Wyre Forest District Council

AtkinsRéalis

Green Belt Review Stage 1 - Contextual and Policy Review

Wyre Forest Local Plan

October 2026



Notice

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The report should be read alongside Stage 2 of the Green Belt Review and the Council's wider Local Plan evidence base. It assesses the planning-policy performance of Green Belt land; it is not a site-allocation, development-capacity or development-suitability assessment. The Council remains responsible for the planning judgements and decisions taken through the Local Plan process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report constitutes Stage 1 of the Wyre Forest Green Belt Review and forms part of the evidence base supporting the preparation of the emerging Wyre Forest Local Plan to 2046. It establishes the strategic, policy and methodological context for assessing Green Belt land within the District and provides the framework for the detailed parcel-based assessment presented in Stage 2. The Review does not identify land for release or development, nor does it determine whether exceptional circumstances exist to alter Green Belt boundaries or assess the suitability of land for allocation.

The Green Belt within Wyre Forest forms part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt and performs important strategic and local functions. However, the context within which the Council is preparing its emerging Local Plan has changed materially since the previous Green Belt studies were undertaken in 2016 and 2018. This includes the adoption of the current Wyre Forest Local Plan in 2022, changes in development needs and the introduction of a revised national policy framework for assessing Green Belt land. The earlier studies therefore remain an important baseline but cannot be relied upon in isolation to support the preparation of the emerging Local Plan to 2046.

The August 2026 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes the current national policy framework for the Review. Policy GB2 and Annex E introduce a structured approach to assessing existing Green Belt land, including the identification of Grey Belt. This requires assessment areas to be defined at an appropriate scale and, where necessary, subdivided to identify meaningful variations in their contribution to Green Belt purposes. Grey Belt is identified by evaluating the contribution that assessment areas make to Purpose A, checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; Purpose B, preventing neighbouring towns from merging; and Purpose D, preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. In accordance with Annex E, land will only be capable of meeting the Grey Belt definition where it does not strongly contribute to any of these purposes. It also requires consideration of whether the release or development of assessment areas could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the plan area.

Stage 2 applies this framework through a detailed parcel-based assessment of Green Belt land across the District. Assessment areas will be sufficiently granular to identify meaningful variations in their contribution to the Green Belt purposes and will be subdivided where necessary to ensure that such variations are appropriately assessed. The wider assessment considers the contribution of each parcel to Purposes A to D. Purpose E, assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, is recognised as a strategic function of the Green Belt but is not separately assessed at parcel level.

The Stage 2 assessment uses a consistent RAG framework to express the relative contribution made by each parcel to the relevant Green Belt purposes. As set out in Table 5-1 of the Stage 2 Assessment, this framework interprets the contribution categories in Annex E through Green, Amber and Red ratings. Green represents a Strong contribution corresponding to a Strong contribution under Annex E; Amber represents a Moderate contribution; and Red represents a Limited contribution corresponding to a Weak or No Contribution under Annex E. The RAG framework is a presentational tool and does not replace the terminology or policy tests established by Annex E.

A Moderate contribution does not indicate an absence of Green Belt function. It means that the land continues to make an identifiable contribution to the relevant purpose, although that contribution does not reach the Strong threshold. The assessment therefore distinguishes between the wider performance of land against the Green Belt purposes and the more specific assessment required to determine whether land meets the national definition of Grey Belt.

For Grey Belt identification, Stage 2 considers whether land comprises previously developed land and/or does not strongly contribute to Purposes A, B or D. Purposes C and E do not form part of this specific contribution test, although they remain relevant to the wider assessment of Green Belt performance and to the subsequent consideration of the Green Belt that would remain. The identification of Grey Belt is therefore reported separately from the wider assessment of parcel performance.

Stage 2 also considers the potential implications of future release or development for the Green Belt that would remain. This includes consideration of possible effects on adjoining Green Belt land, settlement separation, containment, fragmentation and the effectiveness of resulting boundaries. These matters inform the overarching Annex E consideration of whether release or development could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

The identification of land as Grey Belt, or as making a more limited contribution to one or more Green Belt purposes, does not establish that the land should be released from the Green Belt, allocated or developed. Stage 2 provides technical Green Belt evidence rather than a site allocation or development suitability assessment. Any subsequent consideration of Green Belt boundary changes will be undertaken through the wider Local Plan process, taking account of development needs, environmental and heritage constraints, infrastructure capacity, accessibility, sustainability, viability, deliverability and the emerging spatial strategy.

Overall, this Stage 1 Review establishes the policy and methodological basis for the Stage 2 assessment. It ensures that the approach to assessing Green Belt land within Wyre Forest is aligned with the August 2026 NPPF, builds appropriately on the existing evidence base and provides a transparent framework for understanding variations in Green Belt performance without predetermining subsequent Local Plan decisions.

1. Background

1.1 Study Remit

This report has been prepared on behalf of Wyre Forest District Council ('the Council') to support the preparation of the emerging Wyre Forest Local Plan to 2046. It forms Stage 1 of the Wyre Forest Green Belt Review and establishes the strategic, policy and methodological context for assessing Green Belt land within the District.

The purpose of Stage 1 is to:

- explain why an updated Green Belt Review is required;
- review the relevant national and local planning policy context;
- consider the relationship with the Council's existing Green Belt evidence;
- establish the methodology for the detailed parcel-based assessment presented in Stage 2; and
- explain how the findings will inform the wider Local Plan process.

The Stage 2 assessment provides a robust, proportionate and transparent evidence base to inform plan-making. It assesses the contribution made by Green Belt land to the relevant Green Belt purposes, considers whether land meets the national definition of Grey Belt and examines the potential implications of release or development for the Green Belt that would remain. It does not, in itself, identify land for release or development, determine whether exceptional circumstances exist to alter Green Belt boundaries, or assess the suitability of land for allocation.

The emerging Local Plan will establish an appropriate strategy for sustainable growth that responds to the development needs, opportunities and constraints of Wyre Forest. As part of its preparation, the Council must maintain an up-to-date and proportionate evidence base to demonstrate that its spatial strategy and policies provide an appropriate response to the issues facing the District over the plan period.

The national policy framework for plan-making is established by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in August 2026. Policy GB2 requires Local Plans to be informed by an assessment undertaken in accordance with Annex E. Annex E establishes a structured approach to defining appropriate assessment areas, assessing their contribution to the Green Belt purposes, identifying Grey Belt and considering whether the release or development of assessment areas could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

The stages of preparing the emerging Local Plan and the Council's anticipated timetable to adoption are set out in Table 1-1. The Green Belt Review forms one component of the wider evidence base that will inform the development and assessment of the Council's spatial strategy and reasonable alternatives.

Table 1-1 - Wyre Forest District Council, Emerging Local Plan Timetable

Key Stage	Current Programme
Publication of Local Plan timetable and notice of intention	April 2026
Scoping consultation	April to May 2026
Gateway 1 and formal commencement	August to September 2026
Consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence	January to February 2027
Gateway 2	April 2027
Consultation on the proposed Local Plan	June to August 2027
Gateway 3	March 2028
Anticipated examination	July to December 2028
Anticipated adoption	January 2029

The overall objective of this Stage 1 Review and Stage 2 assessment is to establish a robust understanding of the role and performance of Green Belt land within Wyre Forest. Stage 2 assesses the contribution made by individual parcels to the relevant Green Belt purposes and applies the process established through Policy GB2 and Annex E. It also considers, where relevant, the potential implications of future release or development for the Green Belt that would remain.

The Green Belt Review is not a site allocation exercise and does not recommend land for release or development. It provides technical evidence to inform subsequent plan-making. A clear distinction is therefore maintained between the assessment of Green Belt performance, the consideration of whether land meets the national definition of Grey Belt, and any subsequent consideration of Green Belt boundary alteration or site allocation. Any changes to Green Belt boundaries would need to be considered through the wider Local Plan process, taking account of national policy and the Council's wider evidence base.

1.2 Study Area and Relationship with the West Midlands Green Belt

The study area comprises all land designated as Green Belt within Wyre Forest District. Figure 1-1 illustrates the Green Belt within the Wyre Forest District Boundary and its relationship within wider West Midlands Green Belt.

The Stage 2 assessment applies a parcel-based approach across the study area to provide a consistent and spatially coherent assessment of Green Belt performance. Assessment areas are defined with reference to recognisable physical features and at a scale capable of identifying meaningful variations in their contribution to the Green Belt purposes. The assessment also considers relevant relationships with adjoining Green Belt land beyond the District boundary.

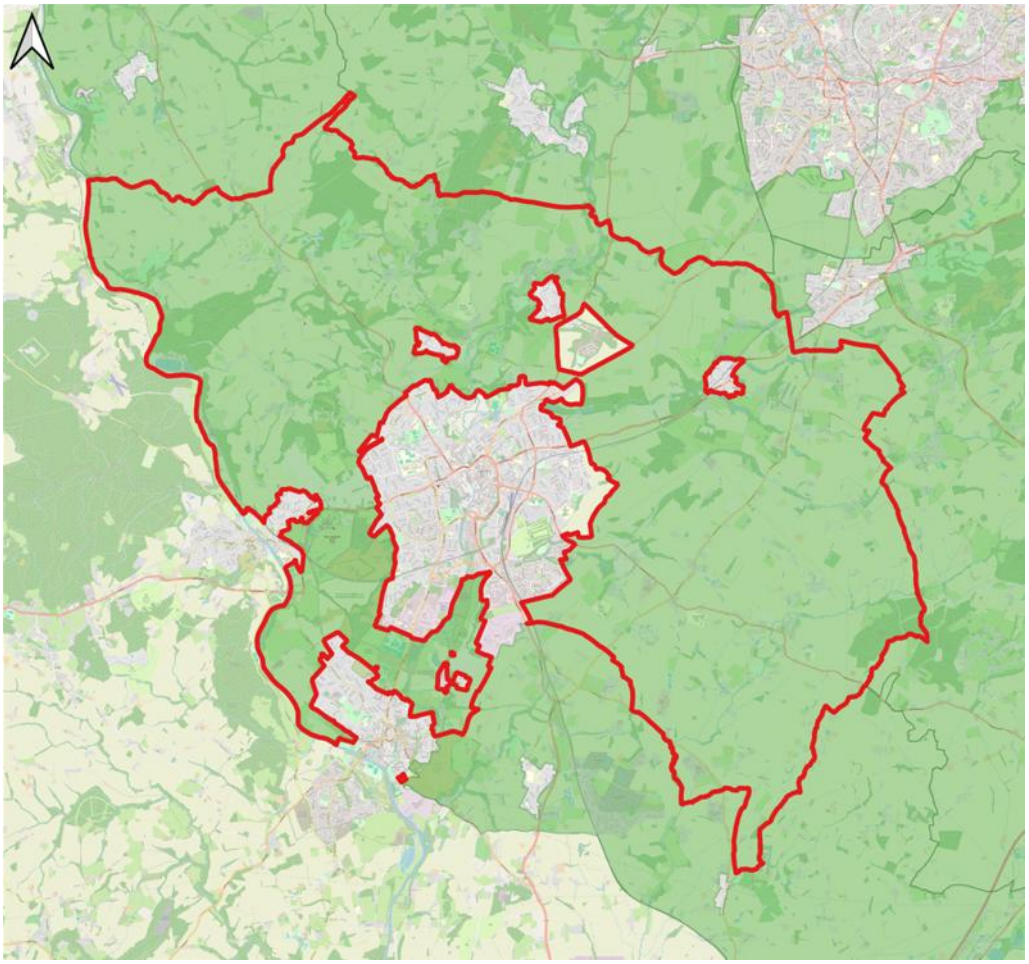

Figure 1-1 – Illustrates the Green Belt within the Wyre Forest District and its relationship with the wider West Midlands Green Belt

1.2.1 Designation of the West Midlands Green Belt

Green Belt is a strategic planning policy designation. Its fundamental aim is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, with openness and permanence being its essential characteristics. Its origins lie in efforts to contain outward urban growth, initially around London in the early twentieth century and subsequently around other major conurbations.

