

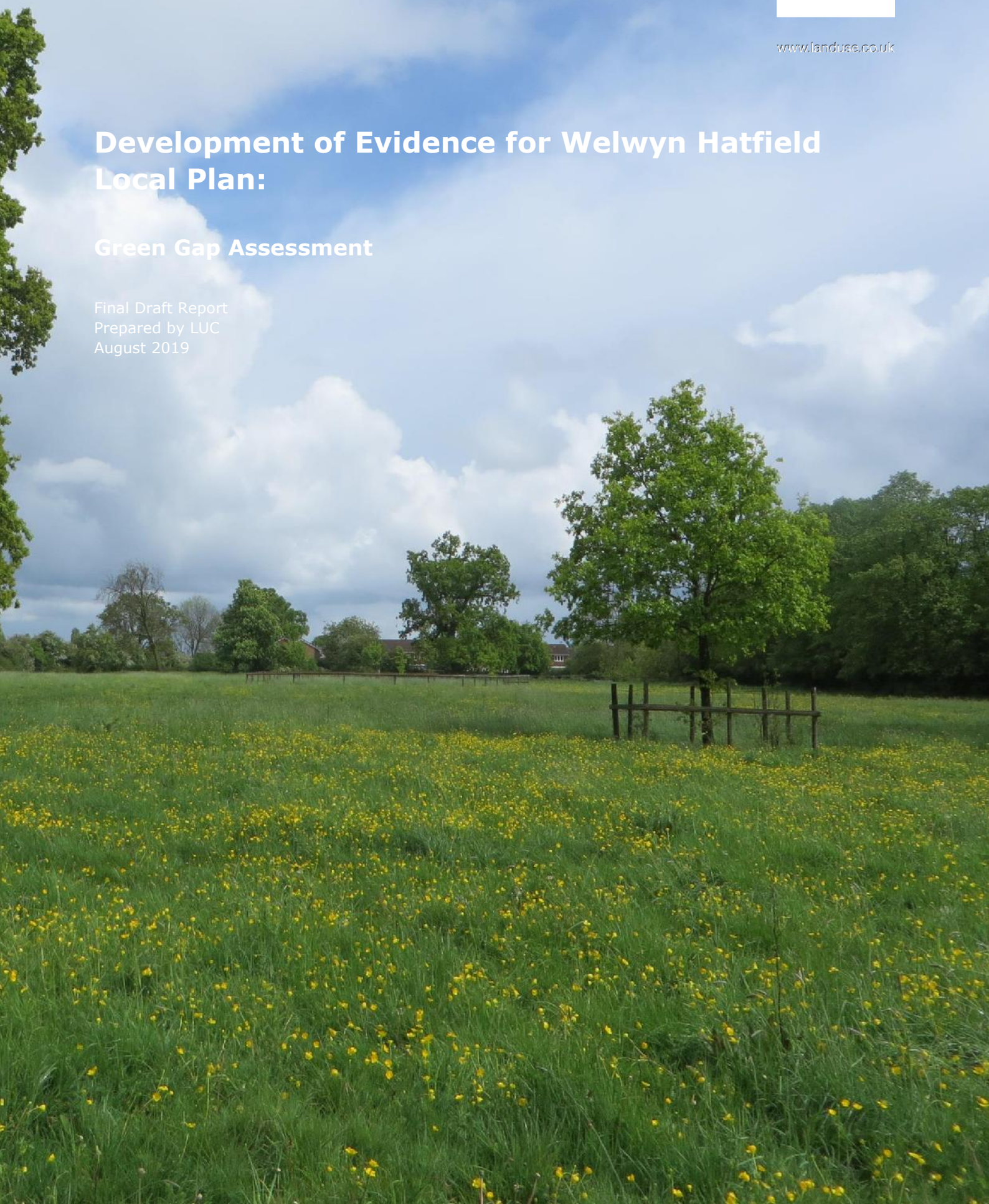


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Development of Evidence for Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan:

Green Gap Assessment

Final Draft Report
Prepared by LUC
August 2019



Project Title: Development of Evidence for Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan: Green Gap Assessment

Client: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
V1	23/5/2019	1st draft report setting out method	R Swann R Knight	R Swann	R Knight
V2	26/5/2019	2 nd draft report – amendments to method & inclusion of assessments	R Knight I King A Knight V Roberts E White	I King	R Knight
V3	23/7/2019	Final draft report – incorporating client comments	R Knight	R Swann	R Knight
V4	1/8/2019	Final draft report – incorporating additional client comments	R Knight	R Swann	R Knight
V5	22/8/2019	Final draft report with amendments	R Knight	R Swann	R Knight
V6	29/8/2019	Final draft report with final amendments	R Knight	R Swann	R Knight



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Planning & EIA
Design
Landscape Planning
Landscape Management
Ecology
GIS & Visualisation

LUC LONDON
43 Chalton Street
London
NW1 1JD
T +44 (0)20 7383 5784
london@landuse.co.uk

Offices also in:
Bristol
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Lancaster
Manchester



Land Use Consultants Ltd
Registered in England
Registered number: 2549296
Registered Office:
43 Chalton Street
London NW1 1JD
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

Contents

1	Introduction	1
	Project Aim	1
	Background and Policy Context	1
	Scope and terminology	2
2	Methodology	4
	Identification of candidate areas for assessment	4
	Method of Assessment for each Candidate Area	5
	Limitations	7
3	Settlement Gap Assessments	8
4	Overall Conclusions and Recommendations	117
	Overall conclusions	117
Appendix 1		132
	Supporting Maps for each Settlement Gap Assessment	132
Appendix 2		133
	A potential policy approach for Welwyn Hatfield	133
Appendix 3		136
	Examples of policy approaches elsewhere	136
	Local Plan policies at Examination	136
	Appeal decisions	140
Appendix 4		142
	Glossary	142

1 Introduction

Project Aim

- 1.1 The aim of the green gap study is to review land between settlements and provide an evidence base on the role gaps play by providing a sense of separation in maintaining settlement pattern and character, and the impact development might have on that role.
- 1.2 The report is not intended to prevent development, but to inform the planning of development (including informing the site allocations for the Local Plan), and to provide guidance to minimise the impact of future development on gaps between settlements.
- 1.3 It is worth noting that the sense of separation provided between settlements relates to the character of the gap as well as its size. Small gaps can be effective in maintaining settlement separation if they have a rural character and provide a sense of separation, perhaps as a result of a distinct topography, presence of vegetation which limits inter-visibility between the settlements, or containing a distinct landscape feature. On the other hand, large gaps may not be effective if they have a suburban character, or lack vegetation and have clear inter-visibility between the settlements, and lack any other features that might provide a sense of separation such as a distinct topographical or landscape feature.

Background and Policy Context

- 1.4 There are no policies relating to gaps between settlements in the currently adopted District Plan¹ or the emerging Local Plan². However, both identify a desire to maintain the existing settlement pattern whilst the draft Local Plan also makes reference to the prevention of coalescence.
- 1.5 The adopted District Plan states (at paragraph 4.2):

"The district's settlement pattern is characterised by a number of medium sized towns and villages, situated along main road and railway routes radiating northwards from London and separated by narrow bands of countryside. In addition, there are a number of small villages and sporadic ribbon developments within the countryside, which are generally in more isolated, less accessible locations. It is this settlement pattern which gives the district its unique qualities and should be preserved."

The draft Local Plan states (at paragraph 3.2) a strategic objective:

"To provide for the borough's development needs over the plan period, in a form which maintains the existing settlement pattern, protects areas of highest environmental value, prevents coalescence of our towns and villages and releases a limited amount of land from the Green Belt to ensure that its boundaries will not need reviewing before 2032."
- 1.6 The adopted District Plan identifies the Green Belt as *"one of the main policy tools for maintaining this pattern and ensuring urban concentration"* and recognises that the Green Belt in Welwyn Hatfield Borough exerts a strong restraint on urban expansion.
- 1.7 National Green Belt policy has a stated intention of preventing the sprawl of large built-up areas. The policy wording³ focuses on preventing the merger of towns and does not mention villages, although it does refer to Green Belt assisting in safeguarding countryside from encroachment. Nevertheless, Green Belt is a strategic designation and comments made by the Inspector at and

¹ Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005

² Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission 2016

³ Paragraph 134, National Planning Policy Framework 2019

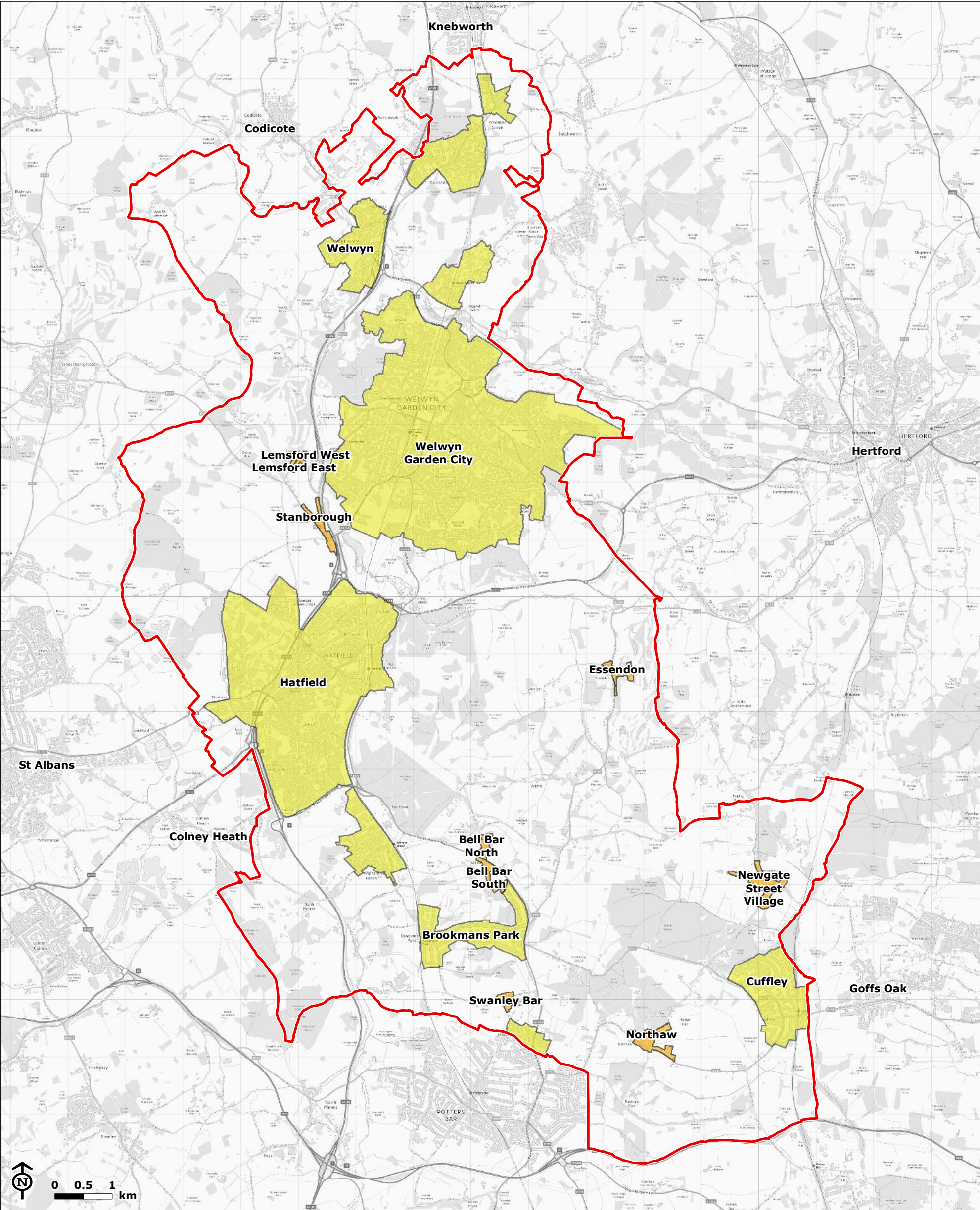
following the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan examination sessions in 2018⁴ questioned the role of Green Belt in performing a 'local purpose' of maintaining the existing settlement pattern. The Inspector noted that the protection of the settlement pattern is not a statutory purpose of the Green Belt and suggested that it might be appropriate for the Council to consider specific designations⁵ to provide protection for open breaks between settlements rather than to rely on Green Belt policy.

Scope and terminology

- 1.8 This study aims to provide evidence to inform the location of site allocations (that minimise impacts on settlement separation), as well as to inform a potential future policy on gaps to maintain the separation of settlements. To inform the latter, this study identifies potential 'gap policy areas' in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration. These policy areas may be refined once sites have been allocated as part of the emerging Local Plan.
- 1.9 The study also identifies areas that have higher landscape sensitivity, important biodiversity/ ecological sites or linkages and other environmental designations that are likely to reinforce the case for keeping land open.
- 1.10 The assessment applies to the medium sized towns and villages that are referenced in the adopted District Plan paragraph 4.2 (i.e. the 'specified settlements' in the adopted local plan) as well as the villages currently 'washed over' by Green Belt but that could potentially be inset as part of the emerging Local Plan process.
- 1.11 The study also considers areas between the settlements within the Borough and those located outside the Borough boundary, as far as it is able (acknowledging the lack of data beyond the Borough boundary).
- 1.12 The relevant settlements are shown in **Figure 1.1: Relevant settlements**.
- 1.13 A glossary of terms is provided in **Appendix 4**.

⁴ References in the December 2017 Inspector's note (Examination library reference EX39) and Letter from Inspector to WHBC on 24/10/18 (Examination library reference EX91B).

⁵ The term 'green breaks/ wedges' was used by the Inspector.



- Welwyn Hatfield Boundary
- Specified settlement
- Village potentially to be inset from Green Belt

Development of Evidence for
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan:
Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Figure 1.1: Settlements



Source: LUC, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Map Scale @A3: 1:65,000

2 Methodology

Identification of candidate areas for assessment

- 2.1 The first stage was to consider which areas require assessment. The areas between the specified settlements in the adopted local plan were all included. In addition, areas between the specified settlements and the nearest settlements outside the Borough boundary were assessed, as were the areas between specified settlements and washed over villages that have potential for insetting (as identified in the Green Belt study), and between the proposed new settlement of Symonsdhyde and nearest specified settlements. The list is as follows:

Areas between specified settlements

- 2.2 The areas between the 'specified settlements' in the adopted local plan are:

- Between Woolmer Green and Oaklands;
- Between Oaklands and Welwyn;
- Between Oaklands and Digswell;
- Between Welwyn and Digswell;
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Welwyn;
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell;
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield;
- Between Hatfield and Welham Green;
- Between Welham Green and Brookmans Park;
- Between Brookmans Park and Little Heath (NB this is covered by the areas between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar, and between Swanley Bar and Little Heath below).

Areas between specified settlements and settlements outside the Borough boundary

- 2.3 The following areas between 'specified settlements' within Welwyn Hatfield and settlements outside Borough boundary were also assessed:

- Between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire);
- Between Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire);
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire);
- Between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire);
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire);
- Between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans);
- Between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne);
- Between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield);
- Between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire).

Areas between specified settlements and potential inset villages

- 2.4 In addition the following villages currently 'washed-over' by the Green Belt but with potential to be inset from the Green Belt as part of the Local Plan process (as set out in the 2019 Green Belt

Assessment), were also considered. These are Lemsford, Stanborough, Bell Bar, Swanley Bar, Newgate Street, Northaw and Essendon. The following gaps between these and the specified settlements are included in the assessment:

- Between Welwyn Garden City, Lemsford and Stanborough;
- Between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park;
- Between Swanley Bar and Little Heath;
- Between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park;
- Between Newgate Street and Cuffley;
- Between Northaw and Cuffley;
- Between Little Heath and Northaw.

2.5 Essendon was considered too remote from the other settlements to need assessing.

Potential gaps between the new settlement of Symondshyde and other settlements

2.6 If the new settlement of Symondshyde goes ahead this would create the following new gaps, which were also assessed:

- Between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead; and
- Between Symondshyde and Hatfield.

Method of Assessment for each Candidate Area

2.7 There is currently no prescribed method for assessing green gaps. The method of assessment used for this study drew on the brief, as well as comments made by the Inspector at and following the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan examination sessions in 2018, and our own research on approaches taken in other Local Authority areas (**Appendix 3**).

2.8 For each candidate area, the following stages were followed (noting that, for areas between settlements where one settlement is outside the Borough, the assessment focussed on land within the Borough).

Identifying Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

2.9 The settlements to which the assessment relates were described in terms of their origins, character and form to provide information about the identity of the relevant settlements.

Recording Gap Size, Character and Strength

2.10 The assessment considered each gap in terms of:

- The size of the area between settlements and whether the current physical separation is sufficient at present to prevent coalescence;
- The character of the gap including its landscape elements, topography, and whether the two settlements retain separate identities;
- Whether the visual separation is sufficient to maintain the perception of leaving one settlement and travelling to another of different character (on footpaths or roads).

2.11 The appraisal also reviewed existing planning permissions (GIS data on planning permissions was supplied by Welwyn Hatfield Council on 10th June 2019) to see whether there are any major developments within the areas between settlements.

Reviewing Landscape sensitivity

2.12 Review of landscape sensitivity within the settlement gaps was undertaken to consider whether this reinforces the case for keeping the land open (undeveloped).

- 2.13 The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019) provides ratings and guidance regarding key landscape sensitivities. This section of the assessment recorded:
- A brief description of landscape character and the strategy for the area (from the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment⁶);
 - A description of which sub-areas are relevant to the gap;
 - The level of sensitivity assigned to the area with reasons why;
 - The key sensitivities associated with the area that are highlighted in the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment.

Analysing Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological and Cultural Heritage Designations and Habitat Networks

- 2.14 Review of environmental designations (both national and local level ecological and cultural heritage designations) and priority habitats was undertaken to understand the values associated with the gap (as this evidence could reinforce the case for keeping the land open/ undeveloped).
- 2.15 The information on habitat networks from Natural England and mapping and from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's Ecological Mapping was also be used to identify opportunities for enhancements to the landscape within the gap and creating links between assets within the gap through positive management.

Analysing Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

- 2.16 Review of recreational features within the gap (including public rights of way, cycle paths, outdoor sports facilities, open access land/ registered common land, allotments, amenity green space, LAPs - Local Areas for Play, LEAPs - Locally Equipped Areas for Play and NEAPs - Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play) was undertaken to provide an indication of the value of the area for recreation. The assessment also considered the potential for improved recreational use and accessibility to the countryside (focussing on potential opportunity, not the practicality of achieving this).

Analysis of Pressure on the Gap

- 2.17 This section considered what pressures are on the land between the two settlements through review of draft allocations and sites that have been promoted through the Council's 2019 Call for Sites. This included a brief comment on what the implication for the integrity and strength of the relevant gap, or separation of the two settlements, would be if the draft allocations and promoted sites were to be released for development.

Field Verification

- 2.18 Field checking was undertaken to test and refine the outputs from the desk study. The field check was undertaken from roads and public rights of way.

Summary and Recommendations for each area

- 2.19 The information reported above was analysed for each gap to determine whether a policy area was warranted in order to achieve the primary objective (i.e. to maintain the Borough's settlement pattern). The analysis considered whether there are other characteristics that would reinforce the case for keeping the land open.
- 2.20 Where a policy area was recommended, suggestions were made regarding its location and extent (which was also mapped), and a list of aims/ recommendations is provided that should be followed within that policy area with the aim of maintaining the separation of settlements.

⁶ Welwyn Hatfield Council and Hertfordshire County Council (2005) Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment

Limitations

- 2.21 This is a strategic-level study undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000. More detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) should inform site layouts and accompany planning applications for the development of any specific site.

3 Settlement Gap Assessments

- 3.1 The settlement gap assessments are provided over the following pages, accompanied by key maps and photos. Additional maps for each gap area are included at **Appendix 1**.

Between specified settlements within the Borough:

Area between Woolmer Green and Oaklands
Area between Welwyn, Oaklands and Digswell
Area between Welwyn, Welwyn Garden City and Digswell
Area between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield
Area between Hatfield and Welham Green
Area between Welham Green and Brookmans Park

Between specified settlements and settlements outside the Borough boundary:

Area between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire)
Area between Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire)
Area between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire)
Area between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire)
Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)
Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire)
Area between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans)
Area between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne)
Area between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield)
Area between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire)

Between specified settlements and potential inset villages:

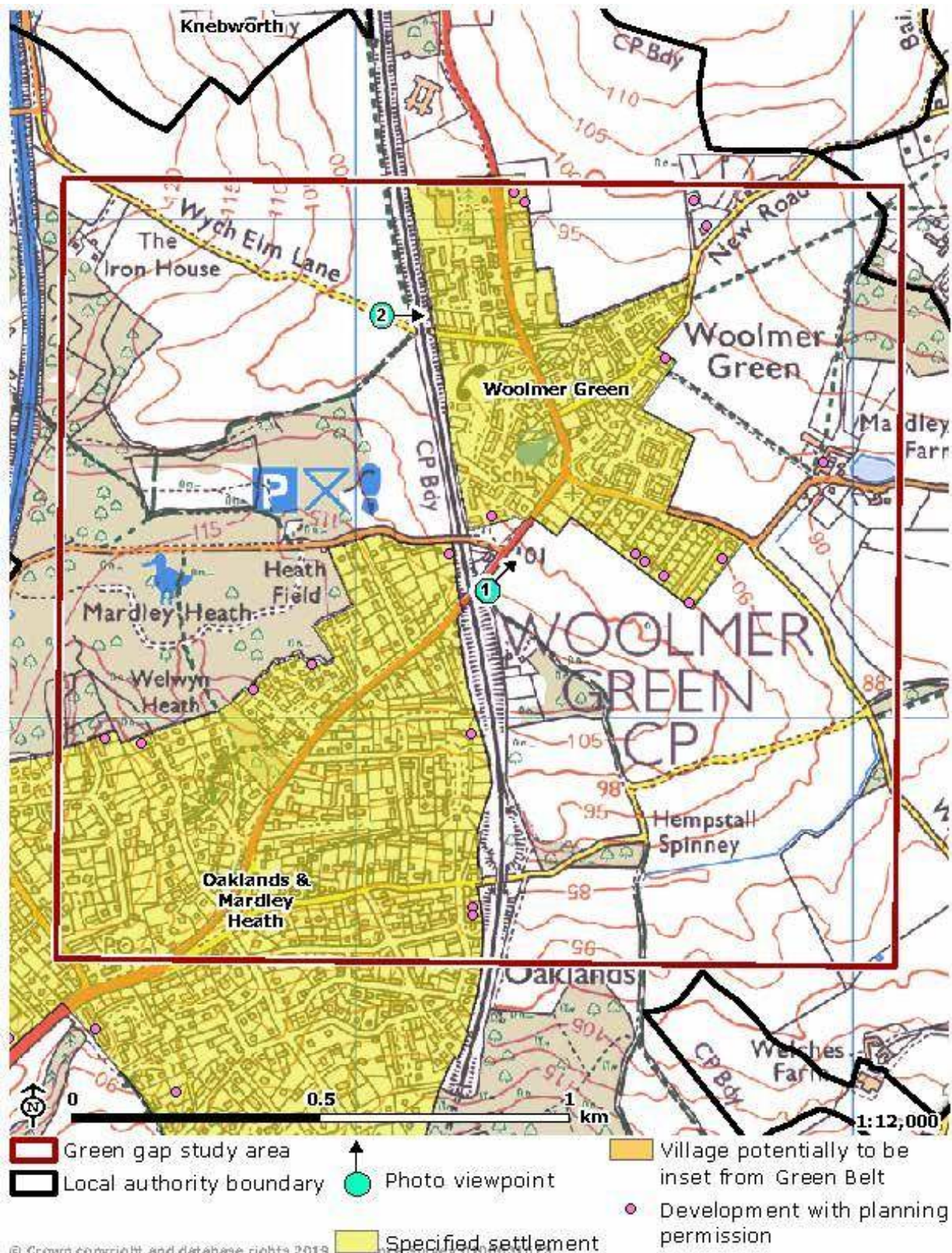
Area between Lemsford, Stanborough and Welwyn Garden City
Area between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park
Area between Brookmans Park, Swanley Bar and Little Heath
Area between Newgate Street and Cuffley
Area between Northaw and Cuffley
Area between Little Heath and Northaw

Between the new settlement of Symondshyde and other settlements

Area between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead (St Albans)
Area between Symondshyde and Hatfield

Area between Woolmer Green and Oaklands

Map 1: Gap area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Woolmer Green is a nucleated village that grew up around the junction of two thoroughfares, the Great North Road and Stane Street (or Stone Street) from St Albans. The village expanded with the building of the railway in the 1850s (although the nearest station is at Knebworth), and there has been further 20th century expansion. Its western extent is marked by the railway line.

