.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	Views of Cathedral and Town Hall from Parkgate Road. Area to north of Parkgate Road visible from city at St.Martins Way
	Predominantly open countryside beyond urban edge at Blacon. Clear views across open countryside and Welsh border.
	Medieval field systems identified as one of oldest and rarest in Cheshire.

Source: Cheshire West and Chester

Further analysis reveals that the existing Green Belt boundary at the urban edge of Blacon provides a relatively strong boundary and is effective in ensuring that the Green Belt can fulfil the purposes of checking unrestricted sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Beyond the existing Green Belt boundary at Blacon there are very few features within Area Ten which could act as a new permanent boundary. A number of tracks and paths traverse Area Ten, but none which would represent a durable defensible boundary that would allow for a revision to the Green Belt boundary to the north of Blacon.

The northern, built up limits of Blacon is identified as a ‘key urban edge’ as defined by the Chester: The Future of an Historic City study – constituting a distinct change between the City and the countryside. This is, even on its own, considered decisive in rendering it inappropriate to release land from the Green Belt in this area. A breach of this key urban edge would constitute urban sprawl, encroachment of the countryside and impact adversely on the setting and special

character of Chester. It would also reduce the gap between Chester and the nearby villages of Saughall and Mollington.

The south eastern part of Area Eight also forms an integral part of a countryside corridor penetrating the City as identified in the Chester study. This corridor follows the routes of the A540 Parkgate Road and Shropshire Union Canal.

To the west, Area Ten features the Chester Urban Greenway which could, arguably act, in part, as a new boundary however this would not fully contain a northerly extension of the urban area, leave a weak boundary to the west adjacent to the borough (and national) boundary.

Furthermore, this section of Area Ten has significant landscape value in the form of the woodland ridge. As such, the release of land to the west of Area Ten in conjunction within the Chester Urban Greenway is not appropriate or justifiable.

Area Ten also provides opportunities for access to open space via various Public Rights of Way and cycle paths, outdoor sport recreation, retained and enhanced landscapes and the provision of visual amenity and biodiversity.

17.3 Site Constraints

This section provides an analytical summary of the site constraints within Area Ten to supplement the assessment of the extent to which Area Ten fulfils the purposes of Green Belt.

17.3.1 Flood Risk

The West Cheshire SFRA (2008) reveals that Area Ten is situated within Flood Risk Zone 1. The Area is therefore unencumbered by flood risk constraints. An isolated area of Flood Zone 2 forms a buffer which follows the boundary to the western edge of Area Ten.

17.3.2 Statutory Designations

Area Ten is not significantly constrained by any statutory designations. Listed Buildings can be found within Crabwell Manor Hotel and Poplars Farm.

17.3.3 Land Use and Built Environment

Area Ten is predominantly rural and open in nature; dispersed residential cottages and isolated farms are the dominant land use type in the west, whilst Crabwell Manor Hotel and Mollington Banastre Hotel are located in the east. A small number of linear residential developments also exist along Saughall Road / Hermitage Road.

The southern edge of Area Ten adjoins Blacon. The urban edge of Blacon forms a clear edge to the urban extent of the Chester.

Three electricity transmission lines traverse the parcel to connect the sub-station just to the east of Area Ten.

17.3.4 Access/Connectivity/Accessibility

Area Ten is relatively constrained by fairly limited access opportunities. The A540, which serves the two hotels runs along the eastern boundary of Area Ten, is the primary access to this area of Green Belt. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that the A540 Parkgate Road has almost a direct connection to the M56 and passes through some of the most attractive countryside in the city's landscape setting.

A number of residential minor roads within the village of Blacon provide the southern border to Area Ten but none of these routes connect into the central sections of Area Ten.

Internal connectivity within Area Ten is poor. Saughall Road/Hermitage Road provides the principal connection for isolated residential developments. The two tracks of Kingswood Land and Green Lane provide local access for residential and agricultural vehicles. Any options for releasing land from the Green Belt would require the capacity of internal roads to be upgraded.

A number of pedestrian walkways and cycle routes traverse the parcel, providing access to a number of Green Belt opportunities including outdoor sport and recreation, landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity.

17.3.5 Topography

Within Area Ten, the landscape is predominantly flat, although some undulating land to the north of Blacon. This landscape forms the beginning of the transition between the elevated plateau of Two Mills and the low lying Dee Levels. Level topography is unlikely to constrain future development; however, flat landscapes may mean enhanced views to historic core of Chester.

17.3.6 Landscape Character and Visual Amenity

Area Ten is a gently rolling agricultural landscape of mixed arable and pastoral fields bound by hawthorn hedges with occasional hedgerow trees. Two tree lined minor watercourses pass through the area. Most of the other tree cover within the area is associated with buildings. Field ponds are present in many of the fields throughout the area.

The northern boundary of the site is formed by agricultural fields, while the east is formed by Parkgate Road, the west by the Welsh border and the south by the urban edge of Chester.

Development within the area is quite limited with two hotels located in the east of the area on Parkgate Road and clusters of residential properties located Hermitage Road in the west of the area. Several lines of pylons pass through the area forming noticeable vertical elements and adversely impacting on the quality of views across the area.

National Cycle Route 5 passes through the south west of the area along a discussed railway line. Several PRoW footpaths and a byway pass through the area.

Views west towards the industrial development along the River Dee and the Clywdian Hills beyond are possible. View of Chester Cathedral and Chester Town Hall are possible from Parkgate Road and conversely the area to north of Blacon at Parkgate Road is visible from St Martin's Way. However, tree cover and built form within Chester obscures many other viewing opportunities.