National policy identifies five purposes of the Green Belt:

- to check 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 urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The West Midlands Green Belt was established following the introduction of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, which enabled local authorities to include Green Belt proposals in their development plans. As elsewhere, the designation arose in response to concerns about outward

urban expansion, initially along railway corridors and latterly in association with increasing car ownership.

By the early 1960s, proposals had emerged for a Green Belt around the Birmingham conurbation. Although Green Belt proposals were advanced through amendments to development plans, formal approval was not secured until 1975, when the Secretary of State approved the West Midlands Green Belt, with some areas remaining interim designations until later plan reviews.

The West Midlands Green Belt extends across a substantial area around the Birmingham conurbation, encompassing land around settlements including Kidderminster, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Cannock, Rugby, Lichfield, Tamworth, Warwick, Worcester and Telford. While some larger towns are excluded from the designation, many smaller villages and rural settlements remain washed over by it. Its current general extent within the District was established through the Wyre Forest Urban Areas Local Plan in 1989 and has subsequently been considered through later plan reviews.

Green Belt is not, in itself, an environmental or landscape designation. Land within the Green Belt may have landscape, ecological, heritage, recreational or other environmental value, but those characteristics are distinct from the underlying purposes of Green Belt designation. They remain relevant to the wider Local Plan evidence base and to subsequent decisions about the suitability of land for development.

1.2.2 General Extent of the Green Belt within Wyre Forest

The Wyre Forest Green Belt forms an important part of the District's character and performs both strategic and local functions. Within Wyre Forest District, the Green Belt extends predominantly across land to the east of the River Severn and also includes land to the west around Bewdley. The principal towns of Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley, together with the smaller settlements of Blakedown, Cookley and Fairfield, are excluded from the Green Belt.

In character terms, the Green Belt within the District is predominantly rural and comprises a varied landscape of open countryside, including extensive farmland to the east, woodland interspersed with arable and pasture land to the north and west, and urban-fringe influences in the vicinity of Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn. These characteristics vary considerably across the study area and inform, but do not determine, the assessment of contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

When Green Belt boundaries were defined through the 1989 Wyre Forest Urban Areas Local Plan, regard was had to longer-term development requirements, and land at Hurcott, Wilden and Worcester Road, Stourport-on-Severn, was removed from the Green Belt accordingly. Subsequent local planning policy, including the 2004 Local Plan and the 2010 Core Strategy, did not undertake a further general review of Green Belt boundaries. The Site Allocations and Policies Local Plan (2006-2026), adopted in 2013, identified three major previously developed sites within the Green Belt, which continue to be recognised through Policy SA.PDL of the adopted Local Plan. The Wyre Forest District Local Plan (2016-2036), adopted on 26 April 2022, also altered parts of the Green Belt boundary through the allocation of land to support the District's development strategy. These changes mean that the Green Belt baseline differs from that considered in the 2016 and 2018 Green Belt studies. The adopted Local Plan therefore provides the appropriate baseline against which this Review has been undertaken.

1.2.3 Previously Developed Sites in the Green Belt

The adopted Wyre Forest District Local Plan identifies three principal previously developed sites within the Green Belt under Policy SA.PDL: Previously Developed Sites in the Green Belt:

- Rushock Trading Estate;
- West Midland Safari and Leisure Park; and
- Cursely Distribution Park.

Policy SA.PDL permits limited infilling or redevelopment within the identified previously developed areas, subject to the uses and requirements specified for each site. It also establishes criteria for proposals affecting other previously developed sites in the Green Belt and requires design and landscaping to minimise impacts on the Green Belt.

The identification of these sites under Policy SA.PDL does not mean that all land within their wider operational or gross site boundaries constitutes previously developed land. This distinction is particularly important at West Midland Safari and Leisure Park, where substantial areas of open grassland generally maintain the openness of the Green Belt, while the identified previously developed area is principally concentrated around the rides, leisure facilities and associated car parking.

For the purposes of this Review, previously developed land is considered by applying the national definition and having regard to the extent of existing or former built development, permanent structures, hardstanding and associated infrastructure. Where previously developed land forms a localised part of a wider assessment area, further subdivision may be appropriate to ensure that its characteristics are properly reflected in the Stage 2 assessment. Previously developed land and Grey Belt are related but distinct concepts, and the identification of land as previously developed does not, in itself, establish that it should be released from the Green Belt, allocated or developed.

Rushock Trading Estate is a former military site within the Green Belt, with a gross area of approximately 14.74 hectares. It lies close to Hartlebury Trading Estate and is accessed from the A442 Kidderminster–Droitwich road. The site contains established commercial and industrial development. Policy SA.PDL permits limited infilling or redevelopment for light industrial, B2 and B8 employment uses within the identified previously developed area.

West Midland Safari and Leisure Park has a gross area of approximately 92 hectares and lies within the Green Belt between Kidderminster and Bewdley. The park contains extensive open grassland alongside built leisure facilities, ancillary animal buildings, hardstanding and car parking. The adopted Local Plan identifies a specific previously developed area principally around the rides and leisure facilities and associated car parking. Policy SA.PDL permits limited infilling or redevelopment within that identified area where proposals support and enhance the Park's operation as a leisure and tourism destination.

Cursely Distribution Park is a former Ministry of Defence storage facility within the Green Belt, with a gross area of approximately 9.98 hectares. It contains around 22,500 square metres of floorspace, principally in B2 and B8 use with ancillary office accommodation and is accessed from the A442 via Cursely Lane. Policy SA.PDL permits limited infilling or redevelopment for light industrial, B2 and B8 employment uses within the identified previously developed area. The adopted Local Plan also allocates 0.7 hectares for redevelopment for employment uses under Policy SP.17.

1.2.4 Strategic Spatial Insight

While this Stage 1 report does not draw conclusions on the relative performance of individual areas of Green Belt, it is evident that the contribution made by Green Belt land is unlikely to be uniform across the District. Variations in the relationship between settlements, the presence of strong physical boundaries, differences in land use and the extent of existing built development are all likely to influence the way in which Green Belt purposes are fulfilled. This is reflected in the Stage 2 methodology, which adopts a parcel-based approach in order to identify and assess such variation in a transparent and consistent manner.

These differences are explored in more detail through the Stage 2 assessment, which provides a more granular understanding of how land performs against the relevant Green Belt purposes and whether any land may exhibit Grey Belt characteristics. The assessment remains technical and evidential in nature and does not, in itself, determine whether any land should be released from the Green Belt through the Local Plan process.

2. Previous Evidence Base

2.1 Need for an Updated Assessment

The Council's existing Green Belt evidence base includes the Wyre Forest Green Belt Review: Strategic Analysis (2016) and the subsequent Wyre Forest Green Belt Review: Part II Site Assessment (2018). Both studies informed the preparation of the Wyre Forest District Local Plan 2016–2036, which was adopted in April 2022. The earlier studies continue to provide an important baseline for understanding the strategic role and performance of the Green Belt within the District. However, their findings cannot be relied upon in isolation to support preparation of the emerging Local Plan extending to 2046.

The national policy framework for Green Belt assessment has changed materially since the earlier studies were completed. Policy GB2 and Annex E of the August 2026 NPPF establish a structured process for assessing existing Green Belt land, including defining assessment areas at an appropriate scale, identifying Grey Belt and considering whether release or development could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area. The 2016 and 2018 studies predate these requirements and were not prepared for the purpose of applying the current Grey Belt definition.

There have also been important changes in the local planning context. The Wyre Forest District Local Plan was adopted on 26 April 2022 and altered parts of the Green Belt boundary. It replaced the Core Strategy, Site Allocations and Policies Local Plan and Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan and now provides the adopted policy and spatial baseline for the emerging Local Plan.

The updated Green Belt Review therefore provides for the Green Belt to be reassessed against the current policy framework and physical and spatial context. Stage 2 applies a more granular parcel-based approach to identify meaningful variations in contribution that may not have been apparent through the earlier assessment geography.

Material differences between the conclusions of the current assessment and earlier evidence may arise for a variety of reasons, including changes in:

- assessment geography,
- national policy and methodology,
- Green Belt boundaries,
- settlement relationships,
- land use or development,
- physical containment, or
- the evidence available at the time of assessment.

These factors are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are not necessarily considered individually in each case. Where relevant to understanding the overall assessment, significant contextual changes may be identified.

This approach provides continuity with the existing evidence base while ensuring that the current assessment reflects the August 2026 NPPF and the baseline relevant to the emerging Local Plan.

2.2 Wyre Forest Green Belt Review: Strategic Analysis (2016)

The Wyre Forest Green Belt Review: Strategic Analysis (2016) was prepared as part of the evidence base supporting the preparation of the Wyre Forest District Local Plan 2016–2036 (adopted 2022). Its purpose was to assess the strategic role and overall performance of the Green Belt against the five purposes of identified in national policy.

The study considered the extent to which the Green Belt:

- checked the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- prevented neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- assisted in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- preserved the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- assisted in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The study divided the Green Belt within the District into 59 parcels to support more detailed assessment. It concluded that the Green Belt performed an important strategic role as part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt, including safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, maintaining separation between settlements east of the River Severn and preserving the setting of the historic core of Bewdley to the west of the River Severn.

The 2016 study remains relevant as a strategic baseline. However, its parcel geography, methodology and conclusions reflect the policy and physical context at the time it was prepared. It did not assess Grey Belt under the current national definition or apply the assessment process now contained in Annex E.

The current Review therefore does not simply carry forward the 2016 ratings. Stage 2 reassesses the land using the current methodology and records the contribution of each assessment area against the relevant purposes. The earlier findings provide context and a basis for comparison but do not predetermine the current conclusions.