Oaklands is a small town which grew in the 20th century on former common and heath land, which is still in evidence at Mardley Heath. The town lies wholly to the west of the railway line, edges defined by the motorway to the west, railway to the east and woodland to the north and south.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Woolmer Green and Oaklands is extremely small, being only 40m from settlement edge to settlement edge, although the railway line (in a slight cutting) and its lineside vegetation does provide a physical boundary between them. There is, however, some inter-visibility between the two settlements.

The gap between the settlements increases to 220m-400m to the south of London Road, where large arable fields and small blocks of woodland provide a sense of space between Woolmer Green and Oaklands.

The B197 enables travel directly between the two settlements. Crossing over the railway provides an impression of passing into a different settlement, helped by signs introducing the settlements. Bridleways on the edges of the area enable an appreciation of the open land between the two settlements.

There are no major planning permissions in the gap, but it is vulnerable to being eroded, and even closed, by relatively modest amounts of development, albeit the railway line will continue to provide some element of separation.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows that the area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 37 'Datchworth Settled Slopes'. This is an area of undulating open arable farmland and woodland. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and conserve' the landscape.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 37 is divided into two areas with sub-area 37a comprising the majority of land between Woolmer Green and Oaklands.

The landscape sensitivity assessment notes that the landscape provides a strong rural setting to Woolmer Green, and is important in retaining distinction between the west of Woolmer Green and the northern edge of Oaklands.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-areas 37a and 37b are both described as **moderate-high**. For 37a this is because the sloping open landform and limited hedgerow boundaries provide visual prominence and provision of setting to Woolmer Green. For 37b this is because of the remote rural character and tree cover providing a strong settlement edge to Oaklands. Both sub-areas are impacted by the railway line, and 37a by the presence of the A1(M) as well as the urban influence of Woolmer Green.

The key sensitivities, relevant to this area, are:

- Sloping land which has high inter-visibility with existing settlement.
- Local Wildlife Sites, both within the area and adjacent.
- The rural setting of Woolmer Green and Oaklands.
- Features of ecological interest including remaining hedgerows and areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland.
- Rural agricultural character of the visually prominent slopes.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Mardley Heath, on the edge of the area, is a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site as well as containing priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient woodland.

There are also some other local wildlife sites a little further afield, for example at Robbery Bottom Lane Railway Embankment, Hempstall Spinney and Harmergreen Wood lies to the south of the area (also ancient woodland).

There are no areas mapped for habitat network enhancement zones by Natural England. However, the Herts Ecological Network data indicates that much of the area between Woolmer Green and Oaklands is a high priority for habitat creation, particularly for acidic open or deciduous woodland. There could be an opportunity in this area to create additional habitats of this type, as well as to enhance the hedgerow network through replanting missing hedgerows, and to plant additional copses and link these to the woodland network around Mardley Heath and Hempstall Spinney.

There are no cultural heritage designations within the gap, although there are grade II listed buildings on the edge of Woolmer Green (within the settlement boundary) including the Church of St Michael and All Angels, and the War Memorial. There are areas of Archaeological Significance south of Robbery Bottom Lane and east of Harmergreen Wood.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There are public rights of way (bridleways) which run from the northern edge of Oaklands through Mardley Heath to Woolmer Green, and between London Road and Robbery Bottom Lane. The Hertfordshire Circular Cycle path runs along White horse Lane near to Woolmer Green.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There are no draft allocations within the gap, although there is one proposed to the north east of Woolmer Green.

Two promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites have been received for adjacent plots on land north of Heath Road, to the west of the railway line. If these two sites were to be developed this would erode the rural settings of, and increase inter-visibility between, the two sites (unless substantial landscape treatment was employed).

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

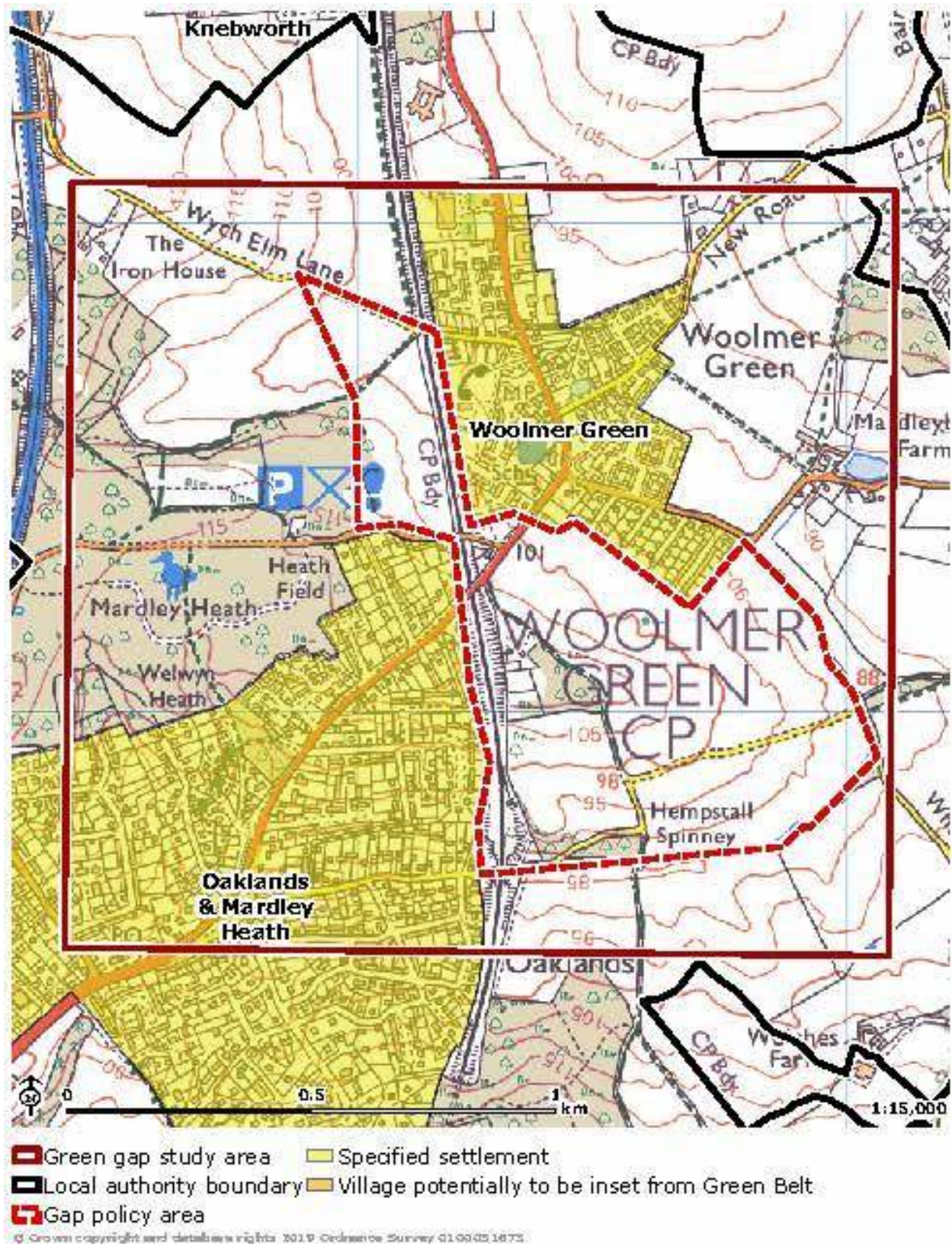
Summary and Recommendations

The gap between these two settlements is very small at its closest point, being only just over 40m. Nevertheless the two settlements do have separate identities as a result of their different histories/ character, different topographies (one on high ground, one on low) and the presence of the railway line that runs between them. They also both retain a rural setting.

Since there is a physical gap either side of the railway line, the identification of a 'gap policy area' in this location could assist in maintaining different settlement identities. Such an area is illustrated on Map 2. Within this policy area the aims should be to:

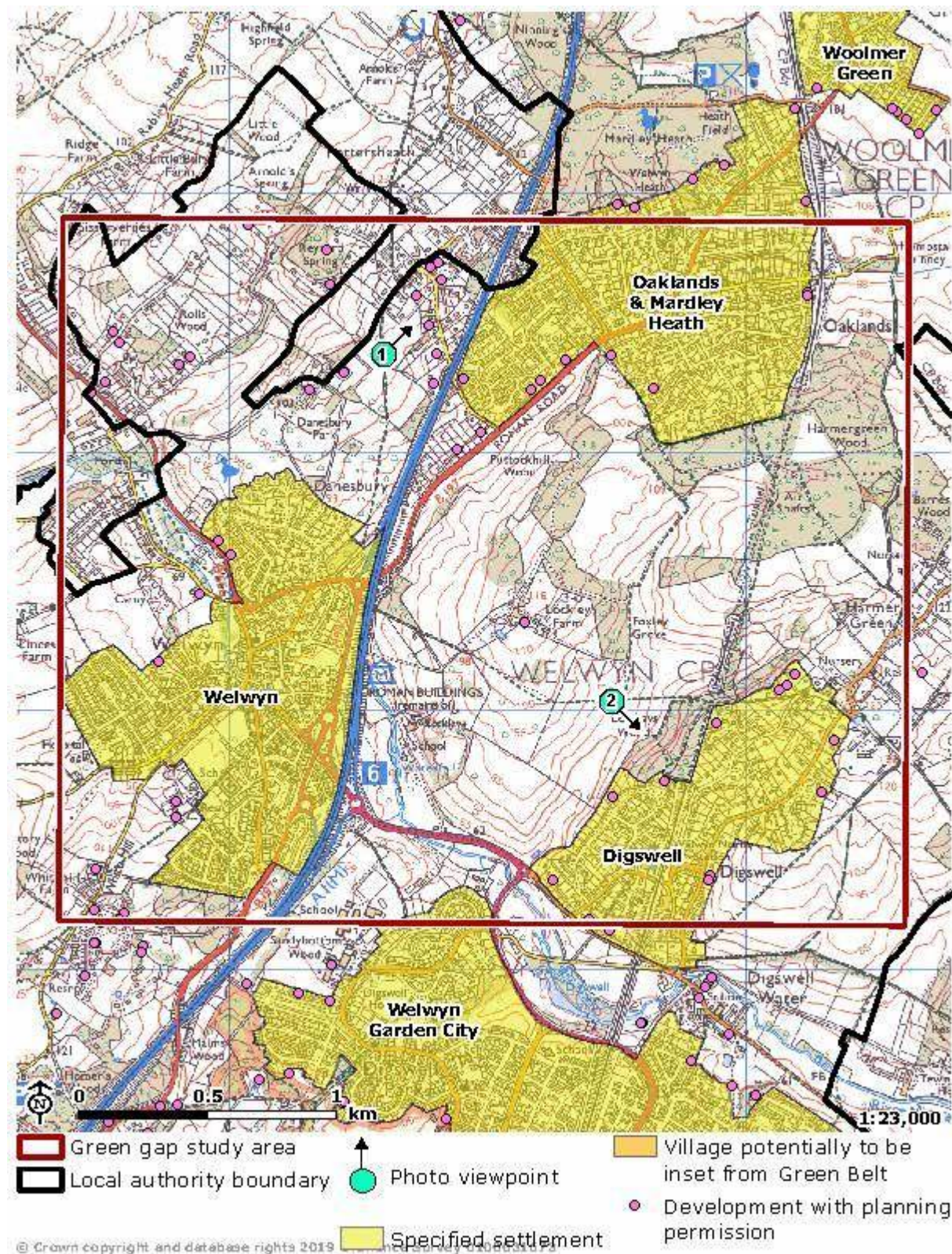
- Ensure that the two settlements remain visually separate and ensure there is no greater inter-visibility between the two than exists at present – topography and planting can be used to screen development;
- Maintain a rural setting to both settlements and seek opportunities to strengthen the existing hedgerow network and plant more trees, including extending and linking deciduous woodlands and heathland restoration;
- Keep development away from the higher and visually prominent slopes surrounding Woolmer Green;
- Maintain public access to the area and seek opportunities for further connections.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Oaklands, Welwyn and Digswell

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Oaklands is a nucleated small town which grew in the 20th century on former common and heath land, which is still in evidence at Mardley Heath.

Welwyn is a large nucleated village that stands on the River. Its position on the Great North Road meant it became a staging post for a number of coaching inns in the 17th century. The railway bypassed the village, but the 20th century has seen enlargement due to the building of estates to the south, west and north of the village.

Digswell village is mentioned in the Domesday book. The village has expanded to the northeast and is a primarily 20th century residential area, centered on the Welwyn North Railway Station.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

Welwyn and Oaklands: The 'gap' between the settlement edges of Oaklands and Welwyn is 600m and the A1(M), mostly bordered by trees, forms a strong physical and visual barrier within this gap. The gap comprises fields with a 'parkland' character (linked to Danesbury Park) and woodland which provides visual separation between the two settlements. However, there is scattered residential and commercial development between the A1(M) and B197 which intrudes into the gap, reducing the perception of a gap particularly when travelling on the B197 between Oaklands and Welwyn. There is no direct footpath between the two settlements, but footpath 039 traverses the parkland that forms part of the gap. The gap could be eroded by further new built development, or intensification of existing development, in the area between the two settlements.

Welwyn and Digswell: The A1(M) defines the eastern edge of Welwyn, beyond which is a prominent ridge that physically and visually separates Welwyn from Digswell (the settlements are 1km apart). The ridge is characterised by fields, parkland and woodland and contains Sherrardswood School. The A1000 connects Welwyn and Digswell along the Mimram Valley, which provides users with the experience of travelling through undeveloped rural countryside between settlements. Footpath 038 crosses the open ridge between Welwyn and Digswell, from which the two settlements are perceived as clearly separate. The gap does not appear to be particularly vulnerable to closure at this point in time, but any development along the A1000 could change this.

Digswell and Oaklands: The gap between Digswell and Oaklands is just over 1km, comprising an undulating landscape of woodland and fields. There are no direct roads between Digswell and Oaklands, but footpath 029 which links the two settlements provides a rural experience from which the gap between the settlements can be appreciated. The gap does not appear to be particularly vulnerable to development at this point in time.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the three settlements is occupied mostly by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 42 'Tewin, Dawley and Lockley Estate Farmland'. A small area in the southwest of the gap (on the edge of Welwyn) is within LCA 36 'Upper Mimram Valley', and the area of land between Welwyn and Oaklands is within LCA 133a 'Danesbury Settled Slopes'.

The evaluation for LCA 42 is 'improve and conserve' the landscape, to 'improve and reinforce' LCA 36 and to 'restore condition to maintain character' for 133a.

The landscape sensitivity assessment divides the LCAs into sub-areas: relevant sub-areas to this area are sub-areas 42, 42a and 42b, 36a, and 133a-a lie between Oaklands, Welwyn and Digswell.

Area 42 is considered to have a **high** sensitivity due to its visually prominent strongly undulating landform with wooded slopes, remnant parkland character, the role it plays in the setting to all three settlements and the good rights of way network. The key sensitivities are:

- Rural nature of landscape.
- Parkland character and its relationship with listed Sherrardswood School.
- Open and uninterrupted views towards woodland blocks on the skyline.
- Extensive public rights of way network.

Sub-area 42a is considered to have **moderate-high** sensitivity due to its distinction from Oaklands, providing a visually prominent rural setting including woodland blocks. The key sensitivities are:

- Sloping landform.
- Uninterrupted views towards the wooded skyline.

Sub-area 42b is considered to have **moderate-high** sensitivity due to the sloping open landform, rural setting with wooded features on the skyline, historic parkland character and rights of way. The key sensitivities, associated with the gap, are:

- Prominent sloping landform.
- Uninterrupted views towards the wooded skyline.
- Historic parkland character and features of Lockleys estate.
- Extensive public rights of way network.

Sub-area 36a is considered to have **moderate** sensitivity: the separation from the settlement edge of Welwyn and intact parkland character (containing mature parkland trees and deciduous woodland) increase sensitivity while disturbances to the rural character from the road network and sports fields associated with Sherrardswood School reduce sensitivity. The key sensitivities are:

- Parkland character with mature trees, woodland and open space.
- Setting of the Dicket Mead Roman villa Scheduled Monument.

Sub-area 133a-a is considered to have **low** sensitivity where there is current development, including between the A1(M) and B197. The fields behind the development, and around Danesbury House, are considered to have **moderate** sensitivity due to the retained parkland character, historic character of Danesbury House and proximity to the Local Wildlife Site. The key sensitivities associated with the gap are:

- Woodland blocks and trees which provide habitat connection and limit visual influence of development.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a number of Local Wildlife Sites between the three settlements: Lockleys Wood Meadow, Puttockhill Wood, Foxley Grove and Hazel Grove, Lockleys Chalk Bank, Harmer Green, Lockleys Wood, Lockleys Farm Woodland, Scrub slope East of Digswell, Harmergreen Wood, Pasture North of Lockleys Wood, Pasture S of Harmergreen Wood, and Old North Road and Central Reservation, Lockleys. There are a number of Ancient Woodlands and priority habitat deciduous woodland and semi-improved grassland

within these Local Wildlife Sites.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates some areas that have potential for habitat creation, particularly between Welwyn and Digswell, and in the larger open arable fields between Digswell and Oaklands.

There are two Scheduled Monuments in the south west of the area, Dicket Mead Roman villa and Lockleys Roman villa. To the east of the Dicket Mead Roman villa site is Sherrardswood School. The main school building is Grade II* listed, and the annexe and garden wall are Grade II listed. Lockley Farm in the centre of the gap contains two Grade II listed barns. The area to the east of Welwyn forms part of the 'Welwyn Area of Archaeological Significance'

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There is a strong network of public rights of way running through the rural gap between the three settlements. There are also some outdoor sports facilities associated with Sherrardswood School in the southwest.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

Welwyn and Oaklands: Draft allocations at Four Oaks, Great North Road, Land rear of 2-12 Great North Road and 2 Great North Road (in the triangle of land between the A1(M) and B197) would intensify development in this already developed area. They would have minimal impact on the gap as it currently stands as these areas are already developed (albeit at a lower density). There are also some promoted sites from the 2019 Call for Sites on the western edge of Oaklands, west of the A1(M). If these sites were to be developed, the edge of Oaklands would move closer to Welwyn, but Danesbury Park would continue to form a break between the two settlements.

Welwyn and Digswell: There is one promoted site from the Call for Sites at Digswell Pumping Station, but otherwise no other evident pressures on this gap. This is a small site and would not close the gap between Welwyn and Digswell.

Digswell and Oaklands: There is no sign of any pressure for development on this gap.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Welwyn and Oaklands: Although the triangle of land between the A1(M) and B197 is partially developed (and subject to draft allocations to further develop/re-develop this area), there is still a sufficient gap along and to the west of the A1(M) to provide a separation between these settlements, which could be vulnerable to further pressure and it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area.

The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the presence of Danesbury Park and a number of Local Wildlife Sites and associated deciduous woodland and semi-improved grassland priority habitats.

The whole of the area between the two settlements could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements through retention of an area of rural character comprising fields with a 'parkland' character (linked to Danesbury Park) and woodland;
- Protect the grasslands and other features associated with Danesbury Park;
- Maintain a wooded boundary to the B197 to maintain a rural character despite the presence of scattered development to the west of this road; and keep the eastern boundary of the road free of development;

- Extend and link deciduous woodlands where possible;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible.

Welwyn and Digswell: There is a clear separation between these settlements currently, and while the gap does not appear to be under particular pressure at this point in time, any development along the A1000 could change this. It is therefore recommended that this area could form part of a 'gap policy area' to protect the ongoing separation of these two settlements.

The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by moderate-high landscape sensitivity on the settlement edge of Digswell and the high landscape sensitivity in the centre of the area. An Area of Archaeological Significance extends from Welwyn, and there are listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments around Sherardswood School.

The whole of the area between the two settlements could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within the aims should be to:

- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements through retention of an area of rural character comprising the Mimram Valley and bordering fields/ parkland.
- Protect the scrub (also a LWS) on the edge of Digswell;
- Maintain open fields alongside the A1000 with some views to the surrounding countryside;
- Restore, improve and extend areas of neutral grassland along the valley floor;
- Seek opportunities for public access to and across the area, including to the river.

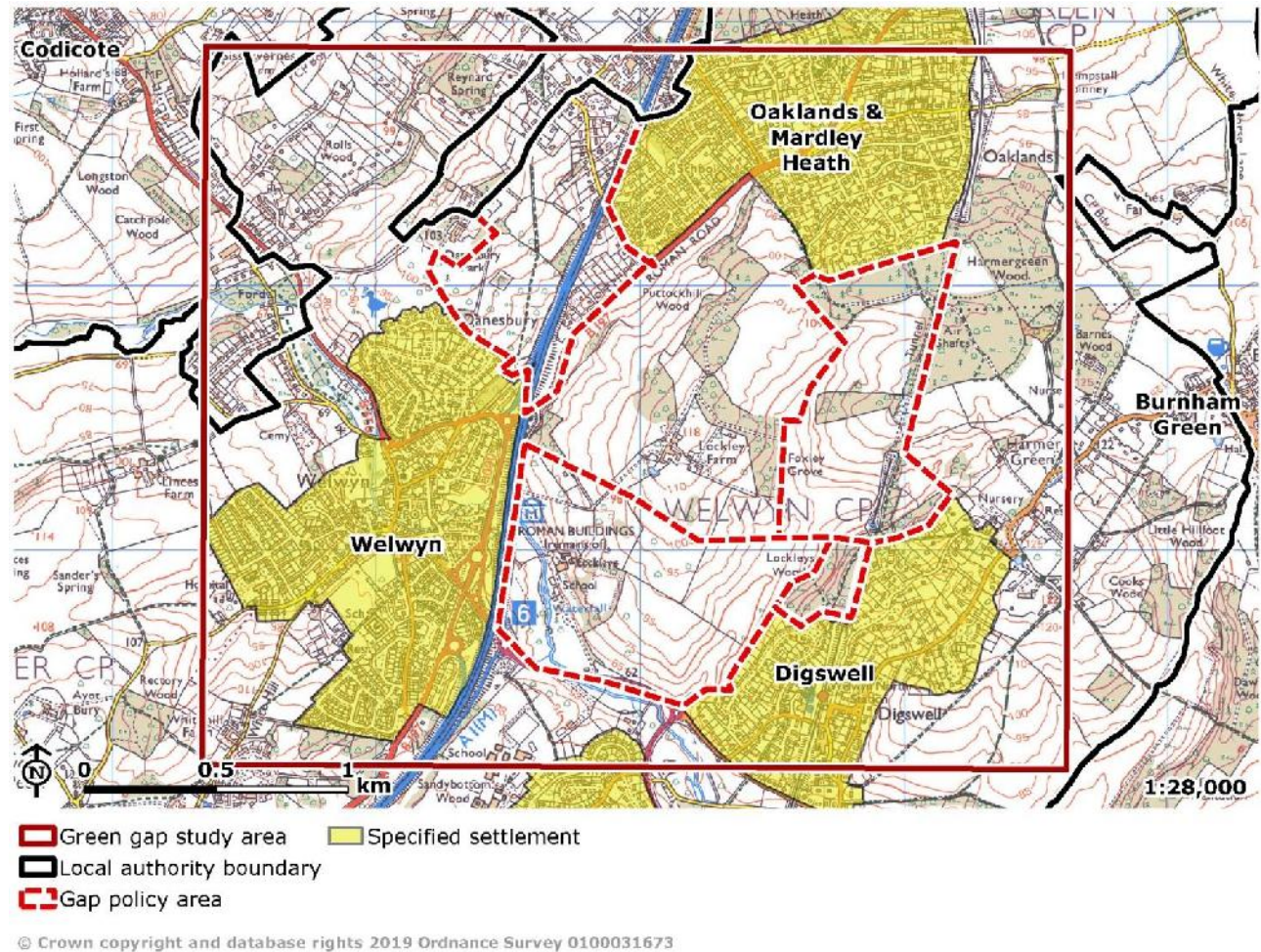
Digswell and Oaklands: There is a clear separation between these settlements currently, and while the gap does not appear to be under development pressure at this point in time, a 'gap policy area' could be introduced to protect the ongoing separation of these two settlements.