On balance, Area Ten is considered to have a moderate sensitivity. The area's sensitivity is related to the open nature and inter-visibility of the area as well as the presence of notable landscape features and detractors.

17.3.7 Historic Environment

The historic environment in Area Ten is influenced by the elongated arable area of Shotwick Slopes to the far west of the site and the large exposed arable fields of the Two Mills Plateau. An area of the Backford-Christleton character area influences the eastern corner of Area Ten.

Arable farming formed the main historic land-use within the parcel, representing why very few visual barriers exist today. The eastern area of the landscape is dominated by uniform field systems dating from the late medieval period. The field pattern in the west is considerably older; reflecting the social organisation of the eighth and ninth century. Cheshire Historic Land Characterisation project identified field systems of this type as one of the oldest and rarest in Cheshire.

A relatively uniform building type exists across the area, which is characterised by simple cottages and farm buildings with red-orange brick and slate roofs. Two Listed Buildings exist: Poplars Farmhouse, a 17th century Grade II listed Farmhouse to the north-east, and Crabwell Hall, an 18th century Grade II listed house to the north-west of Area Ten.

The area is raised above the level the River Dee and gently slopes toward the river and the canal in the east. This topography provides extensive views from the west and south towards Chester Cathedral and Chester Town Hall, especially from Parkgate Road.

17.3.8 Biodiversity and Natural Environment

Area Ten features small area of patchwork woodland and a network of field ponds, with a particularly concentration in the central section of Area Ten between Crabwell Cottage and Poplars Farm.

17.4 Area Ten Conclusion

This conclusion seeks to draw together an assessment of the extent to which Area Ten fulfils the purposes of Green Belt as well as the technical assessment of site-based constraints. From this conclusion it is possible to determine whether there are any appropriate and justifiable opportunities that could be considered for release of land from the Green Belt.

It is clear that Area Ten performs very well in terms of the extent to which it fulfils the purposes of Green Belt. The existing boundary at the urban fringe of Blacon is effective in providing a check on unrestricted sprawl, assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The current Green Belt

boundary within Area Ten is reinforced by the strength of the ‘key urban edges’ to the city at Blacon. The Chester: The Future of an Historic City study notes that these key urban edges should be maintained and in turn would serve to ensure the Green Belt boundary is maintained within Area Ten. The south eastern part of Area Ten forms part of a countryside corridor penetrating the city. Area Ten therefore performs an important role in safeguarding the setting and special character of Chester.

Any extension of the urban area northwards would reduce the gap between Chester and the nearby villages of Saughall and Mollington.

Area Ten is substantially constrained by the well-preserved pattern of field boundaries that overlay the majority of the landscape. The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation project has identified the field system in Area Ten as one of the oldest and rarest in Chester.

The undulating levels of Area Ten provide extensive views, which emphasise the preserved field pattern. It also affords views towards the Welsh Hills and views back towards the ‘historic core’ of Chester. Unimpeded views to features within the ‘historic core’ enhance the significance of the historic environment.

Although the majority of Area 10 is within Flood Zone 1, an area of Flood Zone 3a exists to the far west. Along with the wooded ridge line, and the value of the landscape, this area of Flood Risk Zone 3a serves to preclude the release of land from the Green Belt in this location.

Reflecting on the fact that Area Ten is highly effective in terms of meeting the purposes of Green Belt, and the wide range of site-based constraints listed above, it has been determined that there are no suitable land parcels available within Area Ten which could potentially be appropriate and justifiable to release from the Green Belt.

There are no resultant land parcels identified in Area Ten.

17.4.1 Constraints Map

See Appendix A14.

18 Conclusions

18.1 Conclusions

The Technical Site Assessment has taken and reviewed the findings of the Council's Stage One Green Belt Study and analysed the site-based constraints in each of the identified 10 Areas.

Having reviewed the extent to which each of the areas serves the NPPF's Green Belt purposes and concluded the technical site-based constraints assessment, a number of potential 'Resultant Land Parcels' have emerged. These parcels have subsequently been tested against the purposes of Green Belt to see how they perform, and to help inform the Council as to whether it would be appropriate to release these parcels from the Green Belt and re-define the Green Belt boundary surrounding Chester.

It is important to reflect that the conclusions reached in this study do not automatically result in the release of land from the Green Belt; and that further decision-making by the Council in finalising the Local Plan will determine which, if any, might be released from the Green Belt.

From the assessment work it can be shown that overall, there are resultant land parcels which could potentially be released from the Green Belt. These parcels would allow the Green Belt boundary surrounding Chester to be re-defined whilst still allowing the Green Belt to fulfil the purposes as set out in the Framework.

More specifically, the assessment reveals that:

- Area Two has one Resultant Land Parcel – **"Land to the west of Wrexham Road"**. This is the largest parcel identified by the assessment.
- Area Four has one Resultant Land Parcel – **"Land to the east of the A41"**.
- Area Eight has two Resultant Land Parcels – **"Land between Liverpool Road and Moston Road"** and **"Land to the South of Dale Camp Barracks"**.

Further assessment work reveals that:

- No Resultant Land Parcels have been identified in Area One, Area Three, Area Five, Area Six, Area Seven, Area Nine or Area Ten.

18.2 Recommendations

These highlight areas of further work which the Council will need to undertake related to any proposed release land parcels for development. They are:

- Considering the need for Sustainability Appraisal in relation to the land parcels to inform the next stage of Local Plan preparation; and
- Carrying out masterplanning work to investigate more detailed development concept options for any resultant land parcel(s) identified for release from the Green Belt. This work would draw out specific place-making, infrastructure planning and sustainable development principles to guide how any development opportunities could be realised in the most sustainable way.

Appendix A

Constraints Maps