2.3 Wyre Forest Green Belt Review: Part II Site Analysis (2018)

The Wyre Forest Green Belt Review Part II: Analysis of Sites Update (2018) developed the earlier strategic work through a more detailed assessment of potential development sites within the Green Belt. It examined the relationship between those sites and the wider Green Belt and considered the potential effects of development on Green Belt purposes, openness and permanence.

The assessment classified sites according to the contribution they made to the Green Belt purposes and provided commentary on the likely effects of development on openness and on the integrity of the Green Belt at local and strategic levels.

The 2018 study found that the greatest potential effects on the Green Belt were associated with the large development options assessed. It identified the importance of careful masterplanning and green infrastructure in managing change at the interface between settlements and the countryside.

The 2018 study differs from the current Stage 2 assessment in purpose and policy context. It assessed potential development sites and the likely effects of development, whereas the current assessment examines Green Belt land through the framework established by Policy GB2 and Annex E. The 2018 categories of significant, moderate and limited contribution should therefore not be treated as automatically equivalent to the current Annex E classifications without considering the criteria and assessment geography used.

The 2018 conclusions remain useful contextual evidence, particularly where the same or similar areas are assessed in Stage 2. However, the current conclusions should be based on:

- the physical characteristics of the land at the time of the current assessment;
- the present relationship between land, settlements and adjoining Green Belt;
- the current assessment-area boundaries;
- the adopted Green Belt boundary; and
- the requirements of the August 2026 NPPF.

Where Stage 2 reaches a materially different conclusion from the 2018 assessment, the parcel commentary should provide sufficient explanation to allow the difference to be understood.

2.4 Green Belt Assessments Undertaken by Neighbouring Authorities

Wyre Forest's Green Belt adjoins Green Belt in South Staffordshire, Dudley, Bromsgrove and Wychavon. As at September 2026, relevant neighbouring evidence includes South Staffordshire's Green Belt Review 2019 and Green Belt Study Addendum 2022, together with the Staffordshire Green Belt Assessment dated April 2026; the Bromsgrove Green Belt Purposes Assessment Part 1 dated August 2019 and Part Two Green Belt Study dated June 2022; the Black Country Green Belt Study dated September 2019, which covers Dudley; and the South Worcestershire Green Belt Assessment Part 1 dated October 2018 and Part 2 dated May 2019. The existence and dates of these studies have been verified against the relevant published evidence sources.

The South Worcestershire strategic assessment identified land to the east of Stourport-on-Severn/Kidderminster as one of the concentrations making an overall "Significant Contribution" to Green Belt purposes. It concluded more generally that South Worcestershire's Green Belt performs strategic and local roles as part of the outer edge of the West Midlands Green Belt, including maintaining settlement separation and preventing incremental urbanisation of the countryside.

These studies provide useful evidence about the continuity and cross-boundary functioning of the West Midlands Green Belt. They were, however, prepared at different dates, under different versions of national policy, and using different parcel definitions, methodologies and rating systems. Their conclusions are therefore used only as strategic context: they are not directly transferred to land within Wyre Forest and do not replace the District-specific assessment in Stage 2. In particular, the neighbouring assessments pre-date the August 2026 NPPF framework applied by this review.

3. Policy Context

3.1 National Policy Context

3.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The principal national policy context for this review is the NPPF, published on 17 August 2026, replacing the December 2024 version. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and establishes the national policy framework for preparing development plans and determining development proposals.

The NPPF continues to attach great importance to the Green Belt. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, with openness and permanence identified as its essential characteristics.

Policy GB2: Assessing existing Green Belt land, identifies five purposes of the Green Belt:

- Purpose A: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- Purpose B: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- Purpose C: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- Purpose D: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- Purpose E: to assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

For Local Plan preparation, Policy GB2 requires an assessment to be undertaken in accordance with Annex E to identify Grey Belt and inform any subsequent consideration of Green Belt boundary alterations under Policy GB3. Annex E forms part of national planning policy and establishes the assessment process to be applied. It requires all Green Belt within the plan area to be considered in the first instance, with assessment areas defined at an appropriate scale and subdivided where necessary to enable meaningful variations in their contribution to the Green Belt purposes to be understood.

The August 2026 NPPF defines Grey Belt as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of Purposes A, B or D in Policy GB2. The wording "in either case" means that previously developed land is not automatically Grey Belt; it must also satisfy the contribution test relating to Purposes A, B and D.

The identification of Grey Belt requires a specific assessment of Purposes A, B and D, distinct from the wider assessment of Green Belt performance. Purposes C and E do not form part of the specific contribution test used to identify Grey Belt. They nevertheless remain relevant to understanding the wider function of the Green Belt and to assessing whether the release or development of land could fundamentally undermine the five purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

The August 2026 NPPF removed the previous requirement to treat certain protected areas and assets as a separate exclusion when determining whether land meets the definition of Grey Belt. Environmental, flood-risk and other development constraints remain relevant to the subsequent assessment of whether land is suitable for allocation or development but are considered separately

from Grey Belt identification. Heritage designations and constraints are also relevant to those subsequent decisions; however, evidence concerning the setting and special character of historic towns remains directly relevant to the assessment of Purpose D. The identification of land as Grey Belt does not therefore establish that the land should be released from the Green Belt, allocated or developed.

Policy GB3: Altering existing Green Belt boundaries, establishes the national policy requirements for changes to Green Belt boundaries through plan-making. It provides that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered through the preparation or updating of Local Plans where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, other than where the policy's specific provision concerning suitable land around well-connected stations applies.

In considering whether exceptional circumstances exist, local planning authorities are required to examine all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs. These include:

- making as much use as possible of suitable previously developed and underutilised land;
- optimising the density of development in accordance with Policy L1; and
- assessing whether sufficient suitable sites can be identified outside the Green Belt.

Policy GB3 also provides that exceptional circumstances do not need to be demonstrated where a development plan's spatial strategy has identified suitable land around well-connected stations for development. The relevance of this provision to Wyre Forest will need to be considered separately through the development of the Local Plan spatial strategy; its inclusion in this policy review does not identify any land for release, allocation or development.

Policy GB4: Defining Green Belt boundaries, establishes the requirements for defining Green Belt boundaries where Green Belt is established or altered. It requires boundaries to be clearly defined using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be defensible. It also requires any alterations to be broadly consistent with the spatial strategy for accommodating growth and meeting development needs across the plan area and adjoining areas.

Where Green Belt release is considered through plan-making, Policy GB4 gives priority first to previously developed land within the Green Belt, then to Grey Belt that is not previously developed, and then to other Green Belt locations, provided that this would promote a sustainable pattern of development overall. Alterations should not be proposed where there is clear evidence that they would fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

Policy GB4 also requires Local Plans to ensure that allocations for major development involving housing on land released from the Green Belt can meet the Golden Rules in Policy GB8. These matters relate to the subsequent plan-making and site-selection process rather than the assessment of Green Belt contribution undertaken through this Review.

Taken together, these provisions establish a clear distinction between:

- assessing the contribution that existing Green Belt land makes to the five purposes;
- identifying whether land meets the definition of Grey Belt;
- considering whether release or development could fundamentally undermine the remaining Green Belt;
- determining whether exceptional circumstances exist to alter Green Belt boundaries; and

- determining whether land should be released, allocated or developed.

The Stage 2 assessment provides technical evidence to inform the first three matters. It does not, in itself, determine whether exceptional circumstances exist or whether land should be released from the Green Belt, allocated or developed. Those decisions remain part of the wider Local Plan process and must take account of national policy and the Council's wider evidence base.

3.1.2 Planning Practice Guidance

The NPPF is supported by national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The Green Belt PPG was last updated on 27 February 2025 and has not yet been fully conformed to the National Planning Policy Framework published on 17 August 2026. In particular, its references to the former footnote 7 exclusion and to superseded paragraph numbers do not represent the current grey-belt definition. Policy GB2 and Annex E take precedence. The guidance is relied upon only where its content remains consistent with the current Framework, including relevant guidance on sustainable locations, openness and the relationship between Green Belt assessment and subsequent planning decisions.

The PPG includes guidance on:

- assessing Green Belt to identify Grey Belt land;
- considering the effect of release or development on the remaining Green Belt in the plan area;
- considering proposals on Grey Belt land;
- identifying sustainable locations;
- applying the Golden Rules; and
- assessing the potential effect of development on openness.

The PPG confirms that the identification of Grey Belt requires a structured assessment rather than simple label-making. It also expressly states that, where Grey Belt is identified, it does not automatically follow that land should be allocated for development, released from the Green Belt, or approved for development. Such decisions must still be informed by the application of the NPPF as a whole. That point is particularly important in ensuring that this review is framed as evidence for plan-making rather than as a de facto release exercise.

In particular, the February 2025 PPG reflects the former approach under which certain protected areas and assets could affect whether land met the definition of Grey Belt. As explained above, the August 2026 NPPF no longer includes that element within the Grey Belt definition. Environmental, heritage, flood-risk and other constraints remain important, but they are considered separately when assessing development suitability, site allocation and individual development proposals.

The PPG nevertheless remains relevant where it is consistent with the current NPPF. It provides supporting guidance on the assessment of Green Belt contribution, the effect of potential release or development on the remaining Green Belt, sustainable locations, openness and the relationship between Grey Belt identification and subsequent planning decisions.

The wider PPG also provides guidance on making effective use of land, including the consideration of suitable brownfield opportunities. This is relevant to the Green Belt context because Policy GB3 requires local planning authorities to examine reasonable alternatives for meeting development needs before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to alter Green Belt boundaries.

3.2 Local Policy Context

3.2.1 Wyre Forest District Council Local Plan (2016-2036)

At the local level, the principal policy document is the Wyre Forest District Local Plan (2016–2036), which was formally adopted on 26 April 2022. It now forms part of the development plan for the District and replaced the Core Strategy (2010), the Site Allocations and Policies Local Plan (2013) and the Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan (2013).

The adopted Plan is also directly relevant because it contains the current local policy framework for Green Belt within the District and provides the immediate policy context against which the present review is being undertaken.

The adopted Local Plan establishes the Council's current spatial strategy and Green Belt policy context. It includes Green Belt policy and allocates land for development within the District, including some land released from the Green Belt through the 2022 plan-making process. Accordingly, the present Green Belt review is not being undertaken against an unchanged baseline: it must be understood in the context of a District whose Green Belt boundaries and development strategy have already been revisited comparatively recently through the adopted plan.

The adopted Plan is therefore important for two reasons. First, it forms the immediate local planning context within which the new review is taking place. Secondly, it demonstrates that Green Belt assessment in Wyre Forest must be understood not only in strategic terms, but also in relation to the practical outcomes of recent plan-making and the altered baseline against which the emerging Local Plan to 2046 will be prepared.

3.3 Grey Belt

3.3.1 Current Policy Position

Grey Belt is now expressly defined within the national policy framework and is relevant to both plan-making and decision-making. The August 2026 NPPF defines Grey Belt as land within the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of Green Belt Purposes A, B or D identified in Policy GB2.