The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the high landscape sensitivity and Local Wildlife Sites with priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient woodland.

The whole of the area between the two settlements could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This is illustrated on Map 2 and within this area the aims should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of the settlements, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements through retention of an area of rural character comprising fields and woodlands with a rural character and wooded skylines;
- Protect areas of deciduous woodland and extend where possible to link habitats;
- Restore, improve and extend areas of neutral grassland where possible; and
- Seek opportunities for public access to and across the area (there is a disused railway in this area which may have potential for future pedestrian/ cycle access).

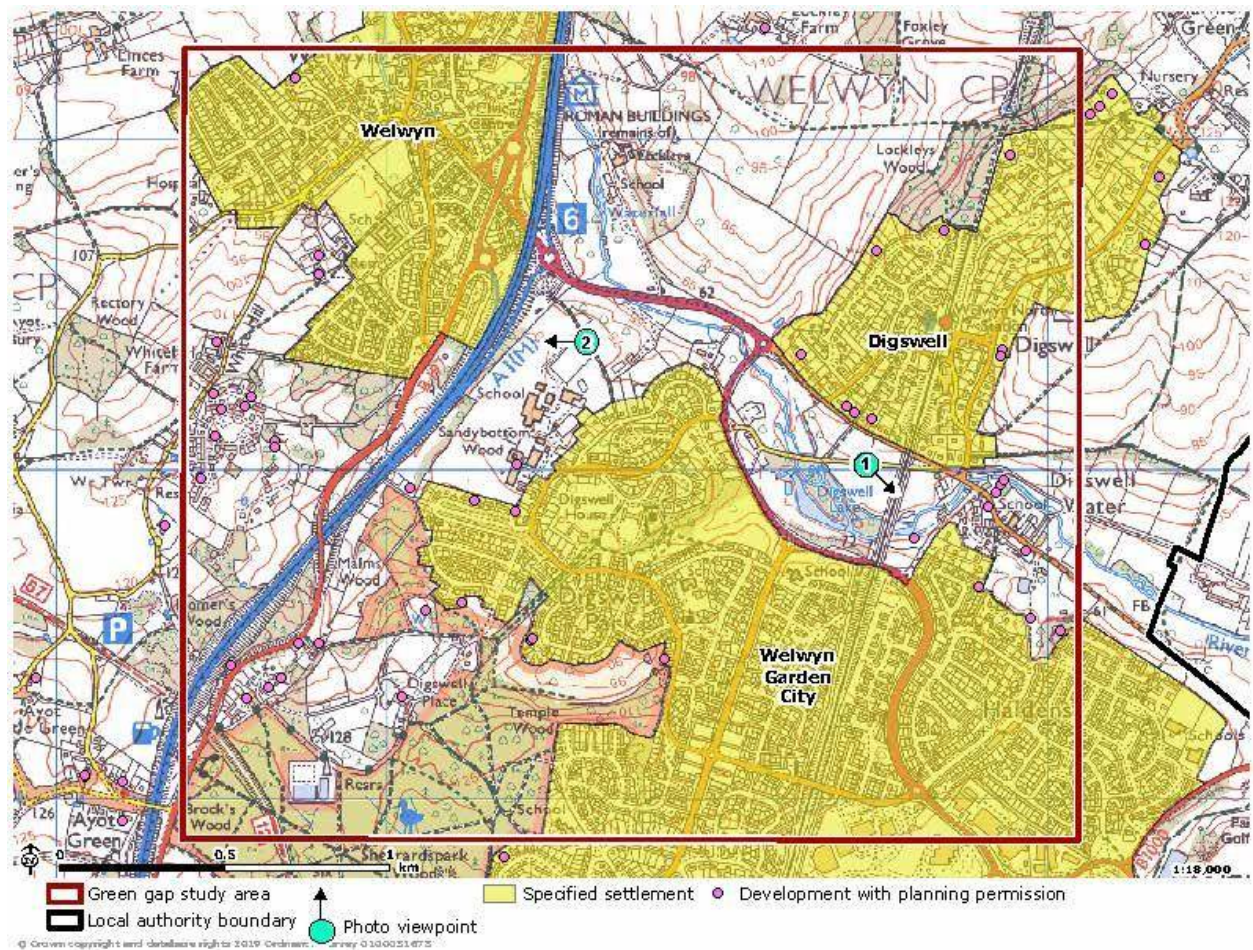
Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



NB the gap policy areas overlap in the above map – each gap policy area has been supplied separately in digital format as a GIS Shape file.

Area between Welwyn, Welwyn Garden City and Digswell

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn is a large nucleated village that stands on the River. Its position on the Great North Road meant it became a staging post for a number of coaching inns in the 17th century. The railway bypassed the village, but the 20th century has seen enlargement due to the building of estates to the south, west and

north of the village.

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the second UK Garden City, in a nucleated pattern. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall and in the north towards Digswell.

Digswell is a residential area that grew up around Welwyn North station after it opened in 1865, located on the northern slopes of the Valley of the River Mimram.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City: The area between Welwyn Garden City and Welwyn is around 300m at its closest point. Welwyn is contained to its south and east by the A1(M), which provides a strong physical barrier between the two settlements and influences the character of the gap, which has an urban fringe character being occupied mostly by Monks Walk School and Knightsfield School, and their associated playing fields. The Mimram Valley lies at the eastern end of the gap, and this area has a more rural character comprising pastoral fields and the River Mimram as well as stables and a pumping station. The A1000 (Hertford Road) links Welwyn with Welwyn Garden City, and from this road motorists have the experience of passing through a 'gap' between the two settlements. The A1(M) prevents direct footpath links between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City, although there is one footpath on the Welwyn Garden City side of the A1(M) from which the gap can be appreciated. There is planning permission for new teaching block at Monks Walk School in the gap.

Welwyn Garden City and Digswell: Digswell is separated from Welwyn Garden City by the Mimram Valley. The narrowest gap between these settlements is less than 200m (according to the specified settlement boundaries from the Local Plan). However, in reality the settlements almost meet at the bridge crossing point of the River Mimram. The river crossing and junction of Hertford Road, Digswell Park Road and Harmer Green Lane is therefore the only remaining gap between Digswell and Welwyn Garden City at this pinch point. The rest of the gap between the two settlements is around 400m wide, separated by the River Mimram and its floodplain including Digswell Lake and woodland. This provides a sense of separation between the settlements. The A1000 (Hertford Road) allows for travel between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell, and from this road there is a sense of a gap between the two settlements. Digswell Park Road also connects Welwyn Garden City and Digswell, and from this route the gap can be appreciated, as it can from the railway which crosses the valley on viaduct. A footpath connects Welwyn Garden City (Digswell Water) to Digswell in the east, allowing travel by foot between the two settlements. From this footpath there is not much sense of travelling between separate settlements, although the area feels less urban/sub-urban than the centre of Welwyn Garden City.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the Welwyn Garden City and Digswell is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 36 'Upper Mimram Valley'. This LCA extends into the gap between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City, which is also occupied by LCA 35 'Ayot St Peter Wooded Upland'. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, for LCA36 is to 'improve and reinforce' the landscape and for LCA 35 to 'conserve and restore' the landscape.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 36 is divided into three areas with sub-areas 36c and 36b comprising the land between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell. LCA 35 is divided into three areas, with sub-areas 35b and 36b comprising the land between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 36b is described as **moderate-high** east of the A1000 as the area provides a landscape buffer to the A1000 and to the urban edge, contributing to the parkland character. The sensitivity of the area west of the A1000 is described as **moderate** due to the steep sloping landform and localised visual prominence, impacted by the urban fringe, major roads and equine activities. The key sensitivities are:

- Steep Mimram valley slopes in the west.
- Mature vegetation which provides a landscape buffer between the A1000 and River Mimram.
- Parkland character and listed buildings in the east.

- Woodland enclosure in the east which forms a buffer to the playing fields.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 36c is described as **moderate** as it provides an open setting to the Welwyn Railway Viaduct, and a rural setting for the edge of Digswell. However, intrusion from trains, equine use of the land and the urban character of the recreation area reduce the sensitivity. The key sensitivities are:

- Open setting of the Grade II* listed Welwyn Railway Viaduct.
- Open area with wooded backdrop which provides rural setting to Digswell.
- Public right of way providing access to Digswell.
- Vegetated field boundaries of hedgerows and mature trees.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 35b is described as **low** in the area around Monks Walk and Knightsfield schools due to the school buildings and playing fields. The area on the fringes of Sherrardspark Wood to the south are considered to have **low-moderate** sensitivity as the wood is a buffer to the urban edge. The key sensitivities are:

- Tree cover connectivity.
- Sherrardspark Wood.

Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

The gap contains a number of ecological designations which are focussed on the wooded areas and the Mimram Valley.

Between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City is the Sandybottom Wood Local Wildlife Site that runs along the A1(M) – this is also priority habitat deciduous woodland. There are also a number of Local Wildlife Sites associated with the SSSI and LNR Sherradswood Park Wood to the south, although these are not in the core of the gap.

Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell there are the Digswell Meadows South and Digswell Lake Local Wildlife Sites, which contain priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh and deciduous woodland respectively. There is also priority habitat floodplain grazing marsh west of the A1000 along the course of the River Mimram.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. However, the Herts Ecological Network data indicates the areas between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City, and east of the railway line have high potential for habitat creation. There could be an opportunity to enhance and link the existing woodland network; restore the grassland and wetland along the River Mimram; and maintain and enhance the marshy grassland.

There are no cultural heritage designations in the gap between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City. Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell are: a Grade II* listed Welwyn Railway Viaduct, Grade II listed Digswell Park Lodge and a number of Grade II listed houses in Digswell Water, outside of the Welwyn Garden City settlement boundary.

The Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Tewin Water lies to the north of Hertford Road, east of Digswell, although this is mostly located beyond the gap.

*Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area contains a few public rights of way – a footpath running along the edge of the schools complex in the west, a footpath leading from Digswell Park Road into Digswell, and a footpath linking Digswell Water (Welwyn Garden City) and Digswell.

There are outdoor sports facilities in the west associated with Monks Walk and Knightsfield Schools, and Digswell playing field which is between the railway line and Digswell Park Road.

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City: There is one draft allocation between the edge of Welwyn and the A1(M). If this site were to be developed it would extend the edge of Welwyn into the surrounding countryside, but would not impact on the gap which is focussed on the east side of the A1(M).

There are some promoted sites east of the A1(M) including 62 Crossway beside the A1(M) and at Digswell Pumping Station. If these sites were to be developed they would impinge on, but not close, the gap.

Welwyn Garden City and Digswell: There are no draft allocations in this gap. There is a promoted site from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites beside the A1000, east of the railway line ('Junction off Digswell Lane and Bessemer Road'). If this site were to be developed it would intrude into, but not totally close, the gap.

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

Summary and Recommendations

Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City: Although the area of land between the A1(M) and the edge of Welwyn Garden City is occupied by school grounds, it provides a break between the two settlements and a gap policy area could help to protect the separation between these two settlements in the future. The case for keeping this land open (and particularly the eastern part) is strengthened by the presence of the River Mimram and associated Local Wildlife Sites.

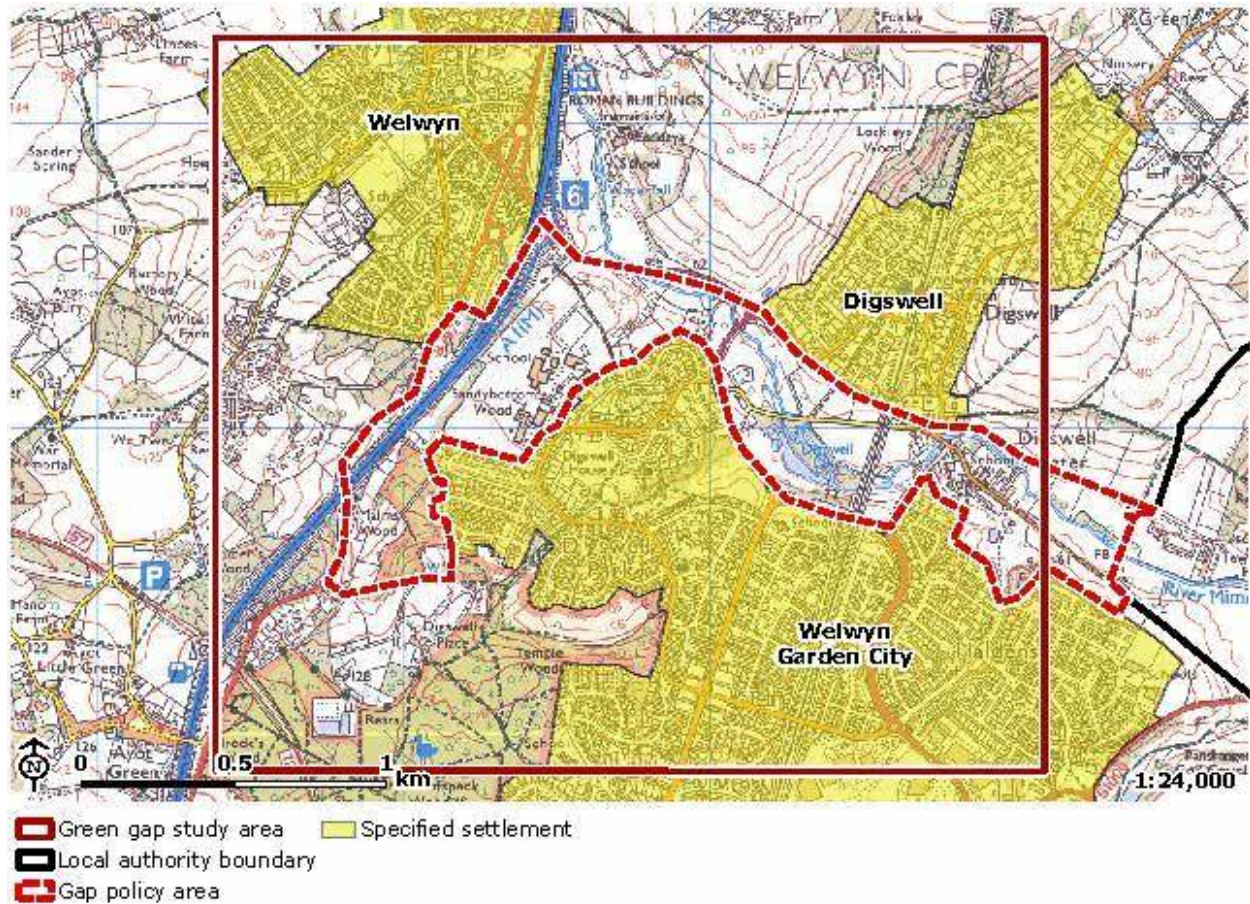
Welwyn Garden City and Digswell: The Mimram Valley between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell forms an important gap between these two settlements. A gap policy area could be applied in this location to maintain that gap and protect the settlement pattern in this area. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the relatively high landscape sensitivity, the ecological value associated with the valley landscape, and the setting it provides to the listed Welwyn Railway Viaduct.

A suggested 'gap policy area' between the three settlements is illustrated on Map 2. Within this area the aims should be to:

- Maintain a physical and visual separation between Welwyn Garden City and Welwyn, and between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road, rail or on foot;
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees);
- Ensure there is no additional inter-visibility between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including deciduous woodland along the A1(M), and the wetland habitats and parkland character in the Mimram Valley - seek opportunities for extending and linking these habitats, particularly deciduous woodland and floodplain grasslands;
- Maintain an open setting to the Grade II* listed Welwyn Railway Viaduct; and

- Maintain public access across the gaps, seeking opportunities for better footpath connections where possible.

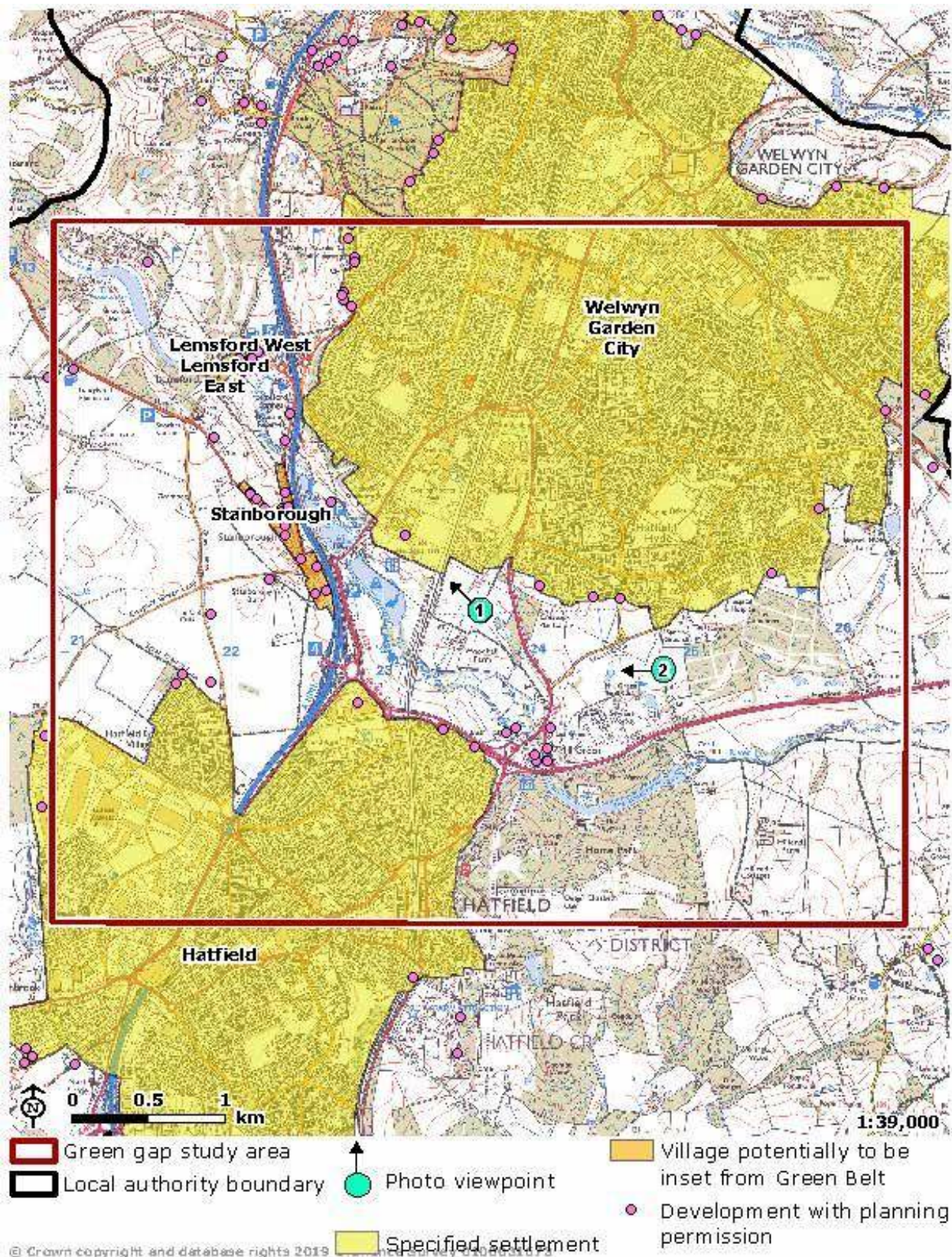
Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



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Area between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the UK's second Garden City. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall and in the north towards Digswell and Panshanger.

Hatfield is a nucleated town which initially grew up around the gates of Hatfield House. However, as one of the post-war New Towns it expanded rapidly in the 20th century with the Government building a new town centre and allocating 9.5km² for the New Town.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield is roughly 880m at its nearest point. The north edge of Hatfield is well defined by the A1001/A1(M) and A414, and beyond this is the Lea Valley which separates Hatfield from Welwyn Garden City.

The Lea Valley is a notable feature comprising fields, small blocks of woodland, the River Lea itself, and bodies of open water (the Stanborough boating lakes). The presence of woodland means there is almost no inter-visibility between the two settlements despite their relative proximity, so that they retain separate identities and a physical and visual separation.

The A6128 and A1000 allow direct travel between the two settlements, as does the railway line. When travelling these routes there is a sense of passing through a rural 'gap' between settlements as a result of the presence of open water, rural farmland and woodland. Public rights of way within the gap also enable walkers to experience the rural and recreational character of the gap.

There are no major planning permissions in the gap, but there are a number of refurbishments and an additional 9 dwellings planned at Mill Green, on the edge of Hatfield.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows the area between the two settlements as occupied by the Landscape Character Areas (LCA) 45 'Welwyn Fringes' in the north, and 65 'Middle Lea Valley West' in the south. The evaluation with the Landscape Character Assessment is to 'improve and restore' the Welwyn Fringes landscape and to 'improve and conserve' the Middle Lea Valley West landscape.

The landscape sensitivity assessment divides LCA 45 into two areas with sub-area 45a comprising the land between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 45a is described as **low-moderate** because of the urban fringe land use activities, and strong enclosure from vegetation. The assessment notes **moderate** landscape sensitivity in Stanborough Country Park, due to its parkland scenery and recreational value. The key sensitivities, relevant to this gap, are:

- The blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows / woodland copses along field boundaries and rural lanes.
- The small area of priority habitat semi-improved grassland adjacent to The Commons.

- The rural/parkland character and sense of remoteness in the east.
- Views from the public rights of way and National cycle routes running through the area.

The landscape sensitivity study divides LCA 65 into three areas: area 65 (western part), area 65 (eastern part) and sub-area 65a, all of which form the land between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 65 (western part) is described as **low-moderate** due to proximity to the A1(M) and housing and equine activities creating regular fenced field boundaries. Stanborough Country Park east of the A1(M) is considered to have **moderate** sensitivity. The key sensitivities relevant to this gap are:

- The immediate riverside area.
- Priority habitat deciduous woodland.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 65 (eastern part) is described as **moderate-high** due to the lack of development in the area, the natural character of the watercourse and associated vegetation, and the historic buildings associated with the river. The key sensitivities relevant to this gap are:

- The linear character of the river valley floor.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 65a is described as **low-moderate** as the large scale pasture fields are crossed by pylons with visual detractors from the roads. The key sensitivities relevant to this gap are:

- Parkland character around the listed Bush Hall Hotel building.
- The vegetation along the railway line which plays an important screening role.
- Priority habitat deciduous woodland, semi-improved grassland and reedbeds in the valley.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

The area contains a number of ecological designations: Local Wildlife Sites at Stanborough Reed Marsh, Woodhall Farm Meadows, Meadow West of Stanborough Yachting Lake, Wood South of Woodhall Farm and Creswick Plantation. Stanborough Reedmarsh is also a Local Nature Reserve. To the south of the gap, east of Hatfield is the Hatfield House Home Park Local Wildlife Site. These contain priority habitat deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland and reedbed.

There are two network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England to the north of Stanborough Lakes. The Herts Ecological Network data also indicates there are areas for habitat creation within the gap. Opportunities include improving the diversity of grasslands and reedbeds, enhancing the hedgerow network through replanting and restocking gappy or missing hedgerows, and planting of additional copses and linking these to the existing hedgerow and woodland network.