For Local Plan preparation, Policy GB2 requires Green Belt assessment to be undertaken in accordance with Annex E. Annex E establishes a structured process for identifying Grey Belt, including the definition of assessment areas at an appropriate scale and their subdivision where necessary to reflect variations in contribution. In determining whether land strongly contributes, consideration is focused specifically on:

- Purpose A: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- Purpose B: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and
- Purpose D: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

Purposes C and E do not form part of this specific contribution test for identifying Grey Belt. This does not mean that these purposes cease to be relevant to the wider Green Belt assessment. In particular, Annex E also requires consideration of whether the release or development of assessment areas

would fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the plan area. All five purposes therefore remain relevant when considering the wider implications of potential release or development.

Importantly, the identification of Grey Belt does not, in itself, establish that land should be released from the Green Belt, allocated or developed. Grey Belt identification forms one stage of the wider planning assessment, with any subsequent consideration of Green Belt boundary alteration or development requiring assessment against the wider provisions of national policy and the Local Plan evidence base.

3.3.2 Approach in the Review

In the context of this Review, Grey Belt will be considered as part of the wider Green Belt assessment rather than as a standalone exercise. Stage 2 will adopt a parcel-based methodology capable of identifying variations in Green Belt performance across the District and applying the assessment process established through Policy GB2 and Annex E.

Consistent with Annex E, assessment areas will be small enough to enable variations in Green Belt contribution to be identified and will be subdivided where necessary to facilitate the identification of Grey Belt. The assessment will apply the Annex E contribution categories of Strong, Moderate and Weak or No Contribution when considering Purposes A, B and D.

The assessment will maintain a clear distinction between the wider assessment of Green Belt performance and the specific assessment required for Grey Belt identification. Purpose C will continue to be assessed as part of the wider parcel-based assessment, while Purpose E will be recognised as a strategic Green Belt function rather than separately scored at parcel level. Neither purpose will determine whether land strongly contributes for the purposes of Grey Belt identification.

Stage 2 will also consider the potential implications of future release or development for the Green Belt that would remain. This will be treated as a distinct consideration from Grey Belt identification and will have regard to whether release could affect the contribution of adjoining land, settlement separation, containment, fragmentation or the effectiveness of resulting Green Belt boundaries. Ultimately, this will inform consideration of whether release or development would fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area, as required by Annex E.

The findings of the Stage 2 assessment will remain technical and evidential in nature. The identification of land as Grey Belt, or as having potential to meet the Grey Belt definition at parcel level, will not constitute a recommendation for release or development. Any subsequent consideration of Green Belt boundary alteration, site allocation or development will remain a matter for the wider Local Plan process.

3.4 Effective Co-operation and Cross Boundary Working

Cross-boundary considerations remain relevant to the assessment of Green Belt land within Wyre Forest because the District's Green Belt forms part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt and adjoins Green Belt in neighbouring authority areas. The Review therefore considers relevant strategic relationships beyond the District boundary, including the continuity of the Green Belt, settlement relationships and the contextual evidence provided by neighbouring Green Belt studies.

The former statutory Duty to Co-operate no longer applies as a separate legal compliance test under the current plan-making arrangements. Nevertheless, effective co-operation on strategic cross-boundary matters remains relevant to the preparation of the emerging Local Plan.

This Review provides technical Green Belt evidence for that wider process. It does not seek to document or conclude upon the adequacy of the Council's cross-boundary engagement. Any further engagement with adjoining authorities or prescribed bodies, and the recording of any resulting agreements or outstanding matters, will be undertaken and documented separately by the Council through the wider Local Plan process.

3.5 Wider Environment Context – Worcestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Although Green Belt is not itself an environmental designation, environmental evidence remains relevant to the wider plan-making context within which Green Belt land is considered. The Worcestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) therefore forms an important part of the evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan. Worcestershire County Council adopted the LNRS in February 2026, and it was officially published in March 2026. It forms part of the statutory framework introduced under the Environment Act 2021.

The Worcestershire LNRS sets out priorities for nature recovery and includes a Local Habitat Map identifying existing Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity and locations where targeted action could deliver the greatest gains for nature.

The LNRS does not determine whether land contributes to the Green Belt purposes or meets the Annex E definition of Grey Belt. Ecological value and nature-recovery potential are therefore considered separately from the Green Belt purpose assessment.

The LNRS is nevertheless relevant to the wider Local Plan process. Policy GB5 of the August 2026 NPPF requires development plans to consider how Green Belt land can contribute to nature-recovery priorities in relevant LNRS. The LNRS may therefore inform subsequent plan-making concerning nature recovery, green infrastructure and the beneficial use of Green Belt land, without determining whether land should be released, allocated or developed.

4. Green Belt Landscape and Visual Context

This section draws on the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)[1i] and the mapped Wyre Forest Green Belt designation as defined by WFDC. Landscape character is described with reference to Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and, where relevant, their associated Landscape Description Units (LDUs). This section provides the strategic landscape and visual context for the Green Belt review. It identifies broad characteristics of the landscape, settlement pattern, visual relationships and openness across the study area, and highlights those landscape character types which are likely to be more or less sensitive to change in general terms. These observations are intended to inform the subsequent parcel-based assessment, but do not in themselves determine parcel-specific conclusions.

4.1 Landscape Character Context

Wyre Forest Green Belt forms part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt. Within this area, landscape character is strongly influenced by woodland cover, estate land management, historic land use and undulating sandstone landform, rather than by openness understood in purely simple or expansive terms. The Green Belt plays an important role in maintaining separation between Kidderminster, Bewdley, Stourport-on-Severn, and surrounding villages, and in preserving the rural and wooded setting of these settlements.

4.1.1 Land Cover

The prevailing land cover within the Green Belt is agricultural, comprising a combination of arable fields, improved pasture and smaller pastoral units defined by hedgerows of varying condition. In many locations, these field patterns are reinforced by mature hedgerow trees, estate planting and notable woodland blocks.

Woodland plays a key role throughout the area, particularly where it is associated with features such as Habberley Valley, Wyre Forest, Eymore Wood, Kingsford Forest Park and riverside corridors. These elements create strong enclosure, visual cohesion and seasonal variation, and often form defining skyline and backcloth features.

Some areas display a more open, estate-farmland character, typically where hedgerows are fragmented or absent. These landscapes tend to exhibit larger field sizes, simplified patterns and greater visual exposure, often functioning as transitional landscapes at the urban edge or between settlements.

[1] Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Guidance – Worcestershire County Council - August 2012

4.1.2 Landform and Visual Relationship

Landform is a key determinant of both character and visual experience, with a recurring pattern of land rising from south to north and of locally prominent ridges, hillsides, and plateaus. This creates a varied visual experience, including:

- Contained and filtered views within wooded valleys, floodplains and enclosed farmland;
- Medium-distance views across undulating agricultural land; and
- Long-distance panoramic views from elevated ground, including towards Bewdley, Kidderminster, the Severn Valley and the Wyre Forest.

River corridors such as the River Severn, River Stour and associated brooks (including Honey Brook and Hoo Brook) introduce flat, low-lying floodplain landscapes with a strong riparian character, where vegetation and landform typically restrict views and create a tranquil, enclosed environment.

4.1.3 Settlement Pattern and Influence

Built development is generally sparse and dispersed, comprising farmsteads, isolated dwellings and small clusters, although some areas experience more pronounced urban-fringe influences. These include:

- The settlement edges of Kidderminster, Bewdley, Cookley, Blakedown, and Wolverley;
- Linear or ribbon development along key routes; and
- Localised uses such as schools, golf courses, nurseries and recreational land.

Despite these influences, much of the landscape retains a strong rural framework and continues to function as a transitional buffer between settlements, or between the urban edge and open countryside.

4.1.4 Visual Containment and Openness

Visual containment varies considerably across the study area. In general terms:

- Strong containment is provided by woodland, hedgerow networks and landform, particularly in valley landscapes and wooded areas;
- Moderate containment occurs where vegetation structure is present but intermittent; and
- Open and exposed conditions are found on plateaus, elevated farmland and areas with weak boundary definition, where wide views are available.

In several locations, important views are available from public rights of way, local roads (including the A442, A449 and A456) and elevated routes, contributing to public appreciation of the landscape and to the perception of openness.

4.2 Landscape Character Types within the Green Belt

The following LCTs are present within the Wyre Forest Green Belt and are relevant to the strategic baseline description.

4.2.1 Principal Wooded Hills

This is the dominant landscape character type within the Wyre Forest Green Belt. It is an upstanding and strongly unified landscape of steep and varied relief, where large blocks of ancient woodland dominate and interlock with small areas of historic clearance, creating a visually powerful and ecologically rich setting.

Key characteristics include:

- Varied, often steeply sloping topography, frequently forming prominent hillsides;
- Large, irregular blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland forming the main landscape structure;
- An interlocking pattern of woodland and hedged fields derived from historic assarting;
- Narrow wooded valleys (dingles) and wooded stream corridors;
- Medium-framed views with strong visual cohesion; and
- Sparse settlement, generally limited to isolated farmsteads and wayside dwellings.

This landscape is particularly sensitive to changes affecting woodland extent, composition and skyline form. Woodland fragmentation, coniferous planting, loss of hedgerow and streamside trees, or visually intrusive development can quickly erode landscape unity, visual prominence, and biodiversity value.

In broad strategic terms, this landscape type is likely to be of high sensitivity to change, particularly where development would introduce urbanising elements or result in woodland loss.

4.2.2 Sandstone Estate Lands

Sandstone Estate Lands occur locally within the Green Belt where estate-influenced farmland overlies sandstone geology. They comprise an open, rolling and strongly ordered landscape dominated by large-scale arable farming, where straight roads, geometric field patterns and planned estate woodlands create a clear sense of structure and visual unity.

Key characteristics include:

- Arable land use dominates large, open fields;
- A planned enclosure pattern with straight roads and regular field boundaries;
- Fields defined by thorn hedgerows, often weakened or fragmented;
- Estate woodlands and plantations, typically in discrete geometric blocks;
- Wide, open views across a large-scale landscape;
- Dispersed farmsteads, wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages; and

- Rolling topography with occasional low escarpments and impoverished soils supporting relic heathy vegetation.

This landscape has medium sensitivity to change, with key vulnerabilities including hedgerow loss, decline of parkland features, and poorly designed development or planting that conflicts with the strong planned geometry. The regular field pattern, openness and estate character can be readily eroded if these defining structures are not conserved and reinforced.

In broad strategic terms, sensitivity is likely to range from medium to high, increasing where landform or public access results in wider visual exposure.

4.2.3 Estate Farmlands

Estate Farmlands and Wooded Estate Lands are both present within the Green Belt and are closely related in character. Together they form an ordered, lowland agricultural landscape shaped by historic estates, characterised by a planned pattern of hedged fields, small plantations and ornamental trees, with settlement focused in discrete clusters and estate villages.

Key characteristics include:

- Medium- to large-scale fields with a semi-regular enclosure pattern;
- Fields bounded by hedgerows, often forming the primary structural framework;
- Planned woodland character, including small geometric plantations and tree belts;
- Large country houses set within mature ornamental grounds or parkland;
- Mixed farming, increasingly dominated by arable use;
- Discrete settlement clusters and small estate villages with distinctive architectural identity; and
- Rolling lowland topography, occasionally punctuated by steeper hills or escarpments.

Estate Farmlands are moderately sensitive, particularly to hedgerow loss, decline of parkland and ornamental tree cover, and insensitive change within estate villages. The erosion of estate planting patterns or primary hedge lines can quickly weaken the planned structure, scale and historic estate character of the landscape.

In broad terms, these landscapes are likely to be of medium to high sensitivity, particularly where they perform a strong buffering role around settlements.

4.2.4 Riverside Meadows

Riverside Meadows occur locally where river corridors fall within the Green Belt, notably along sections of the River Stour and its tributaries. They form a linear, low-lying river corridor landscape defined by flat alluvial floodplains, meandering rivers and seasonally grazed pastures, creating a secluded and tranquil pastoral setting with strong visual and ecological unity.

Key characteristics include:

- Flat, low-lying alluvial floodplain, often subject to seasonal flooding;
- Pastoral land use, with grazing meadows and occasional haymaking;

- Meandering, tree-lined rivers, forming the backbone of the landscape;
- Tree cover comprising individual trees and linear belts, typically alder and pollarded willow along rivers, ditches and hedgerows;
- Medium-to-large fields defined by hedges and drainage ditches; and
- Sparse settlement and limited road intrusion, reinforcing a sense of openness and tranquillity.

Riverside Meadows are highly sensitive to loss of permanent pasture, river engineering, drainage, road construction and encroachment of arable land. Such changes fragment the linear unity of the landscape, reduce biodiversity and erode the distinctive pastoral and wetland character of these river corridors. Although limited in extent, these landscapes have high perceptual sensitivity due to their openness and recreational value, and they contribute to corridor-based settlement separation.

In broad terms, this landscape type is likely to be of high sensitivity overall.

4.2.5 Timbered Plateau Farmlands

Timbered Plateau Farmlands comprise a varied, elevated farmed landscape characterised by rolling plateau topography, broad valleys and a strong ancient wooded character, where landform and woodland together give a sense of strength and dominance.

Key characteristics include:

- Upstanding, rolling plateau dissected by broad valleys, creating changing views;
- Medium to long-distance filtered views, especially from plateau tops;
- Strong association with ancient semi-natural woodland, predominantly oak;
- Medium-to-large hedged fields with an organic enclosure pattern;
- Wooded valleys and streamside tree cover, including dingles; and
- Mixed farming land use with dispersed farmsteads and hamlets.

This landscape is moderately to highly sensitive to the loss or fragmentation of woodland, hedgerows, and streamside trees, which provide its principal structure. Increased arable use, hedgerow decline, or development that disrupts the dispersed settlement pattern can quickly erode landscape unity and historic character.

In broad terms, this landscape type is likely to be of high sensitivity overall.

4.2.6 Principal Timbered Farmlands

Principal Timbered Farmlands form a small-scale, enclosed rural landscape with a strong ancient wooded character, defined by hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, creating a richly textured and intimate countryside.

Key characteristics include:

- Hedgerow-defined fields with an organic enclosure pattern;
- Abundant hedgerow trees, predominantly oak, creating filtered views;
- Small-scale landscape with strong visual unity and enclosure;

- Mixed farming as the dominant land use; and
- Dispersed settlement pattern, including traditional brick and timber buildings.

This landscape is highly sensitive to hedgerow loss, decline of hedgerow trees, field enlargement and intrusive development. Changes that weaken enclosure or introduce suburban forms can quickly erode its historic scale, wooded character, and visual cohesion.

In broad terms, this landscape type is likely to be of high sensitivity overall.

4.2.7 Unenclosed commons

Unenclosed Commons are pen landscapes historically associated with rough grazing and characterised by acid grassland and heath, often of notable nature conservation value. Settlement is usually limited to small cottages located around the edges of the common with irregular plots with scattered tree cover. Their character stems from historic commoners' rights but is vulnerable to declining grazing and settlement expansion, necessitating conservation efforts to maintain openness, biodiversity, and unique settlement patterns.

Key characteristics include:

- Unenclosed landform with few or no boundary features such as hedgerows or fences;
- Rough grazing traditional land use;
- Strong visual and spatial openness, often with long views;
- Wayside dwellings of distinctive scale and style located around the perimeter of the commons;
- Largely unwooded areas with scattered tree cover associated with small plots; and
- Frequent associations with acid grassland and heath.

These landscapes are of very high sensitivity due to their open, unenclosed character and strong sense of wilderness. Even small changes, such as development, enclosure, planting, or the loss of grazing, can have a disproportionate visual and ecological impact, particularly on biodiversity and the distinctive common-side settlement pattern.

In broad terms, this landscape type is likely to be of very high sensitivity overall.

4.3 Landscape and Visual Context Summary

The study area comprises a diverse but coherent collection of predominantly rural and semi-rural landscapes, typically characterised by mixed farmland, woodland blocks and estate-influenced field patterns. Across the area, the interaction between landform, vegetation structure and settlement edges creates a varied visual framework, ranging from strongly enclosed landscapes with limited, filtered views to open and elevated areas offering extensive, long-distance panoramas.

While variability exists between enclosed and open landscapes, the majority of the area retains a distinct rural character, visual coherence and an important Green Belt function. In broad terms, sensitivity to change is closely linked to visual connectivity, landscape structure, settlement context and the extent to which urbanising influences are already present. This section therefore provides an

important strategic context for the subsequent parcel-based assessment, whilst not determining parcel-specific outcomes in itself.

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5. Housing Need and Green Belt Review Context

5.1 Housing Need and Supply Context

National policy places significant weight on boosting the supply of homes. The NPPF expects strategic policy-making authorities to determine a housing requirement for their area and to maintain a clear understanding of the land available to meet that requirement over the plan period. PPG further clarifies that the assessment of local housing need is the starting point for this exercise and is an unconstrained assessment of the minimum number of homes needed in an area. It is distinct from the later process of establishing a housing requirement figure in the Local Plan, taking account of constraints, land availability and other relevant matters.

Assessed housing need in Wyre Forest has increased significantly over time. The Core Strategy (2006-2026), adopted in December 2010, established a target of 4,000 net additional dwellings over the period 2006 to 2026, equivalent to an average of 200 dwellings per year. The subsequent Wyre Forest Local Plan (2016-2036), formally adopted on 26 April 2022, increased the housing requirement to 276 dwellings per year. The Council's current evidence now indicates a local housing need of approximately 584 dwellings per annum, representing a substantial further increase in the strategic housing context for the emerging Local Plan. It therefore reinforces the need for the Council to maintain a current and proportionate evidence base to support the identification and testing of reasonable spatial options.

The Council's evidence base also includes the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2019), which identifies a range of sites that may have potential to contribute housing and employment supply. The HELAA is an important source of information on land availability and deliverability. However, national guidance is clear that a HELAA does not in itself determine whether sites should be allocated for development. Rather, it provides information on the range of sites that may be available to meet needs, with the development plan itself determining which sites are the most suitable to meet those requirements.

Accordingly, the HELAA should be treated as an important starting point rather than a definitive statement of future supply. Whilst it identifies substantial headline capacity over the plan period, including a significant proportion of sites expected to come forward beyond five years, the Council's evidence also indicates that aspects of this supply remain uncertain in terms of timing, capacity, viability and deliverability, particularly where brownfield and mixed-use assumptions require further testing. It would therefore be premature to treat the headline HELAA figures as a definitive indicator that future housing needs can be met without further evidence and option-testing through the Local Plan process. In this context, an up-to-date Green Belt review forms part of the wider evidence base needed to ensure that all reasonable spatial options can be examined on an informed basis.

This context is important in understanding why the Green Belt review is being undertaken. The question is not simply whether sites have been identified in the abstract, but whether the Council can demonstrate, through a sound and evidence-based plan-making process, that it has examined all reasonable options for meeting housing needs and has an adequate understanding of the choices available to it. In that context, the Green Belt Review forms part of the wider evidence base rather than acting as a substitute for housing land assessment or strategic site selection.

It is also relevant that the Council's Brownfield Land Register was last updated in February 2026 and includes 34 sites, demonstrating that previously developed land opportunities are being actively identified and monitored. However, this does not remove the need to consider the broader range of reasonable options through plan-making.

5.2 Relationship to Exceptional Circumstances

National policy makes clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. The NPPF states that this includes situations where a local planning authority is unable to meet its defined development needs in full, requiring authorities to demonstrate that they have examined all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs before concluding that such circumstances exist.

At this stage, the purpose of this report is not to determine whether exceptional circumstances exist in Wyre Forest. Nor is it to suggest that housing need, in isolation, is sufficient to justify alteration of Green Belt boundaries. Rather, the function of this section is to explain why, in the context of increased housing need and uncertainty around longer-term supply, an up-to-date Green Belt review is a necessary and proportionate component of the evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan.

The evidence indicates that the strategic housing context has changed materially since the adopted Local Plan was prepared. The Council's current local housing need is substantially higher than the housing requirement in the adopted Plan, which has clear implications for the scale of growth that may need to be considered through the emerging Local Plan to 2046. At the same time, whilst the Council has identified a range of potential development sites through its wider evidence base, there remain uncertainties regarding the timing, capacity, viability and deliverability of parts of that supply, particularly over the longer term.

In these circumstances, and having regard to the requirement to examine all reasonable options for meeting development needs, it is necessary for the Council to maintain a robust understanding of the role and relative performance of Green Belt land within the District. Without such evidence, it would be difficult to demonstrate through examination that reasonable alternatives had been properly considered and that the emerging plan was based on a proportionate and up-to-date evidence base.

The Green Belt Review should therefore be understood as one component of the wider exercise required to inform plan-making. It may assist the Council in understanding how different areas of Green Belt perform and whether any land may warrant further consideration in Green Belt terms. However, it does not in itself establish that exceptional circumstances exist, nor does it determine whether any land should be released. Those are matters for subsequent policy-on assessment, spatial strategy development and the overall judgement of the Local Plan process.

5.3 Summary

The strategic housing context in Wyre Forest has changed materially since the earlier development plan documents were prepared. The Council's current evidence indicates a substantial increase in local housing need when compared with both the housing target in the former Core Strategy and the housing requirement in the adopted Local Plan. National policy and guidance make clear that this local housing need figure is the starting point for plan-making, but that it must be considered

alongside constraints, land availability, site suitability and other relevant factors in establishing the housing requirement for the emerging Plan.