The area contains many features of cultural heritage interest. This includes a number of Grade II cottages and features at Mill Green and the Grade II* Old Mill House Museum and Mill at Mill Green. South of Hertford Road is the Grade I listed Hatfield House Registered Park and Garden. There are also Areas of Archaeological Significance around Woodhall Farm and north east of Stanborough Lakes.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area includes good recreational provision and links. Stanborough Park Country Park occupies part of the valley and provides a good variety of recreational opportunities. There are also footpaths running east-west and north-south and across the area, as well as part of the National Cycle Network (NCN 57) along the A1000 and a local cycle path along the A414 adjacent to Mill Green. There is also a golf course west of Gipsy Lane.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There are draft allocations at Stanboroughbury, Creswick, Barbaraville (a very small site) and South East Welwyn Garden City. If these are developed they will extend the settlement edges of Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City, but will not close the gap or narrow the existing smallest part of the gap (which will continue to be around 880m). The river valley will continue to form the separation between the two

settlements.

There are two promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites within the gap: North of Oldings Corner and Three Corner Field. If the site North of Oldings Corner were to be developed this would intrude into the gap and could potentially narrow the gap between the two settlements to as little as 325m. The Three Corner Field site would be seen as an extension to Mill Green.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Since there is a physical gap in this location that contains a notable landscape feature (the Lea Valley) and is vulnerable to being closed, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' in this location to protect settlement pattern and identity, and to prevent the coalescence of Welwyn Garden City with Hatfield.

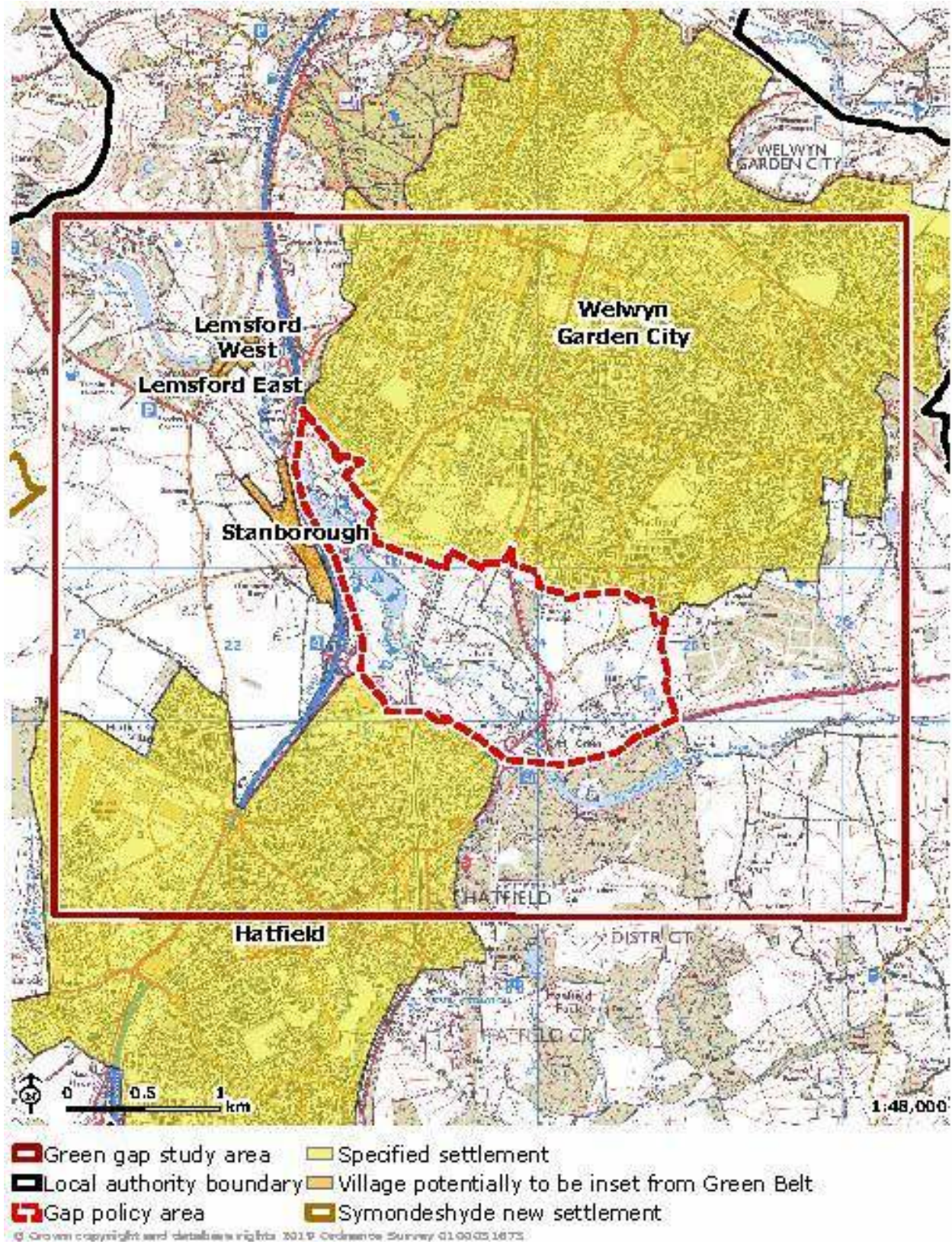
The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the presence of the Lea Valley, with its rural farmland, small blocks of woodland, the River Lea itself and bodies of open water. The settlement edge of Welwyn Garden City to the west of the railway line is considered to have a moderate sensitivity to development, and the small area around Mill Green is considered to have moderate-high sensitivity. The area also contains many Local Wildlife Sites, two Areas of Archaeological Significance and listed buildings.

The gap policy area could include the area between the south west settlement edge of Welwyn Garden City to Gypsy Lane, bound by the A1(M) and A414 in the south.

The area between the three settlements is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

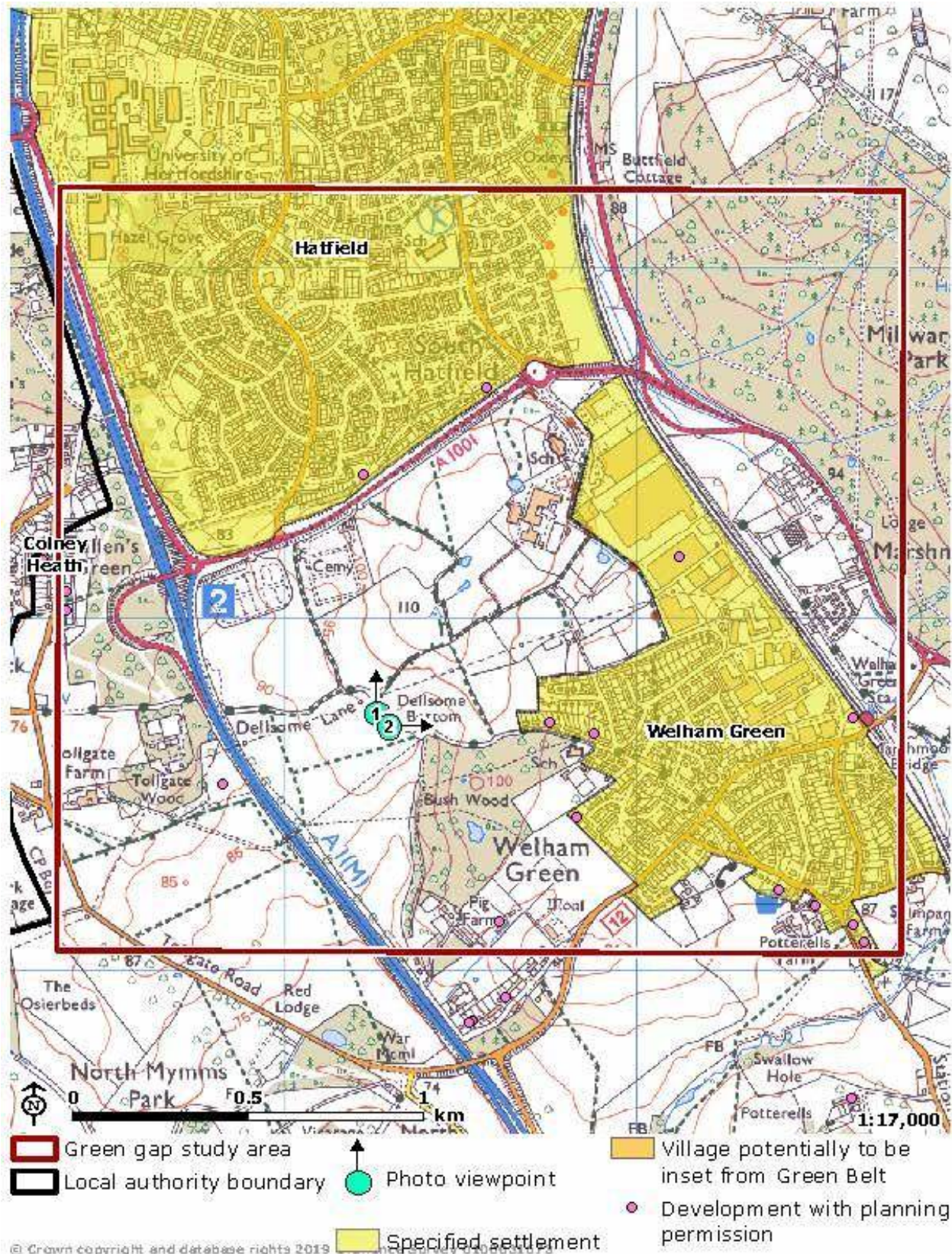
- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure the Lea Valley forms the break between the two settlements – ensure that it remains possible to recognise and appreciate the valley landform and promote opportunities to enhance the valley features;
- Protect and enhance the grasslands and reedbeds on the valley bottom, seeking opportunities to extend and link these along the valley floor;
- Protect and enhance pasture, well maintained hedgerows and copses on the valley sides – seek opportunities to strengthen the existing hedgerow and woodland network;
- Ensure there is no additional inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road, rail or foot;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible, particularly to the river and country park;
- Enhance recreational access to the riverside where possible.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Hatfield and Welham Green

Map 1: Gap area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Hatfield is a nucleated town which initially grew up around the gates of Hatfield House. However, as one of the post-war New Towns it expanded rapidly in the 20th century with the Government building a new town centre and allocating 9.5km² for the New Town.

Welham Green is a nucleated rural village focused around a village green. This village has also expanded in the 20th century, although not to the extent of Hatfield.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Hatfield and Welham Green varies in size. To the east of the area Welham Green almost joins Hatfield due to the presence of a finger of industrial development extending north from the edge of Welham Green.

The gap is larger west of this industrial area, comprising fields, hedgerows and copses – despite some intrusions into the gap from the University Park and Ride and Lawn Cemetery. Gently domed landform and woodland between the two settlements reinforces the sense of separation.

The two settlements therefore manage to retain separate identities and a physical and visual separation.

When walking on footpaths there is a perception of crossing a rural area between two settlements. There is no road that enables travel directly between the two settlements, although when travelling along the A1000 one can gain a perception of the gap at Marshmoor, and travelling along the A1001 also provides a sense of separation.

Due to its size, the gap is vulnerable to being eroded, and even closed, by relatively modest amounts of development.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 29 'Mimmshall Valley' which is an area associated with the valley slopes and floor of the Mimmshall Brook, which has a wooded farmland character. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and conserve' the landscape.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 29 is divided into four areas with sub-area 29a comprising the land between Hatfield and Welham Green.

The landscape sensitivity assessment notes that the landscape provides a strong edge to the south of Hatfield and an open backdrop to the Welham Green.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 29a is described as **moderate** because although it provides a strong settlement edge to Hatfield and contains many recreational routes and deciduous woodland (a

priority habitat) which increase sensitivity, the area has a sense of enclosure and is influenced by some detracting features (the A1M and overhead power line and pylons) which reduce sensitivity.

The key sensitivities, relevant to this area, are:

- Mature vegetation and the A1001 that provides a strong settlement edge to Hatfield.
- Bush Wood and the grassland north of Parsonage Road.
- Strong hedgerow field boundaries.
- Rights of way leading from Welham Green into the area.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

The only environmental designations in this area are the area of grasslands north of Parsonage Road and the southern road verge along 'South Way' which are Local Wildlife Sites. Just to the south of the 'gap' is 'Bush Wood', which is an area of ancient woodland and a Local Wildlife Site, located to the west of Welham Green. Bush Wood and the area of woodland to the west of 'Southfield' are also priority habitats (deciduous woodland).

There are no Habitat Network Enhancement Zones mapped by Natural England. The Herts Ecological Network indicates a high priority for habitat creation south of the A1001 and west of the A1000. There could be an opportunity to improve the diversity of grasslands, enhance the hedgerow network through replanting and restocking gappy or missing hedgerows, and to plant additional copses and link these to the existing hedgerow and woodland network.

There are no cultural heritage designations within this area.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area includes a particularly good network of public rights of way. There is also a cycle path (part of the National Cycle Network) alongside the western edge of the employment area, a local cycle path (part of the Tring/Berkhampstead Circular) along Dellsome Lane.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There is a draft allocation proposed in the gap (Land at Southway). Development of this site would erode, but not completely close, the gap.

There are also three other sites put forward in the Call for Sites: Angerland North (on the site of the park and ride), Angerland South and Pooley's Lane. If these sites were to be developed this would further erode the gap between these settlements, although not completely close it. The area of higher ground between the two settlements would remain open.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

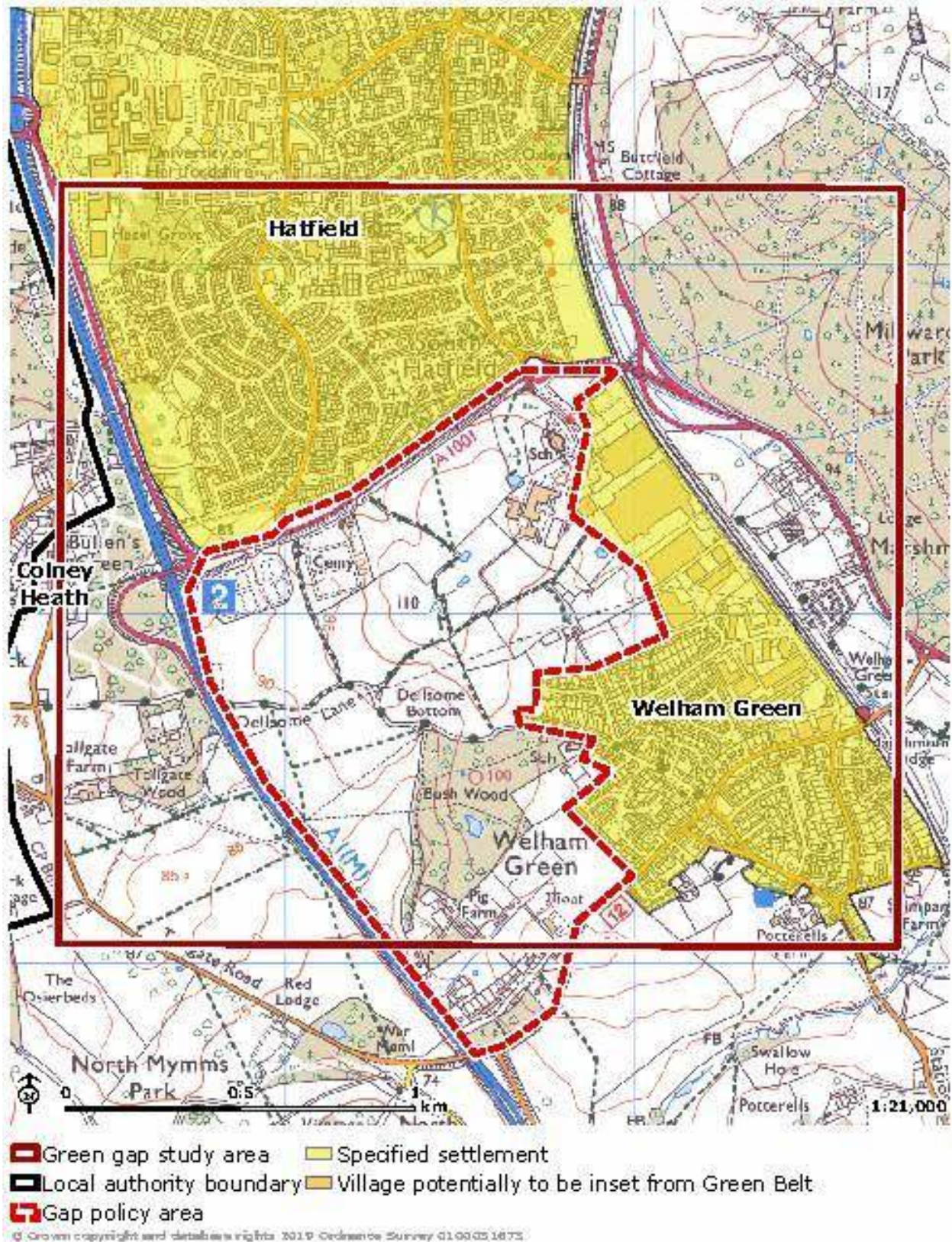
Summary and Recommendations

Since there is a physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to being closed by relatively modest amounts of development, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' in this location to protect settlement pattern and identity and prevent the further coalescence of Hatfield with Welham Green.

The whole of the area between the two settlements, including the designated areas and priority habitats, could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

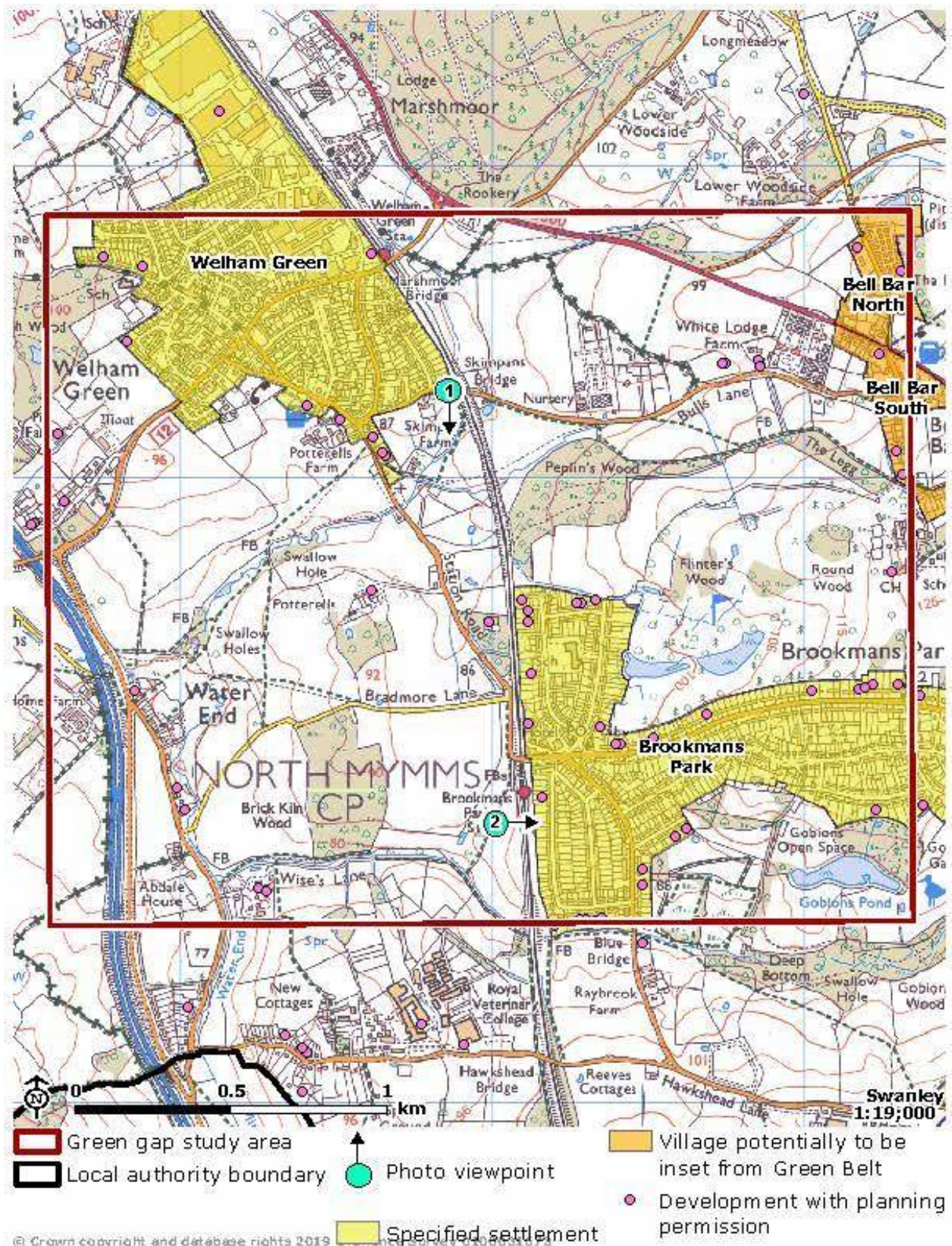
- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements through retention of an area of rural character comprising pasture, well maintained hedgerows and copses – there is an opportunity to strengthen the existing hedgerow network and plant more trees;
- Ensure the area of highest ground between the two settlements remains open;
- Protect the grasslands north of Parsonage Lane and extend the grassland diversity across the whole area;
- Extend and link deciduous woodlands;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible;
- Maintain the open character of the grounds around Mitsubishi Electric to connect it to the 'green gap' and provide a perceived separation between Hatfield and Welham Green in this area.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Welham Green and Brookmans Park

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welham Green is a rural village focused around a village green, that has expanded substantially during the 20th century.

Brookmans Park is a large village built in the inter-war years in response to the arrival of a new railway station (in 1926) on the London & North Eastern Railway with direct links to Kings Cross. It is located on the site of the former Brookmans Manor and Park. There has been some infill and expansion in the mid-late 20th century, but the village is essentially a linear settlement (extending along Brookmans Avenue), and located between the mainline railway line (to the west) and the A1000 to the east.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between the south-eastern corner of Welham Green and the north-western corner of Brookmans Park is just over 600m. Welham Green lies to the west of the railway line and Brookmans Park to the east, with the railway line providing a physical barrier between the two. The gap at this narrowest point comprises small blocks of woodland set in mixed farmland – the hedgerows and copses prevent inter-visibility between the two settlements and ensure a robust gap. The land immediately north of Brookmans Park is a golf course, which provides an open setting to the majority of the village.

Station Road allows for direct travel between the two settlements. It passes through a rural landscape which provides a sense of separation when travelling along this road. There is no direct footpath between the nearest parts of the settlements but there are a number of footpaths in the area from which the gap can be appreciated.

There are no major planning permissions in the gap (permissions relate mainly to refurbishments and extensions to existing buildings).

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows that the area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 29 'Mimmshall Valley', LCA 54 'Potters Bar Parkland' and a very small area of LCA 46 'Hatfield Park'. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and conserve' the Mimmshall Valley landscape and 'improve and restore' the Potters Bar Parkland.

The landscape sensitivity assessment divides these LCAs into sub areas. The relevant sub-areas to this assessment are sub-areas 29b, 29c, 54a and 54b (see landscape sensitivity map in Appendix 1).

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 29b is described as **moderate**. This is due to the arable fields and woodland elements providing a rural setting to Welham Green, and form part of a wider rural landscape. The key sensitivities of this area, relevant to this gap, are:

- The arable and wooded setting to Welham Green.
- The hedgerow boundary network.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 29c is described as **moderate-high** due to its rural and wooded character, providing an important role in maintaining distinct settlement settings. The key sensitivities,

relevant to this gap, are:

- The enclosed and rural character of the area.
- The strong hedgerow boundaries.
- The railway line forming a distinct boundary to Brookmans Park.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 54a is considered to be **low-moderate** to the east of the railway line due to being disturbed by urban influences, and **moderate** to the west of the railway line due to its valley slopes and role in retaining the distinction between Welham Green and Brookmans Park. The key sensitivities relevant to this gap are:

- Visually prominent sloping land.
- Strong hedgerow network with mature hedgerow trees.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 54b is described as varying from **moderate** to **moderate-high**. The area between Station Road and the railway line is considered as **moderate-high** due to its role as a rural setting for the two settlements and maintain their separation. The area at Bell Bar and around the golf course is considered to be **moderate** as it provides some rural setting to Brookmans Park and contains parkland characteristics and some ecological value. The key sensitivities relevant to this gap are:

- Visually prominent slopes.
- Parkland character and deciduous woodland.
- Connectivity between natural landscape elements.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There is quite a good coverage of ecological designations in this area, including a SSSI (Water End Swallow Holes) south west of Welham Green which contains priority habitat deciduous woodland and semi-improved grassland, and Local Wildlife Sites at Potterells Wood, Peplin's Wood, The Legg, Meadow North of Peplins Wood and Grassland North of Potterells Wood. There are also small areas of ancient woodland within these Local Wildlife Sites, and priority habitat deciduous woodland east of Station Road.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates some areas that have potential for habitat creation, particularly west of Station Road and north of Bulls Lane. There could be an opportunity to enhance the hedgerow network through replanting missing hedgerows, and to plant additional copses and link these to the deciduous woodland network. Areas of semi-improved grassland could be restored, and areas of standing water maintained.