At the same time, the Council's land availability evidence and brownfield monitoring provide important information on potential supply, but they do not in themselves determine which sites should be allocated or whether identified options are ultimately suitable, deliverable or strategically appropriate. Those matters remain to be tested through the wider plan-making process, together with consideration of infrastructure, environmental constraints, spatial strategy and cross-boundary issues.

Against this background, an up-to-date Green Belt review is a necessary and proportionate part of the evidence base. It enables the Council to understand how Green Belt land performs, helps ensure that all reasonable options can be examined on an informed basis, and supports the preparation of a Local Plan that is justified, effective and consistent with national policy. It does not predetermine whether exceptional circumstances exist, but it helps provide the evidence needed for that question to be addressed properly and transparently through the Local Plan process.

6. Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment

6.1 Purpose and Scope

Although the five purposes of the Green Belt remain consistent with those considered through the earlier Wyre Forest Green Belt studies, the August 2026 NPPF establishes a revised framework for assessing existing Green Belt land through Policy GB2 and Annex E. The conclusions of the earlier studies therefore provide an important baseline but cannot be relied upon in isolation for the preparation of the emerging Local Plan to 2046. Stage 2 will provide an updated, proportionate and more granular assessment reflecting the current national policy framework and present-day local circumstances.

The Stage 2 assessment will provide a technical appraisal of Green Belt performance at parcel level and, where appropriate, at a finer-grained scale. It will assess the contribution made by land to the relevant Green Belt purposes, identify potential Grey Belt in accordance with Annex E, and consider the potential implications of future release or development for the Green Belt that would remain. The assessment will not, in itself, determine whether exceptional circumstances exist, whether land should be released from the Green Belt, or whether any site is suitable for allocation or development. These matters will remain for subsequent consideration through the wider Local Plan process.

As part of the wider assessment of Green Belt performance, Stage 2 will assess parcels against the first four purposes identified in Policy GB2:

- Purpose A: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- Purpose B: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- Purpose C: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and
- Purpose D: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

Purpose E, to assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, will not be separately assessed at parcel level. By its nature, this purpose operates strategically across the Green Belt and does not readily provide a basis for differentiating between individual parcels. It will nevertheless remain relevant to understanding the wider strategic function of the Green Belt and, alongside the other four purposes, to consideration of the potential implications of release or development for the remaining Green Belt.

For the specific purpose of identifying Grey Belt, Stage 2 will apply the process established through Annex E. This will focus on whether land strongly contributes to Purposes A, B or D. Purposes C and E do not form part of this specific contribution test. The assessment will therefore distinguish between the wider assessment of Green Belt performance and the more specific A/B/D assessment relevant to Grey Belt identification.

The assessment will also consider the potential implications of future release or development for the Green Belt that would remain. This represents a distinct stage from Grey Belt identification. In accordance with Annex E, consideration will be given to whether the release or development of assessment areas could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the plan area. This will enable consideration of potential consequential effects on adjoining Green Belt land, including changes to settlement separation, containment, fragmentation and the effectiveness of resulting Green Belt boundaries.

Assessment areas will be defined at an appropriate scale to enable meaningful variations in Green Belt contribution to be identified. Where larger parcels contain materially different characteristics, relationships or levels of contribution, further subdivision will be considered where necessary to facilitate the identification of Grey Belt and provide an appropriately granular evidence base. Parcel and sub-parcel boundaries will be defined for assessment purposes and will not imply that corresponding changes to Green Belt boundaries should subsequently be made.

Taken together, Stage 2 will therefore distinguish between the existing contribution of land to Green Belt purposes, the identification of potential Grey Belt, and the implications that potential release or development could have for the remaining Green Belt. This approach will provide a transparent and proportionate evidence base for subsequent plan-making while maintaining a clear distinction between technical Green Belt assessment and later decisions concerning Green Belt boundary alteration, site selection or development.

6.2 Methodological Principles

The Stage 2 methodology will be informed by the requirements of the August 2026 NPPF, including Policy GB2 and Annex E, and will provide a transparent, proportionate and repeatable framework for assessing Green Belt land across the District. The methodology will be sufficiently detailed to identify meaningful variations in Green Belt performance while remaining appropriate to the strategic role of the Review within the wider Local Plan evidence base.

The methodology will be guided by the following principles:

- Assessment areas will be defined at an appropriate scale using clear and recognisable physical features, with larger parcels subdivided where necessary to reflect meaningful variations in character, function, settlement relationship or contribution to Green Belt purposes. This will ensure that the assessment is sufficiently granular to facilitate the identification of Grey Belt in accordance with Annex E.
- Green Belt contribution will be assessed consistently across the District, using a common assessment framework supported by desk-based evidence, site survey and professional judgement. The basis for each conclusion will be recorded transparently to enable the assessment to be understood and audited.
- The wider assessment of Green Belt performance will be distinguished from the specific assessment required for Grey Belt identification. The wider parcel assessment will consider Purposes A to D, with Purpose E recognised as a strategic function, while Grey Belt identification will focus specifically on whether land makes a Strong, Moderate or Weak/No Contribution to Purposes A, B and D, and whether it is capable of meeting the Grey Belt definition in accordance with Annex E.

- The assessment will recognise that Green Belt land contributes to Green Belt purposes to varying degrees and that a spectrum of contribution exists. In assessing Green Belt purposes A, B and D, regard will be had to the illustrative features of Strong, Moderate and Weak or No Contribution set out in Annex E of the NPPF. These criteria will inform professional judgement and provide a consistent basis for assessment but will not be applied mechanistically. Grey Belt identification will be treated as distinct from consideration of potential release. Identification of land as potential Grey Belt will not establish that the land should be removed from the Green Belt, allocated or developed. Any such decisions will require subsequent consideration through the wider Local Plan process.

- Potential implications for the remaining Green Belt will be considered separately from Grey Belt identification. In accordance with Annex E, consideration will be given to whether the release or development of assessment areas could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the plan area. This may include consideration of consequential effects on adjoining Green Belt land, settlement separation, containment, fragmentation and the effectiveness of resulting boundaries.
- Parcel-level conclusions will not automatically be assumed to apply uniformly to all land within a parcel. Where material variations in characteristics or contribution are identified, further subdivision or finer-grained assessment will be considered where necessary. Likewise, where only part of a parcel is subsequently considered through the Local Plan process, further assessment may be required to understand both the performance of that land and the implications for the Green Belt that would remain.
- The assessment will remain technical and evidential in nature. It will not predetermine exceptional circumstances, site allocation, development suitability or Green Belt boundary alteration. These matters will require subsequent consideration against the wider Local Plan evidence base and the relevant provisions of national and local planning policy.

Landscape and visual evidence will inform the assessment where relevant to understanding matters such as openness, settlement relationships, countryside character, containment and historic setting. However, landscape and visual sensitivity will remain distinct from Green Belt contribution, and a landscape sensitivity rating will not determine the Green Belt rating of an individual parcel. Further detail on the landscape and visual methodology is provided at Appendix A.

6.3 Assessment Process

6.3.1 Task One – Methodology and Assessment Framework

The detailed assessment framework will be established in accordance with the principles set out above and the requirements of the August 2026 NPPF. Parcels will be assessed against Purposes A to D using a three-point RAG framework comprising Strong (Green), Moderate (Amber) and Weak or no (Red) Contribution. For Purposes A, B and D these correspond respectively with the Annex E categories of Strong, Moderate and Weak or No Contribution.. Purpose E will be recognised as a strategic function but will not be separately scored at parcel level.

For Grey Belt identification, particular regard will be given to whether land makes a strong contribution to Purposes A, B or D, consistent with Annex E. An overall parcel rating will also be recorded based on the highest contribution identified across the assessed purposes, rather than an averaged score.

6.3.2 Task Two – Parcel Definition

Green Belt land will be divided into assessment parcels using clear and recognisable physical features, including roads, railway lines, watercourses, settlement edges, woodland edges and established field boundaries.

In accordance with Annex E, parcels will be defined at an appropriate scale to identify meaningful variations in Green Belt contribution and will be subdivided where necessary to facilitate the

identification of Grey Belt. Parcel boundaries are defined for assessment purposes only and do not imply future changes to Green Belt boundaries.

6.3.3 Task Three – Desk-Based Assessment

A desk-based assessment will be undertaken for each parcel using available mapping, aerial imagery and relevant evidence relating to settlement pattern, land use, physical boundaries, landscape and heritage context.

Each parcel will be assessed against Purposes A to D, with concise commentary explaining the judgement reached. For Purposes A, B and D, particular regard will be given to the criteria in Annex E to inform the subsequent identification of potential Grey Belt. Purpose C will be assessed separately as part of the wider assessment of Green Belt performance.

The assessment will also consider, where relevant, whether potential release or development could affect the function of adjoining or remaining Green Belt land. This will inform consideration of whether release could fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes, taken together, of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

Findings will be recorded through parcel proformas and supporting mapping. Where material variation occurs within a parcel, further subdivision or finer-grained assessment will be undertaken where appropriate.

6.3.4 Task Four – Site Survey and Validation

Site visits will be undertaken by appropriately qualified professionals in order to validate and refine the desk-based findings. Fieldwork will confirm the character of parcels, the presence and influence of built development, openness, visual relationships, defensible boundaries and any relevant physical or perceptual features.

Observations will be recorded in parcel proformas combining spatial information with concise written commentary. This will ensure that the final assessment is informed by both desk-based evidence and on-site professional judgement.

6.3.5 Task Five – Draft Reporting

A draft Stage 2 Report will be prepared setting out the methodology, the parcels assessed and the conclusions reached. The report will identify parcels that make a limited, moderate or strong contribution to the assessed Green Belt purposes and, where relevant, will identify parcels that may exhibit Grey Belt characteristics or contain significant existing development.

The draft report may also identify instances where the existing Green Belt boundary or parcel structure appears irregular or where the treatment of developed areas may warrant further consideration through subsequent plan-making stages. However, it will not in itself conclude that land is suitable for release, that insetting is justified, or that any boundary change should necessarily occur.

6.3.6 Task Six – Officer Workshop

A workshop will be held between the project team and the Council's planning policy officers, and other relevant officers where appropriate, to discuss the emerging findings of the draft assessment. The purpose of this workshop will be to ensure that the methodology has been applied consistently, that any factual matters are identified and corrected where necessary, and that the outputs are clearly understood in the context of the wider evidence base.

6.3.7 Task Seven – Final Reporting

The Stage 2 report will then be finalised, taking account of any agreed amendments arising from the review process. The final report will present a clear, proportionate and transparent record of the assessment undertaken and the conclusions reached.

6.4 Important Considerations

The Stage 2 assessment will not be treated as a standalone determinant of whether Green Belt boundaries should be altered. Parcels identified as lower-performing in Green Belt terms, or as potentially exhibiting Grey Belt characteristics, will not automatically be regarded as appropriate for release or development. Such findings will first need to be considered alongside all other relevant planning matters, including environmental constraints, infrastructure capacity, heritage impacts, flood risk, accessibility, sustainability and the Council's wider spatial strategy.

Similarly, the identification of significant existing development within or adjoining a parcel may be relevant to the assessment of Green Belt function and boundary clarity, but it will not in itself justify insetting or boundary amendment. These matters will require further policy-on consideration through the Local Plan process.

The Council must first determine, through the Local Plan process, whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify any alteration to Green Belt boundaries. In doing so, it will need to have regard to national policy, the requirement to examine all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs, and relevant case law. Relevant case law may include Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council & Ors [2015] EWHC 1078 (Admin).

The Stage 2 assessment should therefore be understood as one part of a broader decision-making framework. It will provide technical evidence on Green Belt performance, but subsequent plan-making judgements will still be required to determine whether any alterations to Green Belt boundaries are justified and whether exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated in accordance with national policy.

6.5 Relationship to Subsequent Plan Making

The Stage 2 assessment will not make recommendations as to which land should or should not be released from the Green Belt. Rather, it will identify variation in the contribution that land makes to Green Belt purposes and may highlight areas that warrant further consideration through the wider plan-making process. This may include areas that make a more limited contribution in Green Belt terms, areas that may exhibit Grey Belt characteristics, or areas where the existing boundary or treatment of developed land may merit further review.

Following completion of the Stage 2 assessment, any parcels or areas identified as warranting further consideration will be assessed by the Council against the full range of other relevant planning considerations and constraints. This subsequent policy-on stage may include consideration of environmental effects, infrastructure and service capacity, accessibility, flood risk, heritage, landscape, ecology, viability and consistency with the emerging spatial strategy.

Only after this wider exercise has been undertaken will the Council be able to determine whether any land should be considered further through the emerging Local Plan. Even then, any proposal to alter Green Belt boundaries would need to be justified through the plan-making process and supported by a clear demonstration of exceptional circumstances in accordance with national policy.

6.6 Role of Stage 2 Assessment in the Evidence Base

The Green Belt Review forms one component of a wider evidence base supporting the preparation of the emerging Local Plan and should be understood within that broader context. Stage 1 establishes the strategic policy and methodological context for the review, whilst Stage 2 will provide a detailed parcel-based assessment of Green Belt performance across the District.

The outputs of Stage 2 will then be considered alongside the full range of other evidence relevant to plan-making, including environmental constraints, housing and employment evidence, infrastructure capacity, settlement strategy and cross-boundary matters. It is only through the integration of these strands of evidence that the Council will be able to determine whether any areas of land warrant further consideration and whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify any alterations to Green Belt boundaries.

This approach will ensure that the Green Belt Review remains an objective and proportionate evidence-base exercise. It confirms that the Stage 2 assessment will be a technical appraisal of Green Belt performance, not a site allocation exercise, and that any future consideration of boundary change must be addressed transparently through the Local Plan process as a whole.

7. Summary and Conclusions

This Stage 1 Review establishes the strategic, policy and methodological context for the Wyre Forest Green Belt Review and forms part of the evidence base supporting preparation of the emerging Local Plan to 2046. It reviews the existing Green Belt evidence, considers the implications of the current national policy framework and establishes the approach to the detailed Stage 2 assessment.

The review confirms that the Green Belt within Wyre Forest performs important strategic and local functions as part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt. However, the existing assessments undertaken in 2016 and 2018 cannot be relied upon in isolation. Changes in national policy, including the introduction of Grey Belt and the assessment requirements of Policy GB2 and Annex E of the August 2026 NPPF, together with changes in the local planning and development context, mean that an updated and more granular assessment is appropriate.

Stage 2 will therefore provide a detailed parcel-based assessment of Green Belt land across the District, considering its contribution to the relevant Green Belt purposes and identifying potential Grey Belt in accordance with national policy. It will also consider, where relevant, the implications that potential release or development could have for the function of the remaining Green Belt.

Importantly, the Green Belt Review is a technical evidence-base exercise and not a site selection or development suitability assessment. Identification of land as potential Grey Belt, or as making a more limited contribution to Green Belt purposes, will not in itself indicate that it should be released, allocated or developed. Any consideration of Green Belt boundary change will need to take place through the wider Local Plan process, having regard to the full range of relevant evidence and national policy requirements.

Overall, this Stage 1 Review provides a clear and proportionate basis for progressing to the Stage 2 assessment, ensuring that the Council has an up-to-date and transparent framework for assessing Green Belt performance and informing subsequent plan-making decisions.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Landscape and Visual Methodology

A.1 Introduction

This appendix sets out the landscape and visual methodology that will support the Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment. It provides a proportionate and strategic framework for understanding how landscape character, visual relationships and openness contribute to the performance of Green Belt land within Wyre Forest. It should be read alongside Section 4, which establishes the strategic landscape and visual context, and Section 6, which sets out the Stage 2 assessment methodology.

The purpose of this appendix is not to establish development capacity or to undertake a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). Rather, it explains how landscape and visual evidence will inform the technical appraisal of Green Belt performance at parcel level, including the assessment of openness, countryside character, settlement relationship and the influence of built development.

A.2 Purpose and Scope

The landscape and visual component of the Green Belt Review will provide strategic evidence to support the parcel-based assessment of Green Belt land. It will identify the principal landscape characteristics of each parcel, the degree to which the parcel contributes to openness and rural character, and the nature of visual relationships both within the parcel and between the parcel, settlements and surrounding countryside.

This methodology is intended to support clear, consistent and transparent judgements across the study area. It does not assess the full planning merits of development, determine whether exceptional circumstances exist, or conclude whether any parcel should be released from the Green Belt. Those matters are addressed through the wider plan-making process and the policy-on assessment described elsewhere in the report.

A.3 Methodological Approach

A.3.1 Assessing Contribution to Green Belt Purposes

Each parcel will be assessed to understand its contribution to the relevant Green Belt purposes, with particular regard to openness, rural character and the influence of built development. The landscape and visual components of this Green Belt Review will consider how landscape structure, settlement pattern and visual relationships influence the role of land in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and maintaining separation between settlements. These matters will inform the technical appraisal of Green Belt performance, but will not in themselves determine whether land should be released, allocated or developed.

A.3.2 Consideration of Grey Belt Land Characteristics

Where relevant, the landscape and visual appraisal will also inform consideration of whether parcels may exhibit Grey Belt characteristics. This will be undertaken as part of the wider Green Belt assessment, rather than as a standalone exercise. In this context, the landscape and visual analysis will assist in understanding whether land contributes strongly to Green Belt purposes most relevant to Grey Belt assessment; checking unrestricted sprawl, preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another and preserving the setting and special character to historic towns, while also informing consideration of opened and the wider function of the remaining Green Belt.

Any such consideration will remain part of the overall technical appraisal of Green Belt performance. It will not, in itself, indicate that land is suitable for release, allocation or development.

A.3.3 Landscape, Visual, and Openness Considerations

The assessment will draw on established landscape and visual principles to consider landscape character, enclosure, openness, visual relationship and the extent of urban influence. In doing so, it will examine the degree to which parcels retain a recognisable rural character, the way in which vegetation and landform influence perception, and the extent to which built development affects openness and the relationship between settlement and countryside. These will be assessed using a proportionate, high level approach, informed by established LVIA principles but not constituting a full LVIA.

These factors will be brought together through professional judgement to inform a comparative understanding of Green Belt performance across the study area. The focus is on understanding the baseline landscape context, its sensitivity to change and any notable visual receptors, rather than undertaking a detailed assessment of development effects.

A.3.4 Use of Professional Judgement

The methodology relies on informed and transparent professional judgement. This is appropriate in a strategic Green Belt review, where landscape, openness and visual relationships cannot be reduced to purely mechanical measures. Judgements will be explained in concise narrative form so that the basis for conclusions is clear and can be independently understood.

The methodology is informed by recognised landscape and visual assessment guidance, including Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3), the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-01, and relevant Statements of Clarification. These sources reinforce the need for transparent, well-reasoned professional judgement and consistent application of assessment principles.

A.3.5 Sources of Evidence

This methodology has been prepared in accordance with good practice and key professional guidance, including:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3, 2013);
- GLVIA3 Statements of Clarification (2013–2014);
- Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/11: Visual Representation of Development Proposals (2019);

An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014); and

Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)

A.4 Scope of Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The landscape and visual component of the Green Belt Review provides a concise and strategic assessment of each parcel, focusing on those characteristics that influence its contribution to Green Belt purposes.

The assessment establishes an understanding of the landscape baseline, including landform, land use, vegetation, settlement pattern, and perceptual qualities such as tranquillity and rurality. It identifies whether parcels display characteristics of open countryside or are influenced by adjacent development and urbanising features.

A proportionate review of the visual context is also undertaken to understand how parcels are experienced. This includes consideration of visibility from publicly accessible locations, the degree of enclosure or containment, and the relationship between parcels and surrounding built form.

Particular emphasis is given to openness, recognising both its spatial and visual dimensions. Spatial openness relates to the presence, scale, and distribution of built form and the degree of physical enclosure. Visual openness relates to the perception of openness, including the extent of views, skyline characteristics, and the influence of screening. These factors are considered together to form a balanced judgement on the extent to which a parcel maintains a sense of openness.

This assessment does not constitute a full LVIA and does not include detailed viewpoint testing, visualisations, or quantitative assessment of effects. Its purpose is to inform a comparative and strategic judgement of Green Belt performance.

A.5 Limitations and Assumptions

The landscape and visual components of this Green Belt Review are based on available mapping, aerial imagery, published studies, and site surveys undertaken from publicly accessible locations. Visibility and perceptual qualities may vary depending on seasonal conditions and vegetation cover.

The methodology provides a comparative assessment of existing conditions and does not assess detailed development proposals or predict likely effects arising from specific schemes.

A.6 Consultation

Relevant consultation and stakeholder input have been considered, where available, to inform understanding of landscape character, visual amenity, and local context.

A.7 Spatial Scope and Visual Context

The landscape and visual components of this Green Belt Review consider each parcel within its immediate and wider context, including its relationship with surrounding settlements, infrastructure, and the wider countryside.

Visibility is established through a proportionate combination of desk study and field survey to determine whether parcels are visually contained, partially visible, or widely exposed. Consideration is given to views from public rights of way, highways, and settlement edges, sufficient to understand how each parcel is experienced and how it contributes to the perception of openness.

Detailed modelling or technical visibility mapping is not required; emphasis is placed on practical observation and professional interpretation.

A.8 Sensitivity

Sensitivity is determined by bringing together two separate judgements: how important a landscape or view is (value) and how capable it is of accommodating change (susceptibility).

Value reflects the importance or worth of the landscape or view. In a Green Belt context, this relates to how strongly the area contributes to openness, rural character, and separation between settlements, as well as any natural, cultural, or recreational qualities.