There are three Grade II listed buildings within the area, at Potterells and Skimpans Farm. There are no other cultural heritage designations.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There are a number of recreational features in the study area including footpaths (from which a sense of separation between the settlements can be appreciated), a local cycle way along Bulls Lane and the golf course at Brookmans Park.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There is a draft allocation west of Brookmans Park and a draft allocation (split into two areas) to the east of Welham Green. Development of these sites would extend these settlements west (Brookmans Park) and east (Welham Green), but would not reduce the existing size of the gap between the two settlements.

In addition, there are a number of promoted sites put forward in response to the Council's 2019 Call for Sites. These include land 'North of Hawkshead Road', 'Peplins Wood' and 'Skimpans Farm', all of which would erode (but not completely close) the gap.

Summary and Recommendations

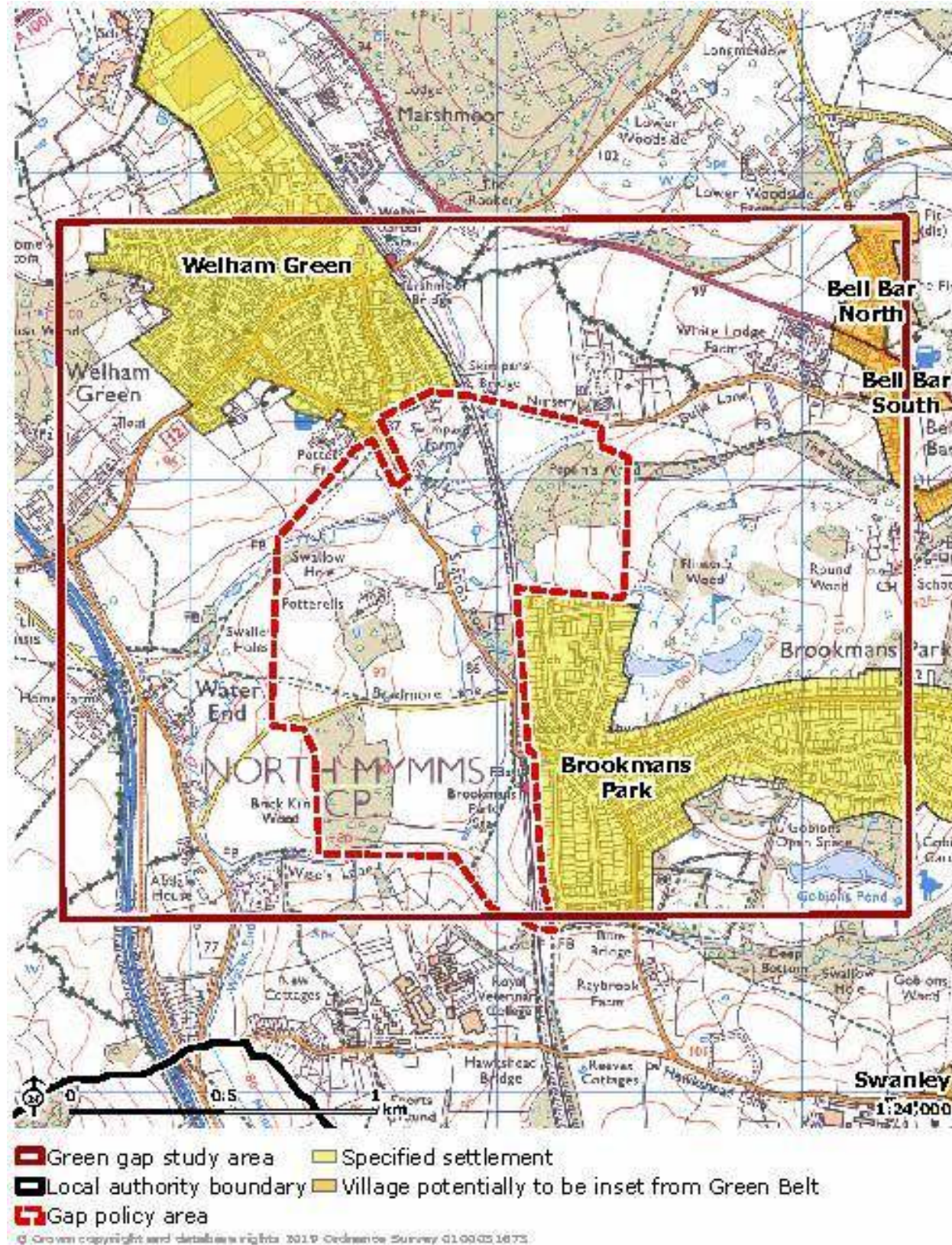
There is a physical gap in this location that is currently robust (in that it effectively provides a sense of separation between the two settlements), but could be vulnerable to erosion as demonstrated by the promoted sites. It is therefore recommended that a gap policy area is identified in this area to protect the settlement pattern and prevent the future coalescence of these two settlements.

The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the moderate-high landscape sensitivity west of the railway line, the presence of ecologically valuable sites (a SSSI and Local Wildlife Sites with associated priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient woodland) and the recreational value provided by a network of footpaths.

The area illustrated on Map 2 could form part of a 'gap policy area', within which the aims should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Welham Green and Brookmans Park, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, when travelling along Station Road or on the railway;
- Ensure development does not mask the valley feature that divides the settlements – this should remain a strong feature of the gap;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to both settlements;
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including reedbeds and willow carr (in the valley) and hedgerows and deciduous woodland in the farmland, and seek opportunities to extend and link these habitats;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Woolmer Green is a small village that grew up around the junction of two thoroughfares, the Great North Road and Stane Street (or Stone Street) from St Albans. The village expanded with the building of the railway in the 1850s (although the nearest station is at Knebworth), and there has been further 20th century expansion.

Knebworth (formerly known as 'New Knebworth' to distinguish it from 'Old Knebworth', an old agricultural village located further west) grew up around a railway station built on the East Coast Main Line at the end of the 19th century. It has since expanded with 20th century estates built onto the edges of the settlement.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

At its narrowest point the gap between the settlements of Woolmer Green and Knebworth is approximately 300m due to past expansion of development along the B197.

The area between the settlements is a combination of large arable fields on rising ground either side of the B197, and smaller enclosed fields (one of which contains a care home) between the railway line and B197.

Although there are hedgerows around the small fields in the valley bottom, gaps in trees means there is inter-visibility between the two settlements when travelling along the B197.

The railway line and London Road act as direct transport corridors linking the two settlements, with a public footpath also following the western side of the railway line. The proximity of the two settlements to each other can be perceived from these routes.

Along London Road there has already been some erosion of the gap with a care home located in the gap. Further development along London Road would further erode the sense of separation between these settlements.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows that the area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 37, Datchworth Settled Slopes.

The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment assesses this part of LCA 37 as having an overall moderate-high landscape sensitivity rating. This rating is given as a result of its visual prominence, the role its sloping land plays in the setting to Woolmer Green and Knebworth, proximity to multiple Local Wildlife Sites, BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands and presence of some listed buildings. Landscape sensitivity is reduced by the presence of the A1(M) and the railway line, both of which produce significant noise, and by the urban influence of Woolmer Green on the area. The key sensitivities are:

- Visually prominent sloping land which has high intervisibility with the settlements and wider landscape.

- Neighboring ecological designations including Local Wildlife Sites.
- Rural setting provided to surrounding settlements.
- Features of ecological interest including remaining hedgerows and areas of priority habitat deciduous woodlands.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Although there are no designated areas between the closest part of the two settlements, there are a number in the wider area – including Mardley Heath, Cave Wood, and Barnes Wood which are ancient woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites and BAP Priority Habitats. These woodlands are prominently located on the slopes either side of Woolmer Green. There are no cultural heritage designations within the gap.

There are none of Natural England's habitat network enhancement zones in the gap. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the undeveloped fields in the gap have potential for habitat creation while the grounds around the care home and fields to the north are neutral grassland in need of restoration.

There is an opportunity to enhance hedgerows and expand and link woodlands – this would also reduce the inter-visibility between the two settlements.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

A public right of way leads directly between Woolmer Green and Knebworth, following the western edge of the railway line. Woodland cover along the railway line helps to prevent intervisibility between the two settlements from this footpath, however the open character of the large arable field means the southwestern settlement edge of Knebworth is constantly visible.

There are likely to be opportunities to extend and connect rights of way in this area.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There is a large allocated housing site on the land east of London Road on the northeast edge of Woolmer Green. Whilst this development would not extend any further north than the existing settlement boundary (except for the access road), it would result in expansion of Woolmer Green further into the surrounding countryside.

There is a site that has been promoted through the Council's 2019 Call for Sites (Heath Lane, WGr7) on the west side of Woolmer Green. Although this would expand Woolmer Green into open countryside to the west of the settlement, it would not extend the village further north than its existing northern extent and planting could ensure no inter-visibility between this site and the edge of Knebworth.

There is also a site that has been promoted through the Council's Call for Sites on the southern edge of Knebworth (WGr3). Although development of this site would result in encroachment towards the care home which could result in these two settlements almost joining. (NB the proposed building edge should not go further south than the existing building edge – refer to guidance below).

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Since the physical gap in this location is vulnerable to being closed by relatively modest amounts of development, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap' designation to maintain the separation between these two village settlements, and to prevent further coalescence.

Although some of the area between these settlements has already been developed (i.e. the care home), enough undeveloped land remains to form a physical and visual separation between the two settlements which could be defined as a 'gap'.

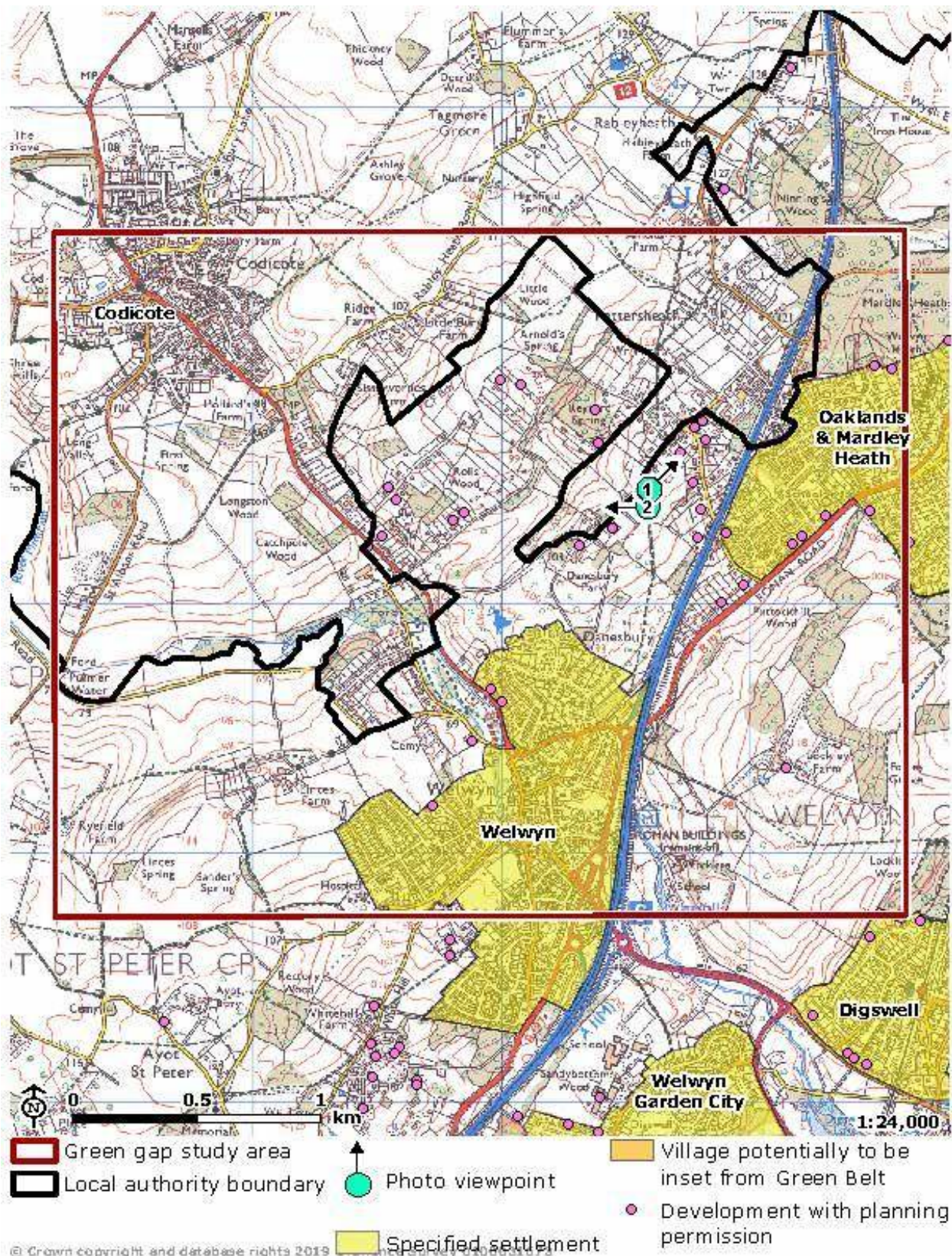
The 'gap' could include the whole of the area between the northern boundary of Woolmer Green and the Borough boundary. Within this area, the aim should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Woolmer Green and Knebworth and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road, rail or foot;
- Ensure the care home and its ground retains the character of a building in the countryside (rather than part of a settlement), and that the gap remains rural in character;
- Ensure development does not extend any further than the existing northern extents of Woolmer Green or Southern extents of Knebworth;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to both settlements (to the south of Knebworth and north of Woolmer Green);
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function; and
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including remaining hedgerows, semi-improved grassland and deciduous woodlands – improving, extending and linking these where possible.

The map on the next page sets out the area within which these recommendations should be followed.

Area between Welwyn, Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn is a large village that stands on the River Mimram (Welwyn is derived from the Old English welig meaning "willow"). It was the early site of a minster church and its position on the Great North Road meant it became a staging post for a number of coaching inns in the 17th century. The railway bypassed the village, but the 20th century has seen enlargement due to the building of estates to the south, west and north of the village. Despite this it remains a nucleated settlement. Adjacent to Welwyn is Oaklands, a settlement which grew in the 20th century on former common and heath land, which is still in evidence at Mardley Heath. It is also nucleated in form.

Codicote is a large village in Hertfordshire set on a chalk ridge on the dip slope of the Chilterns, which also includes some important coaching inns. It is also nucleated in form.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The distance from the north-western edge of Welwyn and the edge of Codicote is approximately 1.4km meaning these are read as clearly separate settlements on the ground. Ribbon development along Codicote Road intrudes into the gap, but the two settlements retain separate identities and the presence of Danesbury Park, the River Mimram and the undeveloped hill to the south of Codicote are strong features that ensure there is perception of leaving one settlement and travelling to another when travelling on roads between the two settlements.

The gap is vulnerable to being eroded by further scattered development, such as has already taken place along the Codicote Road although current planning permissions tend to be for replacement dwellings rather than new dwellings.

Oaklands is located further from Codicote than Welwyn (1.9km) and is separated by the A1(M). There is also scattered development in the area between Oaklands and Codicote.

Landscape Sensitivity

Within Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap are three landscape character areas: **35 Ayot St Peter Wooded Upland**, a plateau with woodland enclosing historic villages and parklands; **132 Codicote Bottom Arable Valley**, an open valley landscape; and **133 Danesbury Settled Slopes**, an area of undulating south-west facing slopes with localised deep depressions and dry valleys.

The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'conserve and restore' for area 35, and 'restore condition to maintain character' for areas 132 and 133. This implies that the areas are generally in good condition and with strong character that needs maintaining.

The landscape sensitivity assessment subdivides these character areas into assessment parcels. Sub-areas 35a, 132, 132a, 132b, 133a, 133a-a, and 133a-b fall within this gap.

With regards to the role of these areas providing a setting to settlements, the riverside grassland and

trees in sub-area 132a provide a strong setting to Welwyn (including the conservation area), and Danesbury Park in area 133a plays an important role in providing a wooded backdrop to Welwyn. LCA 35 does not play a strong role in setting.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 35a is described as **moderate** because although there are some valued features within the area (sloping landform, rural lanes, woodland cover in the south-west, hedgerows and hedgebanks) and a sense of openness that increase sensitivity, the disturbance from the busy A1(M) road and modern settlement edge at Welwyn reduce the sensitivity. The key sensitivities, relevant to this area, are:

- The open and rural setting to this edge of Welwyn.
- The steep and narrow rural lanes lined with medium high hedgerows and occasional hedgebanks.
- The public rights of way along rural lanes and crossing agricultural fields.
- The rural character and listed farm buildings.

The level of sensitivity of area 132 is described as **moderate-high** due to its open and exposed undeveloped character, visually prominent sloping landform and Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens at Ayot House. The key sensitivities relevant to this area, are:

- The undeveloped rural agricultural character.
- The visually prominent sloping landform.
- The BAP Priority Habitats, local wildlife sites and hedgerow boundaries.
- The good network of public rights of way.

The level of sensitivity of area 132a is described as **moderate** because, although the area is close to the settlement of Welwyn, its strong vegetated boundaries mean that it retains a rural character. The key sensitivities relevant to this area, are:

- Small-scale character with well-established hedgerow boundaries
- Singlers Marsh Local Wildlife Site and Nature Reserve and the role the area plays in the setting to Welwyn Conservation Area.

The level of sensitivity of area 133a is a mixture of **low-moderate** in the centre, interspersed with areas of **moderate** sensitivity. The key sensitivity in this area is the well-established hedgerow and woodland network which provides habitat connectivity and limits the visual influence of development. Key sensitivities in this area are:

- Well-established hedgerow and woodland network, providing habitat connectivity and limiting the visual influence of development.

Land at 133a-a is described as being **low** in sensitivity in the south and having **low-moderate** sensitivity in the north. The extent of tree cover and low development density means that there is some distinction between this and the more urban parts of Oaklands, but landscape character is nonetheless significantly affected by the proximity of the A1(M) and B197.

- Woodland blocks and other trees, which provide habitat connectivity and limit the visual influence of development.

Most of area 133a-b is occupied by Danesbury Park Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site which is not assessed for sensitivity as it is an absolute constraint to development. However the small part of 133a that is not occupied by the Park is considered to be of **low-moderate** sensitivity due to its containment and proximity to the urban edge. Key sensitivities in this area are:

- The hedgerows and tree cover that contribute to the setting of Welwyn, and
- Remaining areas of rural character.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Environmental designations in Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap include a number of local wildlife sites (Singlers Marsh / Fulling Mill Meadow, Danesbury Park, Mimram Valley Marsh and a number of deciduous woodlands).

Priority habitats include an area of good quality semi-improved grassland on the northern edge of Welwyn around Danesbury Park, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh along the Mimram Valley bottom, and scattered deciduous woodland and some traditional orchards amongst the scattered development along Codicote Road.

There are no habitat network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England in this area, but the Hertfordshire Ecological Network mapping indicates that the farmland areas are high priority for habitat creation. This could include improving and extending the network of semi-improved grasslands, marsh, woodland and hedgerows in the area – including extending semi-natural grassland habitats through appropriate management (or grazing marsh in the valleys), planting and restocking gappy or missing hedgerows, planting additional copses / orchards and linking these to the existing hedgerow and woodland network.

With regards to cultural heritage, there are some scattered listed buildings/ structures (such as a listed cottage, milepost, and farm buildings) as well as areas of archaeological significance west of Linces Farm, adjacent to the Welwyn Conservation Area and around Rolls Wood.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area of this gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough includes a number of footpaths (including several along the part of the Mimram Valley close to Welwyn). There is also a local cycle path along Kimpton Road connecting to Welwyn, and Danesbury Park itself contains a number of paths. There could be an opportunity to extend footpaths further along the Mimram Valley, as well as new links across the valley to join up with footpaths within North Hertfordshire.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There is a small draft allocation proposed on the edge of Welwyn (The Vineyards). If this site were to be developed, it would extend the edge of Welwyn a little further north-westwards and towards Danesbury Park, but would not reach the Borough boundary or close the gap between the settlements. There are also some draft allocated sites in the triangle of land formed by the railway, the B197 and Oaklands. Since this is already developed land this will not result in much of a character change (assuming the sites are sensitively developed and vegetation used to soften views within the gap).

There are a number of sites put forward in the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites': a cluster of sites around Welwyn cemetery, a large site on the golf course at Danesbury Park (Land between Dansbury Park Road and Reynards Road) and another cluster on the edge of Oaklands (Land to the east of Danesbury Park Road and sites on The Avenue). If these sites were to be developed the edges of both Welwyn and Oaklands would move further north-west towards Codicote, and Danesbury Park could potentially become a park within an urban area rather than on the edge of an urban area, depending on the layout of these sites.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

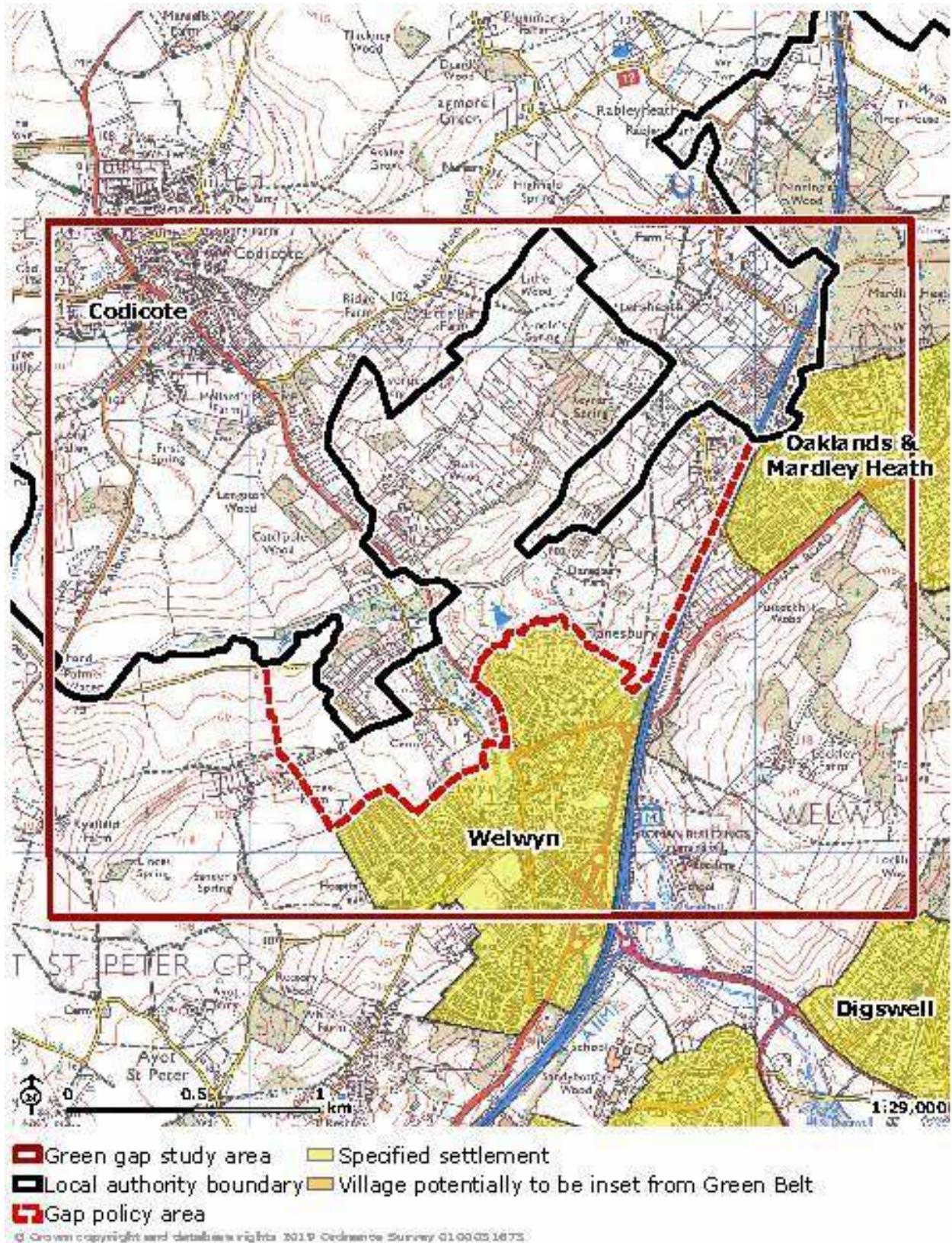
Since there is a clear physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to erosion from development on the edges of the existing settlements as well as further scattered development in the countryside, it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area to protect settlement pattern and identity, and to prevent coalescence of Welwyn/ Oaklands with Codicote (N.B. as Codicote is located in North Hertfordshire, the gap designation could only form part of Welwyn Hatfield's area).