Susceptibility reflects the ability of that landscape or view to accommodate development without unacceptable harm. It considers factors such as openness, scale, enclosure, existing urban influence, and the degree of change.

Sensitivity is informed by existing published documents, including national and local LCAs, and is used to inform, but not determine, overall conclusions, with primary emphasis placed on the parcel's role in maintaining openness and Green Belt function.

Sensitivity is expressed using a five-point scale derived from the combination of value and susceptibility. This provides a clear and consistent way to describe how sensitive a landscape or visual receptor is to change:

Level	Description
Very High	Receptors of the greatest importance that are highly susceptible to change. Development would result in substantial adverse effects and is unlikely to be appropriate.
High	Receptors of high importance with limited ability to accommodate change. Development may lead to notable adverse effects and would require careful consideration.
Medium	Receptors of moderate value and/or susceptibility. Some change may be accommodated, typically with mitigation, without fundamentally altering character or views.
Low	Receptors of lower value and/or low susceptibility. Development can generally be accommodated with limited effects.
Very Low	Receptors of minimal value and very low susceptibility. These areas can accommodate change with little or no noticeable effect.

Table A-1 - Sensitivity Scale

A.9 Evaluation of Contribution to Green Belt Purposes

The landscape and visual components of this Green Belt Review bring together landscape character, visual context, and openness to form an overall judgement of how each parcel contributes to Green Belt purposes, including:

Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

Preventing settlement coalescence; and

Maintaining openness and a recognisable sense of rural character.

The overall performance rating is derived from a balanced professional judgement of these factors, considering both the physical characteristics of the parcel and how it is perceived within the wider landscape.

Appendix B. Glossary of Terms

Definitions of the following terms used throughout this document are provided for ease of reference.

Term	Definition
Baseline	The term refers to the current landscape and visual environment, including expected changes, legislative and planning context, and relevant guidance.
Designated Landscape	Area(s) of land identified as being of importance at international, national or local levels, either defined by statute or identified in a development plan or other documents.
Development	Any proposal that results in a change to the landscape and/or visual environment.
Element	Individual parts which make up the landscape, for example, trees, hedgerows or buildings.
Feature	Prominent or eye-catching elements in the landscape, such as wooded skylines, parkland trees, church spires, or a particular aspect of the Scheme.
Key characteristic	The combination of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.
Land cover	This term relates to the surface cover of the land and is usually expressed in terms of vegetation cover or lack thereof.
Land use	This term refers to what land is used for and is based on broad categories such as urban, industrial, agriculture or forestry.
Landform	The shape and form of the land surface resulting from combinations of geology, geomorphology, slope, elevation and physical processes.
Landscape character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.
Landscape Character Area (LCA)	Single unique areas, which are discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.
Landscape Character Assessment	The process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape and using this information to assist in managing change in the landscape.
Landscape Character Type (LCT)	Distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes.
Landscape quality / condition	A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which the character typical of the area is represented in

Term	Definition
	individual locations, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
Landscape receptor	The constituent features and elements of the landscape, its specific or perceptual qualities and its character considered in relation to the proposal.
Landscape value	The relative value that is attached to landscapes by society, which may vary depending on the nature of the stakeholder.

Table B-1 - Glossary of Terms

Appendix C. Landscape Character Map

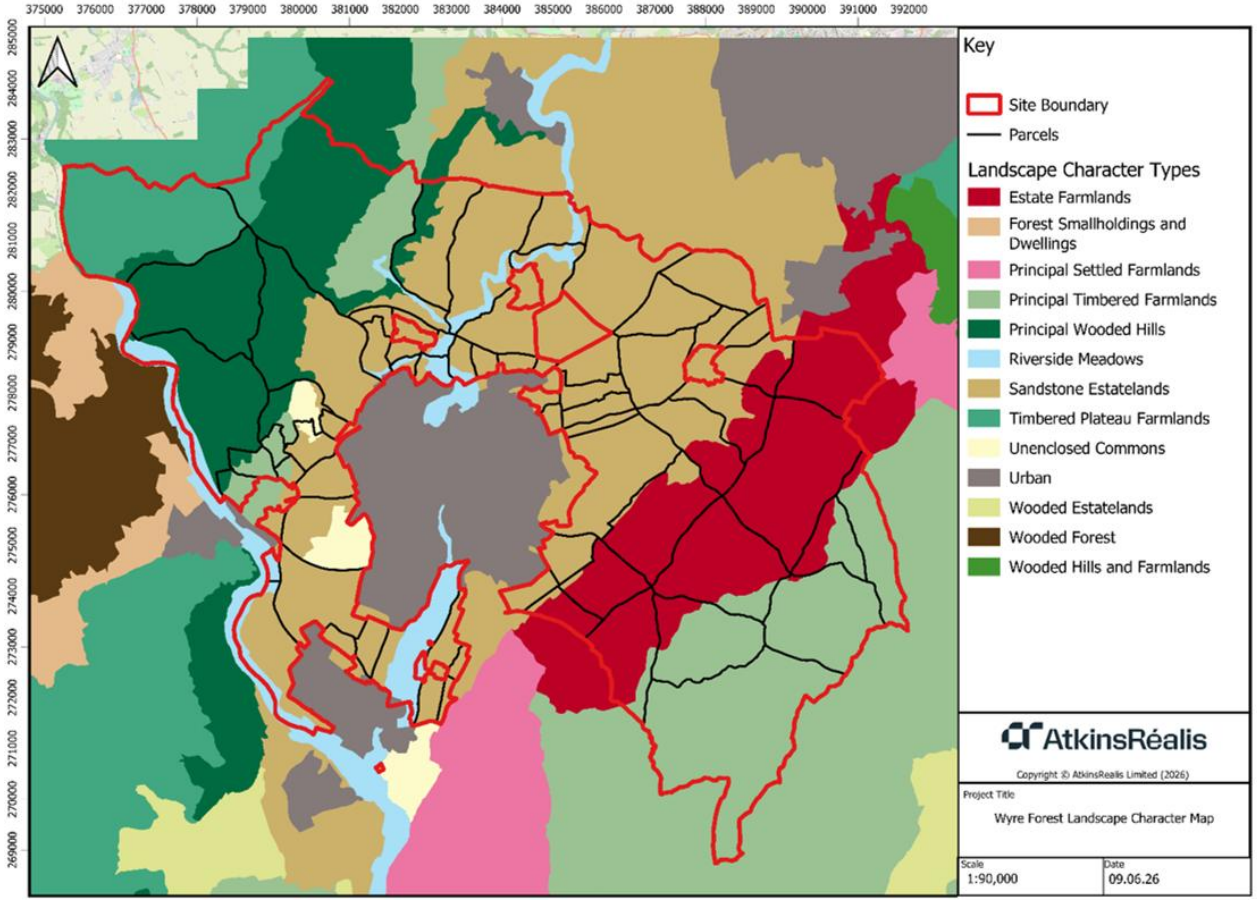

Figure C-1 - Landscape Character Map

Appendix D. Landscape Constraints Plan

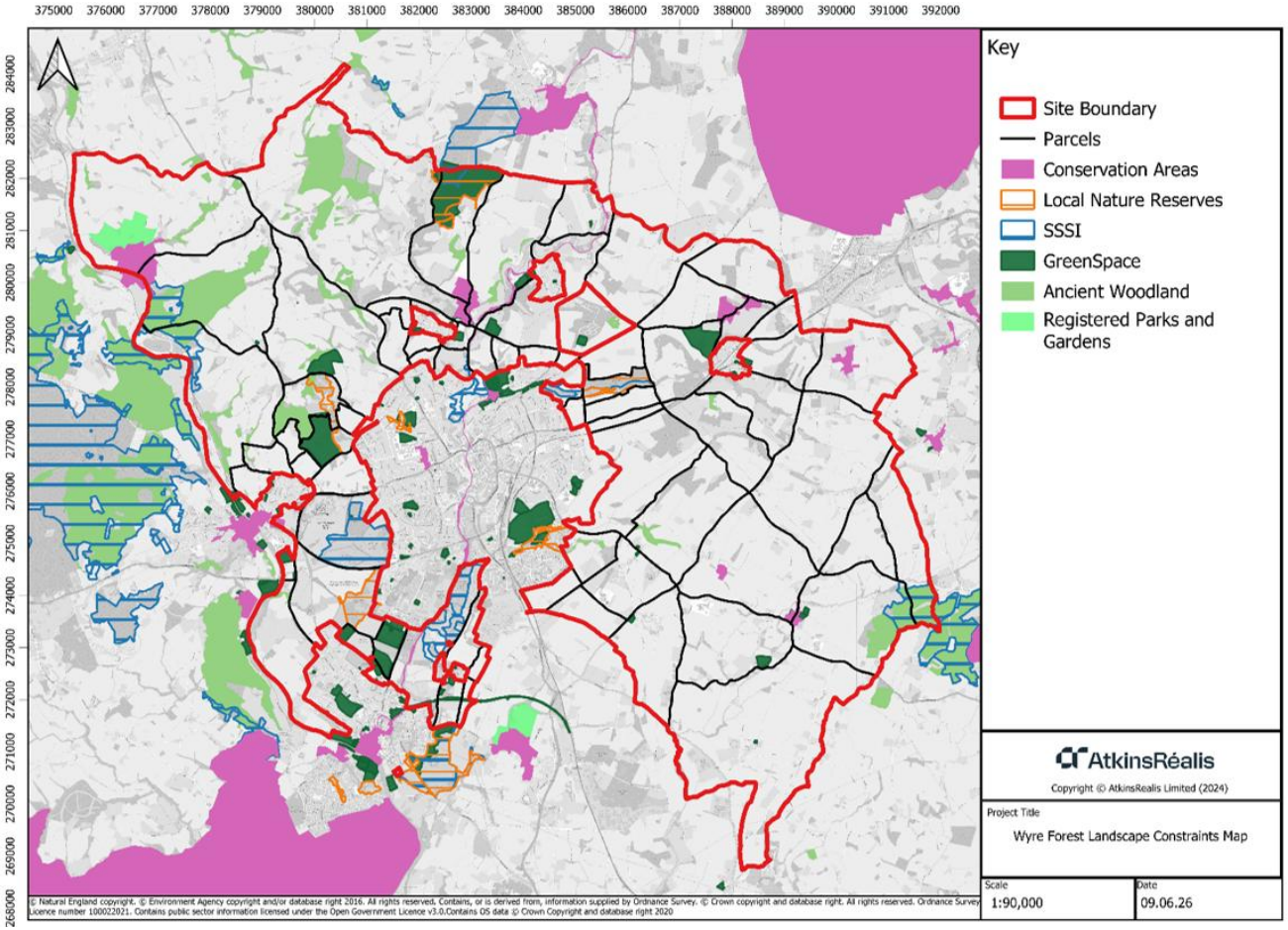

Figure D-1 - Landscape Constraints Plan

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