The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in the setting to Welwyn Conservation Area, the presence of local wildlife sites in the Mimram Valley and at Danesbury Park, and the presence of areas of archaeological significance.

The gap policy area could include the area between the edge of Welwyn and the motorway in the east and the Borough boundary in the west. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

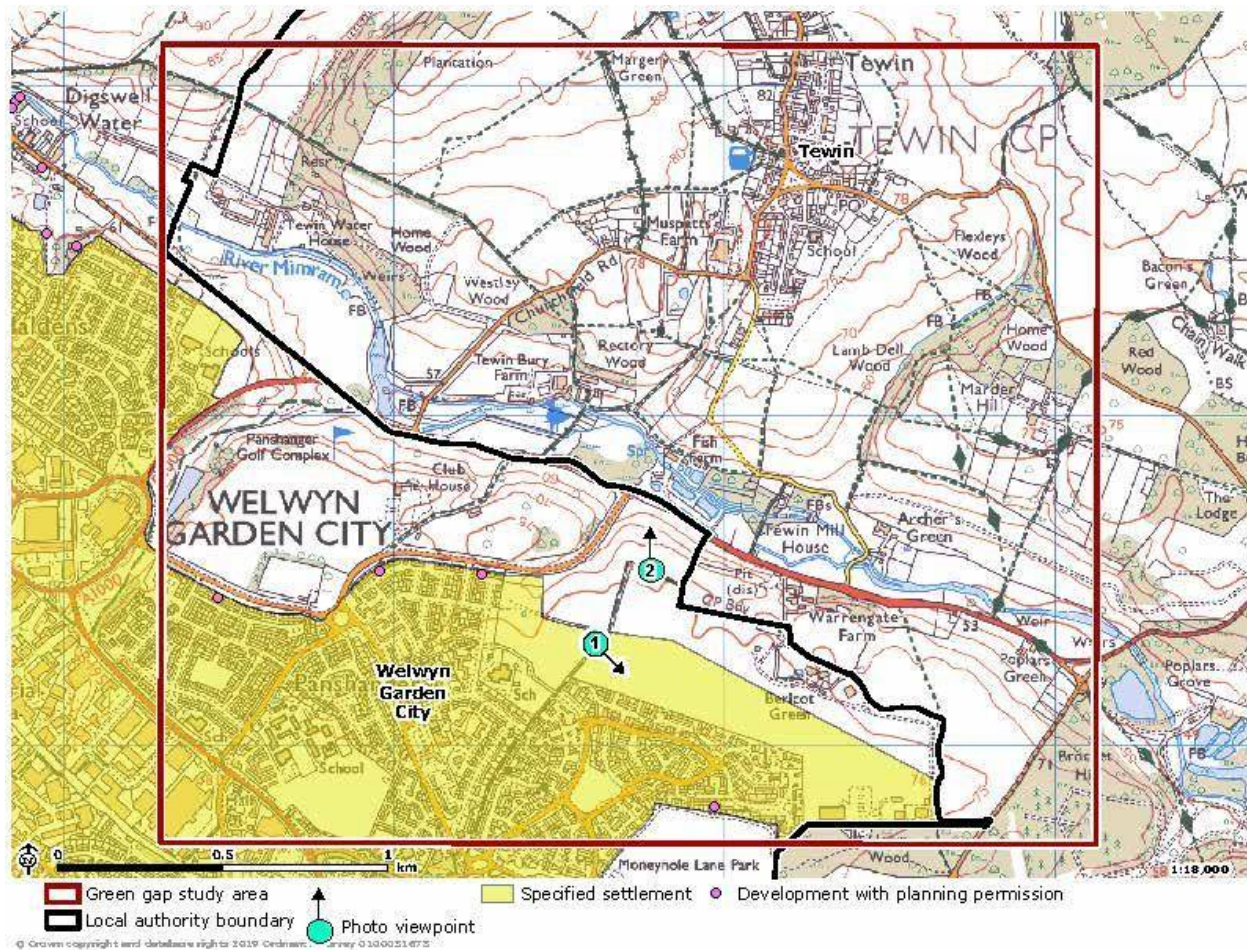
- Avoid the coalescence of Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote, taking account of what is being planned across the Borough boundary in North Hertfordshire, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road, rail or foot;
- Retain the area of open and rural character that defines the gap, comprising undulating farmland, well maintained hedgerows/ hedgerows and copses (including orchards), valley marshlands and semi-improved grasslands - ensure low density scattered development does not erode the rural character of the core of the 'gap';
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Conserve the character of Singlers Marsh / Fulling Mill Meadow and the role it plays in providing a setting to Welwyn Conservation Area, as well as the Mimram Valley Marsh – seeking opportunities to extend these river valley habitats;
- Conserve the character of Danesbury Park and its role as a recreational resource;
- Preserve the extensive areas of archaeological significance west of Lincas Farm, adjacent to the Welwyn Conservation Area and around Rolls Wood, as well as the setting of the listed buildings/ structures (such as a listed cottage, milepost, and farm buildings);
- Preserve the priority habitats good quality semi-improved grassland on the northern edge of Welwyn around Danesbury Park, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh along the Mimram Valley bottom, and scattered deciduous woodland and some traditional orchards amongst the scattered development along Codicote Road) and seek opportunities to extend and link these where possible; and
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections public rights of way connections where possible.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the UK's second Garden City. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall

and in the north towards Digswell.

Tewin is a small hilltop Saxon village situated within East Hertfordshire District on the other side of the Mimram Valley from Welwyn Garden City. The village originated as two smaller hamlets, each focussed around a green. These have now joined with Upper Green located in the north and Lower Green in the south of the village.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The rural gap between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin is around 1km wide at its narrowest point. The Mimram Valley is a notable feature that separates the two settlements. Only part of this gap (south-west of the Mimram Valley) falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough. Within this area is Panshanger Golf Course (located on the plateau top and valley side) and the disused Panshanger Airfield located on the plateau top, below which are fields and woodland on the valley side.

Due to the river there are no direct roads between the two settlements. However there are a series of interconnecting roads from which the valley that forms the gap can be appreciated. A series of footpaths also cross through this area and across the valley, from which the rural character of the gap can be appreciated.

There is currently a strong sense of separation between the two settlements. Although there is some inter-visibility between them due to the elevated landform, the distance of the gap and presence of the valley provides a good sense of separation. There are no major planning permissions in the gap (other than the resolution to permit the development of the allocated site subject to the completion of a S106 Agreement).

Landscape Sensitivity

The part of the rural gap within the borough boundary is part of the Welwyn Fringes Landscape Character Area (LCA 45).

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 45 is divided into two sub-areas, with sub-area 45b comprising of the land between Welwyn Garden City and the Borough boundary.

Landscape sensitivity of most of sub-area 45b to residential development is assessed as **moderate**, however there is a small area including part of Panshanger Golf Course with a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity rating. The proximity to the urban edge and urban fringe land uses reduces sensitivity here, although the valley provides a setting for this edge of Welwyn Garden City. Key sensitivities relevant to this area are:

- Visually prominent sloping land;
- BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands; and
- Rural character of the enclosed valley floor.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix X.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Within the part of the gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough is the Blackfan Local Wildlife Site, located in the tributary valley to the Mimram Valley. There are also a number of Priority Habitat areas of deciduous woodland.

The area contains part of a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone mapped by Natural England – this relates to the reedbeds in the Mimram Valley bottom which is located just over the administrative boundary in East Hertfordshire. In addition, the Herts Ecological Network data indicates that much of the area has the potential for habitat creation. The whole of the dis-used airfield is identified by the Herts Ecological Network to be poor semi-improved grassland, and there is a large area of semi-improved neutral grassland directly west of this, both of which require restoration. It also identifies several small

pockets of woodland plantations including mixed, coniferous and broadleaved, most of which require restoration or maintenance and enhancement.

In terms of cultural heritage there are some listed buildings at Warrengate Farm and an area of archaeological significance in Panshanger Golf Course. The rest of the area is undesignated.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The recreational value of the area is represented by several public rights of way linking to the Mimram Valley, an outdoor sports facility on the edge of Welwyn Garden City, the golf course, and Tewin Water Park/ Garden to the south of Waterside road (B1000).

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix X.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There is a draft allocation on the edge of Welwyn Garden City, on the plateau top at Panshanger Airfield. There is a resolution to permit the development of this allocated site subject to the completion of a S106 Agreement and this will extend development further north towards the Mimram Valley, but would not significantly erode the gap between the settlements – the settlements would still benefit from the undeveloped gap provided by the Mimram Valley.

North of the disused Panshanger Airfield there are two sites that have been promoted through the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (Land North East of Welwyn Garden City WGC4 and Warrengate Farm WGC9). Development of the northern parts of both of these areas would extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City down the valley slopes and to the Borough boundary. The northern edge is particularly sensitive. If the sites were to be developed the retention of a rural gap between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin would be dependent on it being preserved within East Hertfordshire.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix X.*

Summary and Recommendations

As the River Mimram and its associated designation creates a distinct division between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin the area is not at significant risk of closure. However, larger scale developments have the potential to erode the rural character and sense of separation between the two settlements. Therefore, it is recommended that a 'gap policy area' be located within the Welwyn Hatfield part of the area to enable separation of these settlements to be a consideration in any future development proposals.

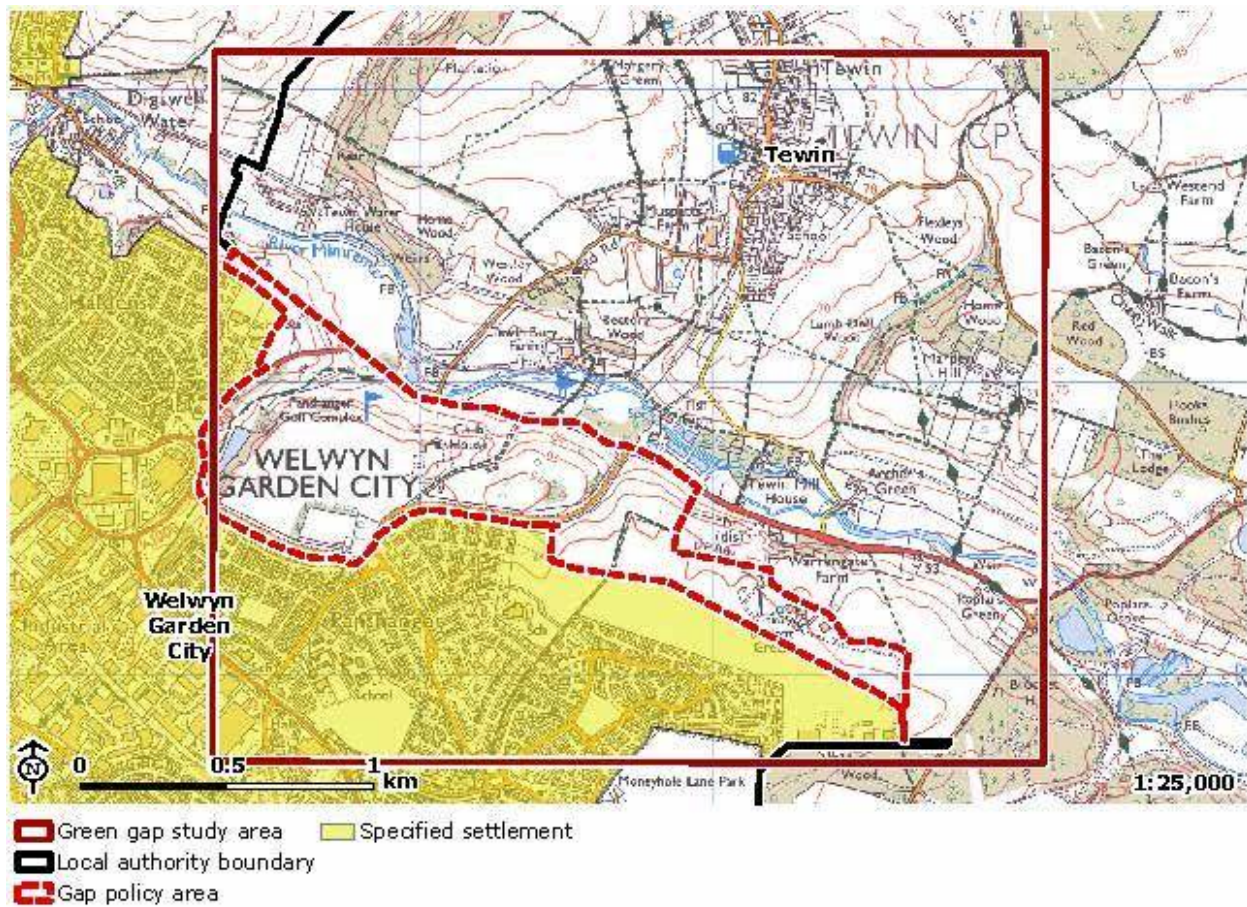
The case for keeping this land (or at least the valley and valley slopes) open is strengthened by the presence of ecological designations and the gap policy area could include the whole of the area between Welwyn Garden City and the Borough boundary. Within this area, the aim should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (taking account of what is being planned across the Borough boundary in East Hertfordshire) by keeping the Mimram Valley and its valley slopes open;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including deciduous woodland, acid and neutral grassland and seek opportunities for extending and linking habitats;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Welwyn Garden City and Tewin;
- Keep any development on the edge of Welwyn Garden City on the plateau top and set back from the valley sides, and ensure there is no greater inter-visibility between settlements than exists currently (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide an effective screening function;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections

public rights of way connections where possible; and

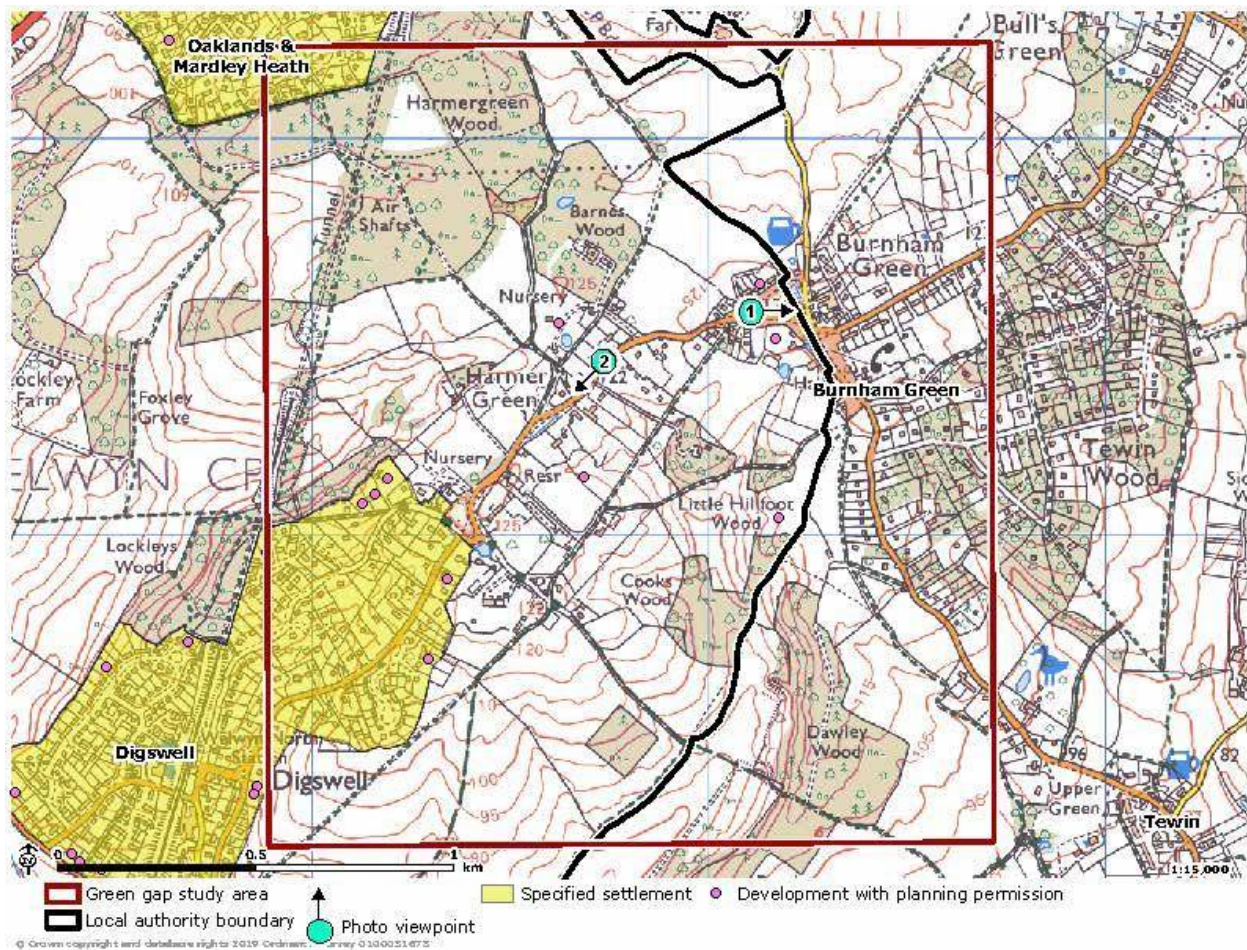
- Retain the perception of rural valley from the valley-floor B1000 road.

Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Digswell and Burnham Green

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Digswell is a residential area that grew up around Welwyn North station after it opened in 1865, located on the northern slopes of the Valley of the River Mimram.

Burnham Green is a small historic hamlet, located on a hilltop. The extent of which has not altered greatly since the late 19th century, although newer development has extended to the south of the village

into Punchettes Wood.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Digswell and Burnham Green is approximately 800m at its narrowest point. The area has a wooded character with interspaced small and irregular shaped pastoral fields. Harmer Green Lane directly connects the two settlements. Mid-way between the two settlements is the small and dispersed hamlet of Harmer Green; here there are already a considerable number of large detached properties which follow Harmer Green Lane. However as these properties are set back from the road and within an area with wooded character, the area has managed to retain an almost rural character.

There are footpaths which connect the two settlements, some of which have extensive views due to the elevated landform, whilst others are enclosed by mature tree hedgerows, providing a rural experience between the two settlements.

The gap is vulnerable to being eroded, or even closed, by development along Harmer Green Lane.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 42 'Tewin, Dawley and Lockley Estate Farmland'. A small proportion of the northeast of the rural gap is within the 'Datchworth Settled Slopes' Landscape Character Area (LCA 37).

For the purposes of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment LCA 42 is divided into three areas with sub-area 42b comprising of the land between Digswell and Burnham Green.

The land within sub-area 42b, in close proximity to the north of Digswell has a **moderate** landscape sensitivity. Where the terrain provides strong eastwards views towards open countryside in the larger open fields to the east/ northeast of Digswell there is a stronger rural character and therefore the land has a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity.

The key sensitivities are listed as:

- The prominent sloping landform.
- Uninterrupted views towards the wooded skyline.
- Maintain historic parkland character and associated features of the Lockleys estate along western settlement edge.
- Small scale field pattern around Harmer Green.
- The extensive network of public rights of way.

For the purposes of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment LCA 37 is divided into three areas with sub-area 37b comprising of the land between Digswell and Burnham Green in the south of the LCA.

LCA area 37b has a more remote rural character than land closer to Woolmer Green (to the north), with tree cover providing strong separation from Oaklands (in the west) and no major roads in the vicinity, although the presence of the railway line to the west has some impact on tranquillity. The undulating and open landform provides a rural setting to Burnham Green. The area has an overall **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity to residential development.

The key sensitivities are listed as:

- The rural agricultural character of the visually prominent slopes.
- Provision of habitat within the adjacent Hammergreen Wood (also an ancient woodland), Hempstall Spinney and Barnes Wood Local Wildlife Sites.
- Rural setting of Burnham Green.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a series of environmental designations located between the two settlements, including several Local Wildlife Sites, such as; Cooks Wood, Barnes Green, Harmer Green Area, Harmer Green Lane,

Barnes Wood and Pastures S. of Harmergreen Wood. There are also a series of Ancient woodlands (some of which are also LWSs) these include; Cooks Wood, Dawley Wood and Lockleys Wood.

Many of the woodland areas between the two settlements are identified to be BAP priority Habitat Deciduous woodlands, these include; Cooks Wood, Little Hillfoot Wood and Barnes Wood, among others.

There are none of Natural England's habitat network enhancement zones in the gap. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the undeveloped fields in the gap have potential for habitat creation. Other habitats identified here include semi-improved neutral grassland to be restored, semi-natural broadleaved woodland to be maintained and enhanced and poor semi-improved grassland to be restored, among other smaller habitat areas.

There is the potential to enhance and extend existing hedgerow boundaries and BAP priority Habitat deciduous woodlands within the gap area.

There are four Grade II listed buildings within the rural gap three of which are clustered near Harmergreen House whilst the fourth is on the settlement edge of Burnham Green.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There is a strong network of public rights of way running through the rural gap between the two settlements.

In addition to public rights of way, there is also a considerable area of open access land areas between the two settlements most of which are along the route of the Harmer Green Lane, including both military by-law land (Area 8 Access Layer) and 14 pockets of Registered Common Land.

There is the potential for the open access land to be better connected to the public rights of way. To join these public rights of way to Burnham Green

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are no draft site allocations likely in this area.

There is one proposed site submitted in response to the Council's 2019 Call for Sites identified directly west of Burnham Green (Land north of Harmer Green Lane). Development of this area would extend Burnham Green to Harmer Green and change the character of this part of the gap, but will close the gap between these settlements.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

The area between the settlements of Digswell and Burnham Green is currently rural in character, but is vulnerable to erosion from additional residential properties along Harmer Green Lane. It would therefore be appropriate to identify a Green Gap Policy Area in this location to protect settlement pattern and identity and prevent the further coalescence of Digswell with Burnham Green.

The area between these settlements contains several sensitive features which further warrant the need for a Green Gap Policy Area, these include; Local Wildlife Sites, BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, registered common land open access areas and public rights of way. The two settlements have distinct characters with Digswell being a 20th century settlement whilst Burnham Green is a historic village, convergence of these settlements would consequently cause a loss in their separate identities.

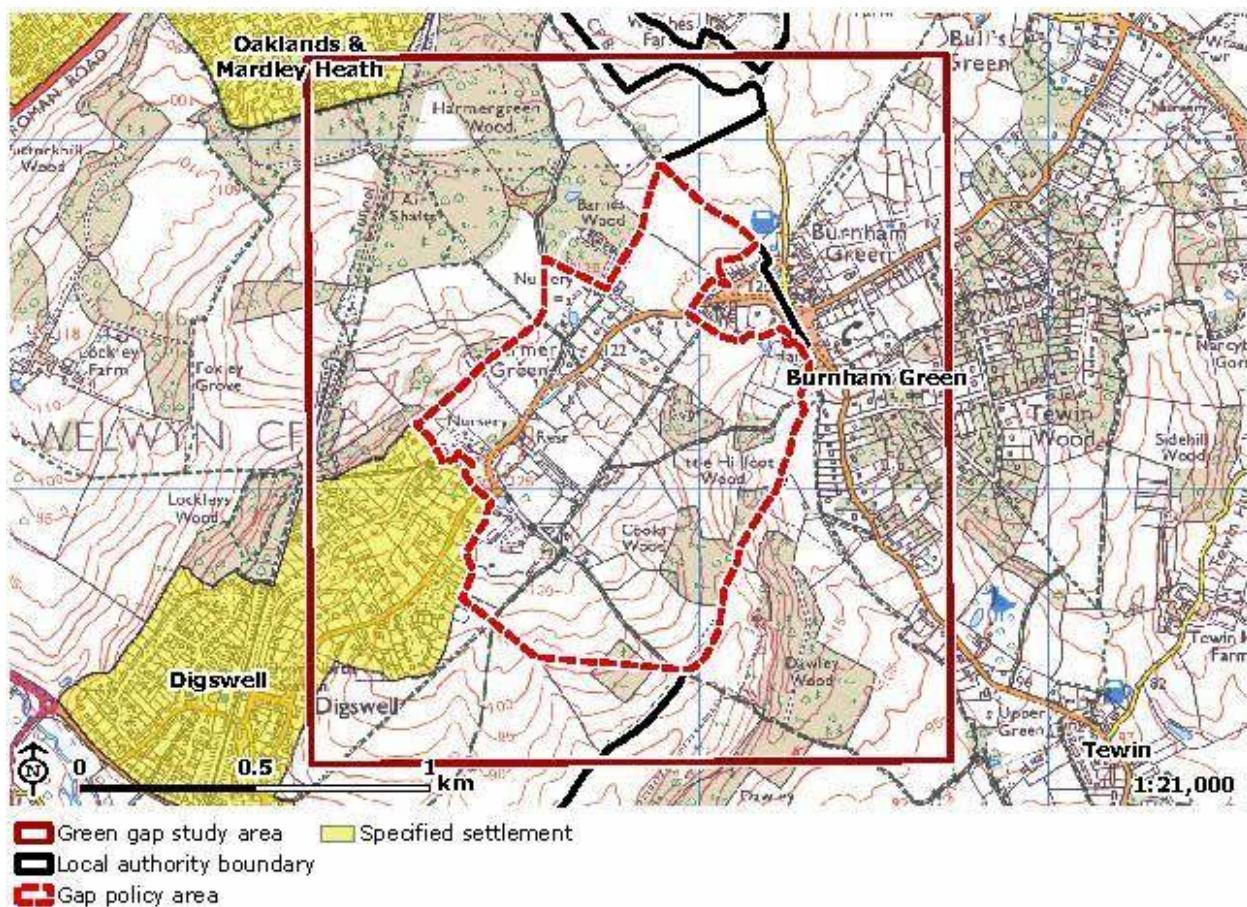
Within this Green Gap Policy Area the aims should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Digswell and Burnham Green, and ensure each retains its own separate identity with Burnham Green being a small historic village and Digswell a 20th century residential settlement;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one

settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot;

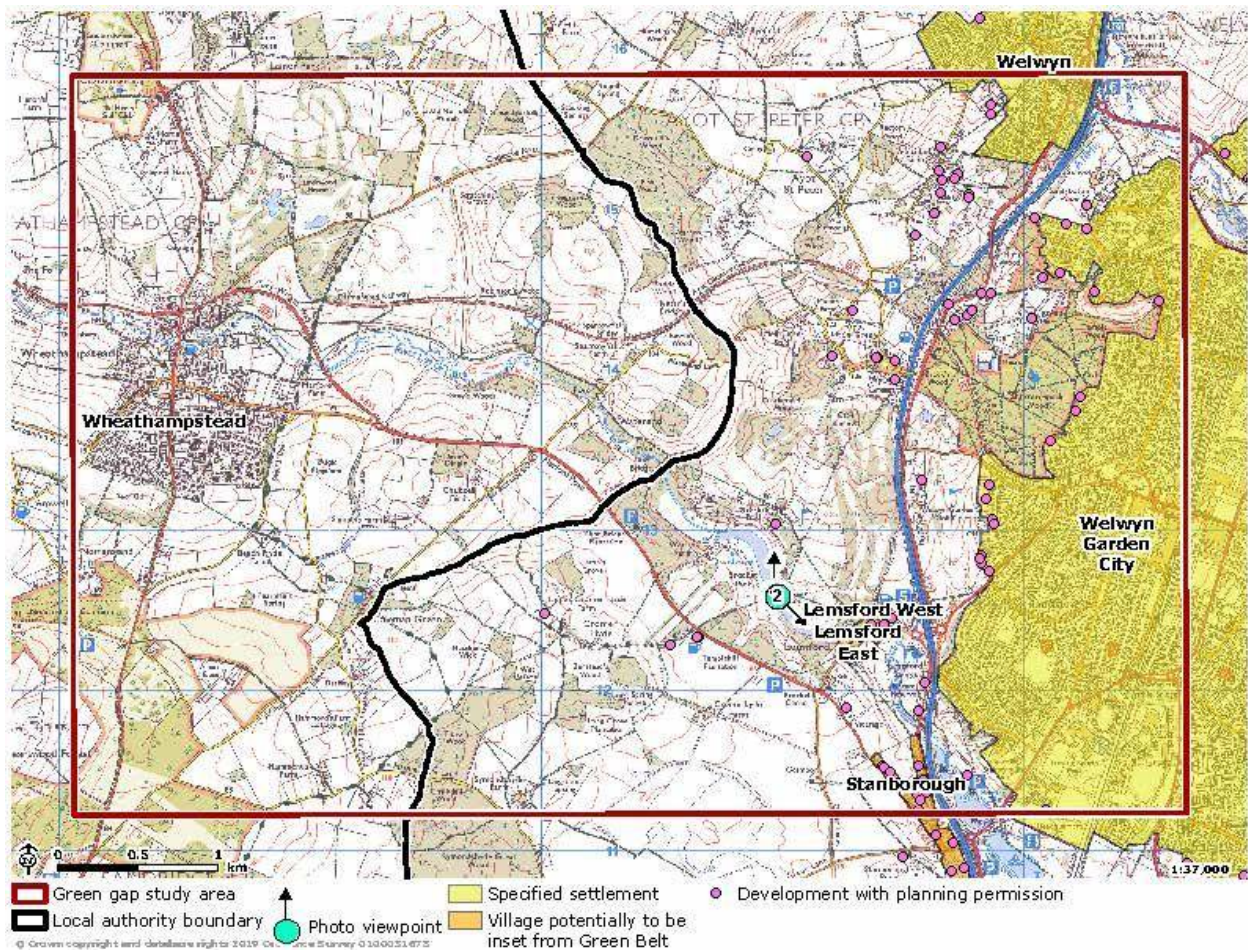
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Digswell, Harmer Green and Burnham Green;
- Retain wooded areas including Ancient woodlands, BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands and woodlands included in LWS, as they act as visual screening between the two settlements. Seek opportunities for extending and linking these ecologically significant areas;
- Avoid development on visually prominent slopes such as those directly east of Digswell, which may have intervisibility between the two settlements;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible; and
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the UK's second Garden City. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall

and in the north towards Digswell and Panshanger.

Wheathampstead is a large nucleated village, focussed on the River Lea, outside of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Boundary in St Albans District. By 1060, the village had formed around Wheathampsteadbury manor house, the Church, and the mill on the River Lea. Since then the village has grown as a nucleated settlement around these central features.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead straddles the boundary between the Borough of Welwyn Hatfield and St Albans District. The gap measures 4.3km and comprises an undulating landscape of agricultural fields, parkland (the Grade II Registered parkland of Bocket Hall) and woodland, incised by the Lea Valley which flows between the two settlements. The A1(M) encloses the western edge of Welwyn Garden City, forming a physical barrier.

The B653 Marford Road provides a vehicular link between the two settlements. When travelling along this road there is a sense of passing through undeveloped countryside between Wheathampstead and Welwyn Garden City. There is a good network of public rights of way in this area, including National Cycle Network Route 51 along the Ayot Greenway which is formed by a former railway branch line from Luton to Welwyn Garden City. These routes also provide an opportunity to experience the countryside that surrounded and separates these settlements.

The undulating topography, presence of woodland and large distance between the two settlements means that the two settlements retain separate identities, as well as a distinct physical and visual separation (there is no inter-visibility between them). There are no major planning permissions for new developments in the Welwyn Hatfield part of the gap.

Landscape Sensitivity

The part of the gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough is covered by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 33 'Upper Lee Valley' and LCA 35 'Ayot St Peter Wooded Upland'.

LCA 33 is divided in two; land to the west of the A1(M) (33), and land on the edge of Welwyn Garden City (33a). This area is dominated by arable farmland, woodland and parkland. The landscape sensitivity assessment assessed both sub-areas as having a **moderate – high sensitivity** to development.

Key sensitivities for LCA 33 include:

- Visually prominent landform;
- Important ecological resources including BAP Priority Habitats and mature hedgerows/ trees;
- Historic character of Lemsford/ Bocket Hall parkland.

LCA 35 is an elevated plateau with woodland enclosing historic villages, arable fields and parkland is divided. The landscape sensitivity assessment divides LCA 35 into three sub-areas: 35, 35a and 35b. The southern section of 35 and 35b are of relevance to this gap. LCA 35 has a **moderate – high sensitivity** to development while 35b is assessed as having a **low to low-moderate sensitivity** to development.

Key sensitivities for LCA 35 include:

- The rural nature of the landscape including historic settlement pattern of isolated farms, cottages and country houses of traditional vernacular materials;
- Presence of ancient woodlands as skyline landscape features;
- Historic character of the village of Ayot Green (a Conservation Area), including its associated village green;
- The relationship between Listed buildings within the villages of Ayot St Peter and Ayot Green and their surrounding rural landscapes;
- Visual prominence of valley slopes to the River Mimram;
- The extensive network of public rights of way;

- The connectivity provided by hedgerows and trees;
- Sherrardspark Wood which contains pockets of development.

Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

The part of the gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough contains a high number of environmental designations. These include Sherrardspark Wood which is a SSSI, Local Wildlife Site (LWS), Local Nature Reserve, and Ancient Woodland (74ha), which is also protected by a blanket TPO and recognised as a priority habitat (deciduous woodland). Sherrardspark Wood LWS also forms part of a larger complex of adjoining LWSs which include parcels of deciduous woodland and grassland habitats including: Valley Road Open Space Wildlife Site is located south of Welwyn Garden City Golf Course; Bocket Park North, Lemsford Springs, Mitchell's Wood and Long Spring (Ayot Green). A 6ha pocket of Ancient Replanted Woodland is located west of Ayot Green, with a TPO around a group of trees linked to this woodland. The dismantled railway 'The Ayot Greenway' is also a linear Local Wildlife Site which forms an important green corridor.

There is a good network of priority habitats including deciduous woodland, as well as Purple Moorgrass and Rush Pasture at Lemsford Springs.

Lemsford Springs is recognised by Natural England as a Primary Habitat and Network Enhancement Zone. In addition, the Herts Ecological Network identifies many area for habitat creation, as well as to 'maintain and enhance' broadleaf, and 'restore' pockets of plantation.

Cultural designations include a high number of Grade II Listed Buildings within Lemsford, Ayot Green and buildings associated with Bocket Hall. There are three Grade II* built features at Bocket Hall (the Temple, Paine Bridge, and the Gates, Lodges and Screen Wall at the south-east entrance), and the Hall itself is Grade I. Ayot Green village is also a Conservation Area.

In addition, there are three areas of archaeological significance, one just west of Ayot Green at Melbourne Stud, and the other two split across the A1(M) just north of Lemsford.

*Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There is a good network of public Rights of Way across this gap offering circular routes from settlements and out to the wider region. National Cycle Network routes 57 and 12 provide an off-road route along the Ayot Greenway between the two settlements and into the wider countryside to the north.

Much of Ayot Green and Ayot Little Green are designated as Open Access Land.

There is an allotment sandwiched between Welwyn Garden City Golf Course and the Great North Road. Outdoor sports facilities include playing fields at Lemsford village and two Golf Courses (Welwyn Garden City Golf Club and Bocket Hall).

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There are no draft allocations proposed within the area that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough between these settlements (the nearest proposed allocation is the new settlement of Symondshyde).

However there are seven sites that have been put forward in the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites': these include three sites at Lemsford, an area just outside the western boundary of the Bocket Hall Parkland, and two areas on the outskirts of Ayot Green. These are all located within areas identified in the landscape sensitivity assessment as being of relatively high sensitivity.

Whilst development of these sites would not threaten the existing gap between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead, they would impact on the countryside outside the existing settlement boundaries. The site on the western edge of Bocket Hall would be most remote from an existing settlement boundary

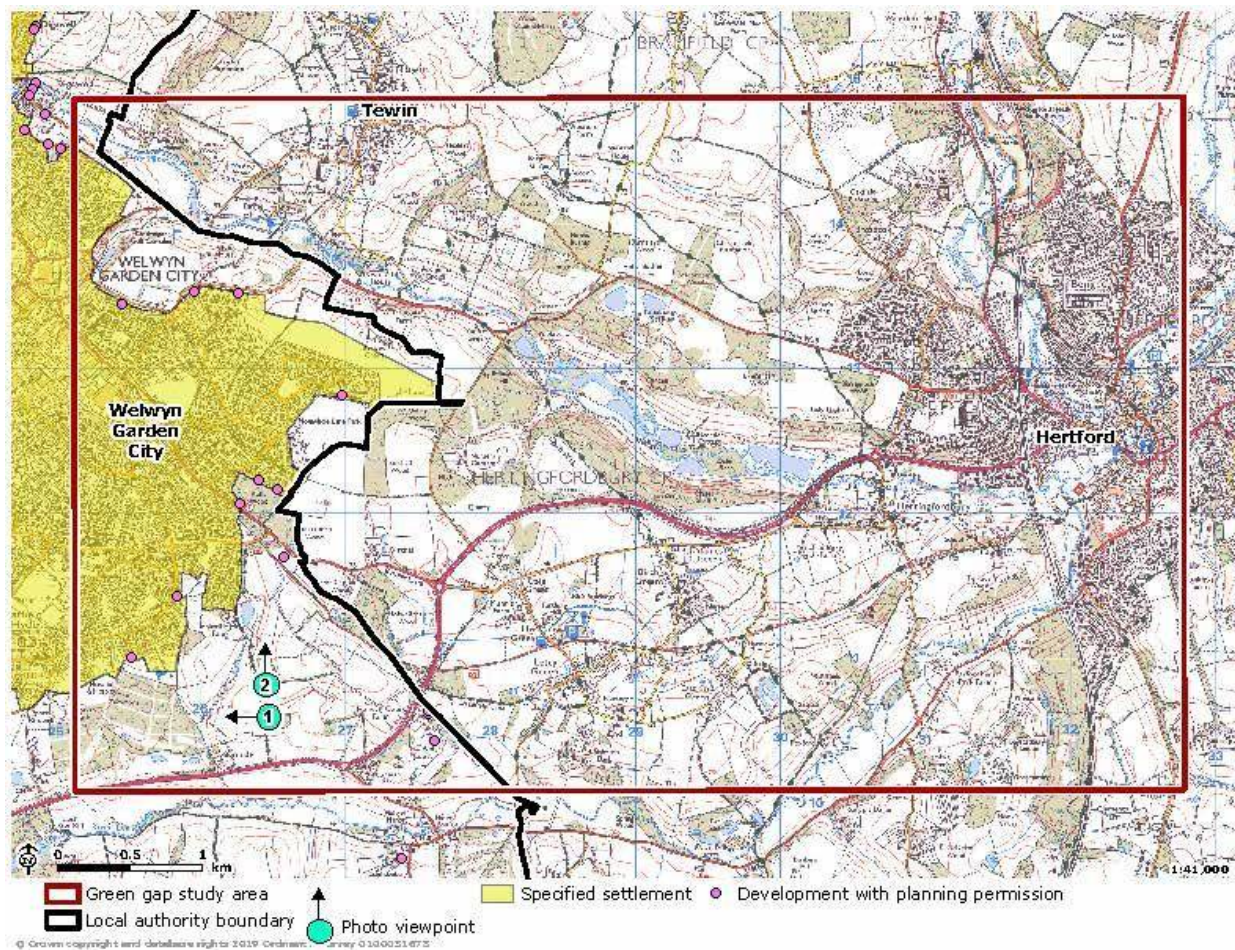
**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

The area between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead is large (at around 4.3 km) and includes robust features including the A1(M) corridor, woodlands, the parkland of Bocket Hall and the Lea Valley which would help prevent the settlements from merging at a future date. It is concluded that there is no need for a 'gap policy area' in this location due to the large distance between the two settlements and the lack of risk of coalescence. Any issues likely to arise in relation to proposed development over the next Local Plan period are likely to be related to effects on landscape character, ecological / heritage features and the setting of villages, rather than the separation of Welwyn Garden City from Wheathampstead.

Area between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the UK's second Garden City. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall and in the north towards Digswell and Panshanger.

Hertford is the county town of Hertfordshire where four rivers converge – the Rib, Beane, Mimram and Lea. It was a fortified Saxon town built by King Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great, in 912. Its population has since grown to 26,000 (2011 Census). Like Welwyn Garden City, Hertford is a nucleated settlement which has expanded over the centuries around the central Castle.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between the main settlements of Welwyn Garden City and Hertford is 2.7km. A large part of the gap is occupied by the presence of the historic Grade II* Registered Parkland of Panshanger Park (336ha). The Park has been owned by Tarmac since the 1980s with sections quarried for sand and gravel. The Park has largely been restored to arable farming and wildlife habitats, with further phases of restoration planned as extraction comes to an end. Despite this disruption to the historic park, the valley landform of the Mimram Valley has been preserved and the valley containing the river is a key feature of the gap between the two settlements. The wooded character of the park and valley provide a visual separation between the two settlements.

The settlements are linked via the B1000 (a rural, winding road) to the north and the A414 dual carriageway to the south of the Park. Off-road links along the Cole Green Lane and the local footpath network give the perception of crossing a rural area. This gives users travelling between these two conurbations the sense of leaving one settlement and arriving at a new settlement of different identity.

Within Welwyn Hatfield Borough there is a recent planning permission for a proposed two storey office, general industrial and storage/ distribution development on former equestrian land south of Blackthorn Wood. Over the Borough boundary within East Hertfordshire the designated parkland at Panshanger is likely to prevent coalescence between the two settlements. However, expansion of the villages south of the A414 at Birch Green, Letty Green or Cole Green could erode the rural character of this area.

Landscape Sensitivity

The part of the gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough is within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 45 'Welwyn Fringes' on the eastern side of Welwyn Garden City. The eastern side of this LCA is associated with rural landuse with arable cultivation and some blocks of woodland. The LCA identifies the management aim for this area as 'improve and conserve'.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 45 is divided into two areas, 45a and 45b.

Sub-area 45a has a **moderate sensitivity** and includes a large area of former mineral extraction and subsequent landfill where the land is largely undeveloped and now has an open rural character. There is a small area of **low** landscape sensitivity at Moneyhole Lane Farm.

The key sensitivities in this area are:

- The blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows / woodland copses along field boundaries and rural lanes.
- The small area of BAP Priority Habitat semi-improved grassland adjacent to The Commons.
- The rural/parkland character and sense of remoteness in the east.
- Views from the public rights of way and National cycle routes running through the area.

Sub-area 45b has a **moderate** to **moderate-high sensitivity** rating with the valley landform creating a distinctive settlement edge, with sensitivity to development moderate on higher ground, and moderate-high on the steeper slopes which are subject to views across the valley.

The key sensitivities are listed as:

- Preserve the blocks of deciduous woodland and tree lines.
- Avoid any visual perception of development spilling over from higher ground into the valley.
- Retain perception of a rural valley from the valley-floor B1000 road.

*Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix X.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are quite a lot of environmental designations within this gap, which reflect the value placed on this area. Some of these designations lie within Welwyn Hatfield Borough and some within East Hertfordshire. This assessment focuses on the part of the gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough.

Ecological designations include The Commons Local Nature Reserve (13ha), with a further 26ha designated as a Local Wildlife Site in the south. Greater Captain's and Howellpark Wood Local Wildlife Site (8ha) which straddles the eastern boundary of the gap, and nearby Rolls and Blackthorn Woods LWS (12ha), and the Blackfan Valley Local Wildlife Site (13ha) in the north.

All of these sites contain priority habitat (mostly deciduous woodland), which contribute to the network of deciduous woodlands acting as stepping stones across the wider landscape. Rolls Wood and parts of Howellpark Wood are also designated Ancient Woodland. Rolls and Blackthorn Woods are protected by a blanket TPO. The Hertfordshire Ecological Network identifies an opportunity to enhance all broadleaf woodland within this gap.

The site of the former Panshanger Aerodrome currently consists of poor semi-improved grassland presenting an opportunity to improve grassland management and restore it to acidic or neutral grassland.

The vast majority of the gap is highlighted as an opportunity area for habitat creation. Certainly, improvements to linking habitats such as hedgerow restoration and strengthening existing corridors between the pockets of woodland would improve ecological connectivity across this gap with the wider habitat network. The northern extent of Panshanger Golf Complex includes the valley slopes of the Mimram River chalkstream and is part of one of Natural England's Network Enhancement Zones.

In terms of cultural heritage designations within the Welwyn Hatfield part of the area, there is a Grade II Listed Building at Holwellhyde Farmhouse, two areas of archaeological significance beside the Blackfan Valley Local Wildlife Site and part of the Grade II Registered Park and Garden of Tewin Water, a Humphry Repton landscape. To the east of the administrative boundary is the Grade II* parkland of Panshanger Park, another Humphry Repton landscape, which has a significant bearing on the character and sensitivity of the landscape between these two settlements.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There are good public rights of way links in the north and eastern parts of this area leading to the surrounding countryside outside the Borough towards Tewin and Panshanger Park. Public Rights of Way through the southern section of the gap are curtailed by the A414 which dissects the Lea Valley.

The National Cycle Network route 61 follows the former Great Northern Railway line (now called the Cole Green Way) from Welwyn Garden City to Hertford which provides a good off-road route for cyclists.

Outdoor sports facilities include Hatfield Cricket Club grounds to the west of The Commons LWS and LNR, Moneyhole Lane Playing Fields on the east of the Panshanger area of Welwyn Garden City, and Welwyn Garden City Football and Social Club.

There is one allotment site within the gap at Moneyhole Lane Allotment Garden.

Mill Green Golf Club borders the north side of the A414 and surrounds The Commons LWS and LNR. Panshanger Golf Course dominates much of the northern area of this gap. These reduce the sense of separation from urban areas for users of rights of way.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix X.*

Pressure on the Gap

There are two draft allocation sites on the edge of Welwyn Garden City: Panshanger Airfield and South East Welwyn Garden City. There is a resolution to permit the development of the Panshanger Airfield site subject to completion of a S106 Agreement, and development of this site would extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City up to the valley slopes in the north. The South East Welwyn Garden City draft allocation is part of Birchall Garden Suburb which extends into East Hertfordshire. Development of this site would extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City up to the A414 in the south. Despite the extension of Welwyn Garden City in these directions, the nearest distance between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford would be no closer and a clear separation would remain between the two settlements.

Immediately north of the Panshanger Airfield are two promoted sites put forward in response to the Council's 2019 'call for sites' (WGC4 and WGC9). The gap between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford is large, and development of these sites would not extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City any closer to Hertford.

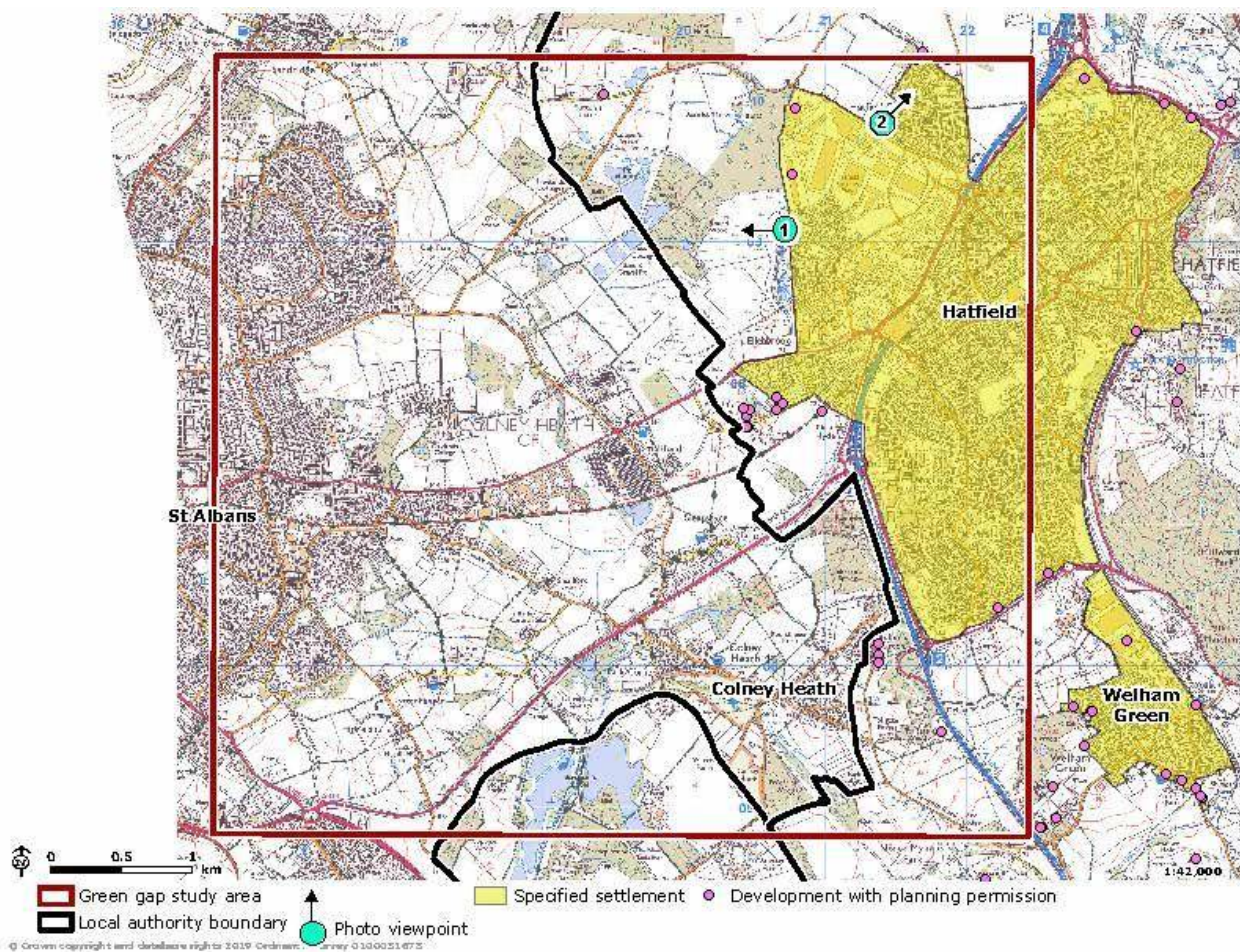
**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

There is sufficient separation between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford that, even with pressure for development on the edges of both settlements, the settlements are unlikely to merge. Further protection is provided by the Grade II* Registered Parkland of Panshanger Park which lies between the two. For these reasons, and the fact that most of the land within the gap is outside Welwyn Hatfield Councils' control (being located in East Hertfordshire), it is suggested that a Green Gap designation would not add much value in this instance. Development in the next Local Plan period is more likely to affect landscape character, ecology/ habitat network value, and setting of cultural heritage features than settlement separation.

Area between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans District)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Hatfield is a town which initially grew up around the gates of Hatfield House. However, as one of the post-war New Towns it expanded rapidly in the 20th century with the Government building a new town centre and allocating 9.5km² for the New Town.

St. Albans is a city in Hertfordshire and the major urban area in the City and District of St Albans. It was the first major town on the old Roman road of Watling Street for travellers heading north, and it became the Roman city of Verulamium. It is a historic market town and is now a dormitory town within the London commuter belt and the Greater London Built-Up Area. Post-World War II it expanded rapidly as part of the post-War redistribution of population out of Greater London.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

This is a large gap that exceeds a distance of 3km in places. The smallest part of the gap is around 1.3km along the Hatfield Road (A1057) and the village of Smallford (and its adjacent glasshouses) lies within this gap reducing the perception of separation further. Nevertheless, the two settlements of Hatfield and St Albans retain separate identities and the presence of Ellenbrook Fields country park, blocks of woodland and undeveloped slopes are strong features that ensures there is perception of leaving one settlement and travelling to another when using the roads and footpaths between the two. The two settlements are not currently inter-visible with each other.

The gap is vulnerable to being eroded by further development, such as has already occurred along Hatfield Road and within Sleapshyde, although current planning permissions typically consist of alterations to existing dwellings rather than new dwellings.

Landscape Sensitivity

Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap occupies Landscape Character Areas (LCA) 30 Colney Heath Farmland and 31 De Havilland Plain. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and conserve' the landscape within area 30, and 'improve and restore' the landscape within area 31.

The landscape sensitivity assessment subdivides these character areas into assessment parcels. Sub-areas 30, 31 and 31a fall within this gap.

With regards to the role of these areas providing a setting to settlements, deciduous woodland and mature hedgerows in sub-area 30 provides some rural setting to Hatfield as does Ellenbrook Fields country park in sub-area 31a.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 30 is described as **moderate** as although reduced by the surrounding major road network, the simple and flat landform and the sense of enclosure created by mature hedgerows and trees, there are a number of valued features including the presence of priority habitat deciduous woodland (which creates a buffer to the edge of Ellenbrook and enhances rural character), the historic character of built development along Wilkin's Green Lane, the rural character of the lanes along the settlement edge and the presence of the Alban Way long distance recreational route. The key sensitivities are:

- The areas of priority habitat deciduous woodlands;
- The historic buildings off Wilkin's Green Lane;
- The rural character of Wilkin's Green Lane and Ellenbrook Lane; and
- The Alban Way Long Distance Footpath.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 31 varies between **low-moderate** in the northern part of the area given the evidence of mineral extraction which has altered the field pattern and limited the coverage of habitats, and **moderate** in the southern part where much of the land has regenerated to form more important habitats. The key sensitivities are:

- The pockets of priority habitat deciduous woodlands, as well as other large areas of semi-natural or restored habitats associated with past mineral extraction;
- Rural character;
- Visually prominent areas comprising an open character; and
- Listed buildings and their rural setting.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 31a also varies between **low-moderate** in the northern part of the area due to the visible urban edge influences of Hatfield Business Park and busy roads and **moderate** in the southern part which contains Ellenbrook Fields country park, valued for its parkland

vegetation, woodlands, recreation and with some heritage interest as it is located on the site of the former Hatfield Aerodrome. The key sensitivities are:

- Visually prominent areas that have an open character;
- Extensive public access in this area; and
- Priority habitat deciduous woodland as well as other small copses.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a number of Local Wildlife Sites between the two settlements and within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough part of the gap: Sleeve Hall Wood, Home Covert & Round Wood and Copse at Nast Hyde.

Priority habitats include scattered deciduous woodland and a traditional orchard at Great Nast Hyde House.

A Network Enhancement Zone 1 (mapped by Natural England) lies between the settlements at Colney Heath although this is outside Welwyn Hatfield's administrative boundary. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the areas within Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap have a medium/high priority for habitat creation, particularly in relation to enhancement of acid grassland and broadleaved woodland.

There are some scattered listed buildings/ structures (such as a listed cottage, manor house, and farm buildings) and an area of archeological significance at Astwick Manor.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area of this gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough contains recreational value in the form of the Alban Way Long Distance Footpath, national and local cycle paths, and the Hertfordshire Sports Village at Ellenbrook. Informal recreation opportunities also exist within Ellenbrook Fields country park which contributes to the recreational value of the area. There could be an opportunity to improve the footpath and cycleway network in the area.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are no site allocations in this area, although there is a draft allocation in the emerging St Albans Local Plan 'East of St Albans'.

There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites along the western edge of Hatfield: Hat2 Land west of Hatfield, Hat19 Land off Bramble Road, Hat3 Land at Great Nast Hyde, Hat 4 Land at Wilkins Green Lane, and Hat9 Roehyde. If these sites were to be developed this would extend the western edge of Hatfield further into the surrounding countryside, and the Land at Great Nast Hyde would extend development further west towards Smallford. Although there is a clear gap between Hatfield and St Albans across much of the area, the gap between Hatfield and Smallford is vulnerable and development of these sites will almost join Hatfield to St Albans.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

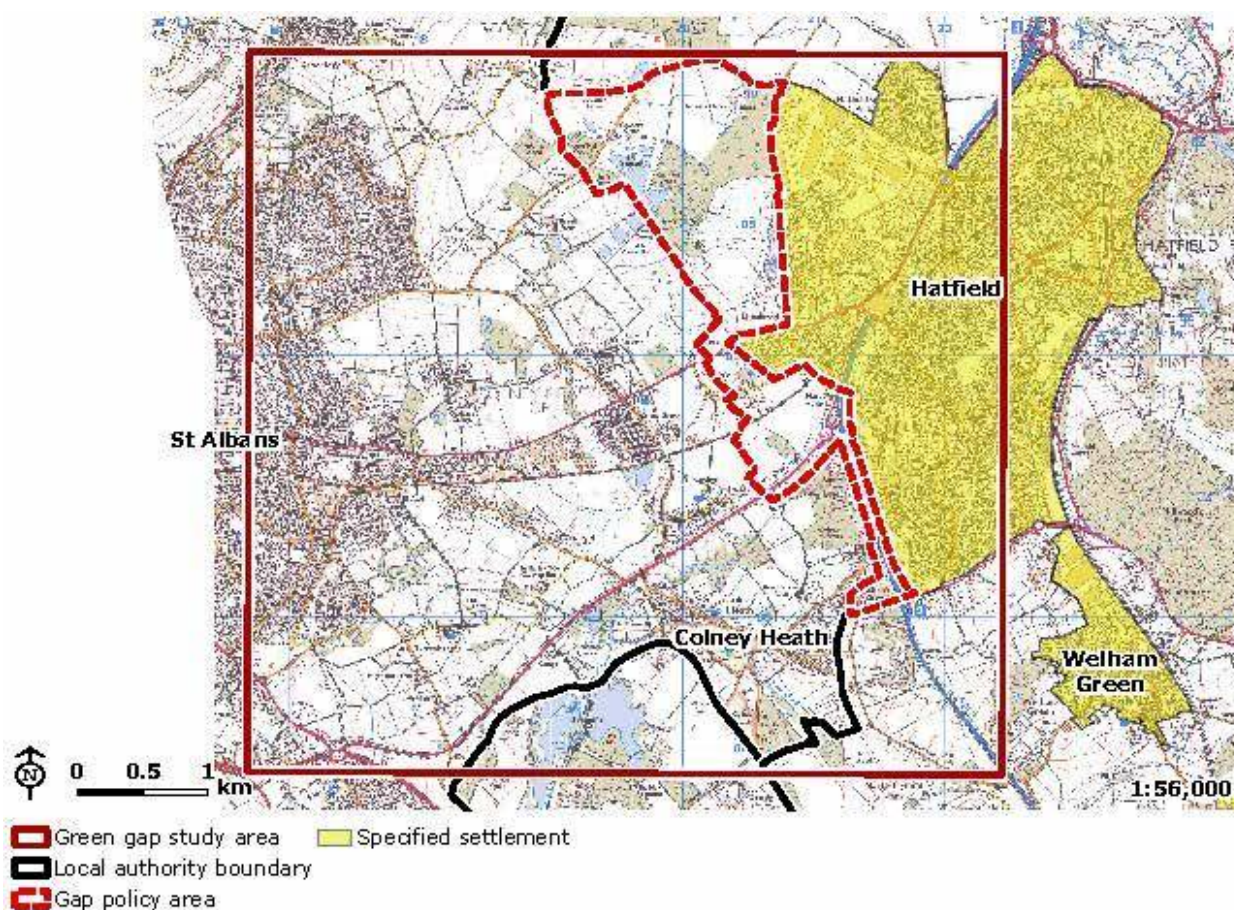
Since the gap between Smallford (St Albans) and Hatfield is currently quite small and vulnerable to future development, it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area within Welwyn Hatfield's part of the gap in order to help prevent the future merging of Hatfield with St Albans.

The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural parkland setting to the edge of Hatfield, as well as its ecological value represented by the presence of local wildlife sites.

The whole of the area to the west of Hatfield that lies within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

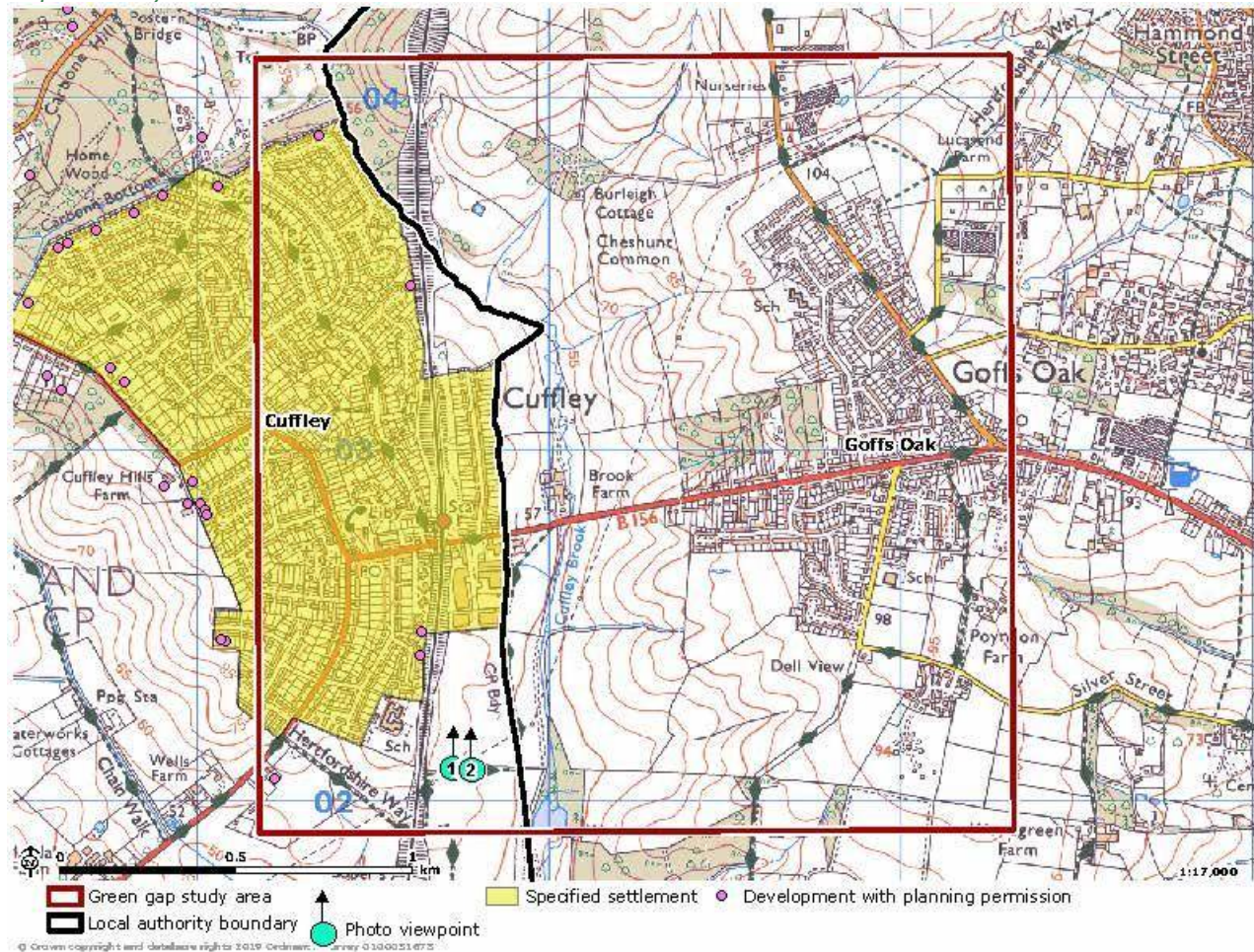
- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements, avoiding scattered and ribbon development along the connection roads that could erode the gap. This is particularly pertinent between the edge of Smallford (St Albans) and Ellenbrook (Hatfield);
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including the traditional orchard at Great Nast Hyde House and the scattered deciduous woodlands, seeking opportunities to extend and link these features where possible;
- Improve habitat provision throughout the area, particularly acid grassland and broadleaved woodland;
- Preserve the character of Ellenbrook Fields country park and its role as a recreational resource;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Hatfield; and
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further public rights of way.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Cuffley and Goff's Oak

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

The settlement of Cuffley is a large 20th century village, which grew up around a station on the Great Northern Railway (the railway reached the village in the early 20th century). It has since expanded even further as a series of estates, particularly the west of the railway line.

Goff's Oak originated as a small rural village at the junction of Cuffley Road and Newgate Street Road in Broxbourne Borough. The village has expanded over the years in response to demand for additional housing, resulting in what is now a large village.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Cuffley and Goff's Oak varies in size, but is approximately 0.4km at its closest point (along Cuffley Hill). It is approximately 1.2km where the gap is larger in the north and south.

The gap is bisected by the Cuffley Brook which runs directly north to south, resulting in a valley between the two settlements, comprising a mixture of arable and pastoral fields bounded by hedgerows. The valley landform means there is some intervisibility between the two settlements.

From the edge of Cuffley, east facing slopes gently descend towards the Cuffley Brook with much of this land being within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary. The west facing slopes on the other side of the Cuffley Brook ascend steeply towards the edge of Goff's Oak and lie entirely within the Broxbourne Borough boundary.

Despite the presence of Brook Farm in the gap, the undeveloped valley provides a sense of separation between the two villages which can be experienced when travelling along Cuffley Hill. However the gap is vulnerable to being eroded by further development, particularly along Cuffley Hill. The gap can also be perceived when walking the Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath which runs along the edge of Cuffley.

Landscape Sensitivity

Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap is only a small area on the eastern edge of Cuffley, which forms part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 56 'Cheshunt Common'. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and restore' the landscape.

The landscape sensitivity assessment notes that the sloping landform down towards Cuffley Brook provides a setting for the Cuffley settlement edge to the east of the railway line.

The landscape sensitivity of area 56 is described as **low-moderate** because although the sloping landform, vegetated boundaries and the absence of built development gives the area a rural character, the close relationship with the adjacent urban edge, including aural intrusion from the railway line, limits sensitivity. The key sensitivities are:

- The vegetated boundaries that enclose the area including the deciduous woodland along the edge of the railway line and field boundaries.
- The Cuffley Brook and associated riparian vegetation.
- Visibility of the area from higher ground to the west.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Within Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap is an area of priority habitat deciduous woodland which runs along part of the railway line. Cuffley Station Embankment is also a Local Wildlife Site.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the areas within Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap have a medium/high priority for habitat creation, targeting acid grassland, broadleaved woodland and wetland along the Cuffley Brook.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area of this gap that falls within Welwyn Hatfield Borough is partly bounded by the Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath in the south which forms part of a circular walk within Cuffley. It also provides access to the Chain Walk which provides a connection to Goff's Oak.

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There is a draft allocation proposed in Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap (Land at The Meadway), although it is noted that the eastern boundary of the allocation would not extend development any further eastwards than the existing development at The Meadway.

There are no promoted sites from the Call for Sites in this area (they tend to be focussed on the west side of Cuffley).

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

Summary and Recommendations

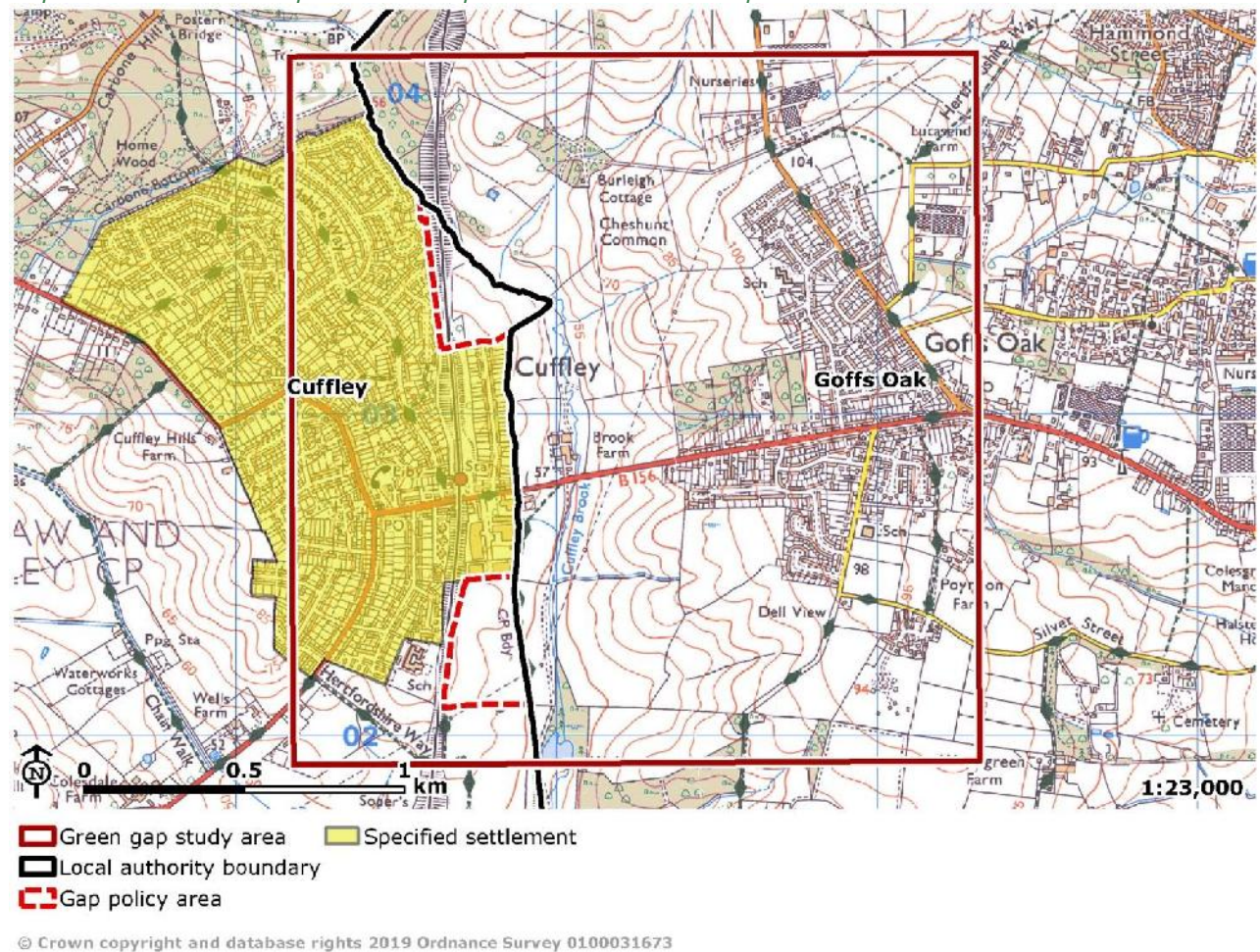
Since there is a physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to being closed, particularly along Cuffley Road, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap' in this location to prevent these two villages from merging. This is particularly pertinent where development has extended from Goff's Oak along Cuffley Hill resulting in only a small undeveloped area between the village and the settlement edge of Cuffley, and where coalescence between the two is at greatest risk. However the part of the gap that lies within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary is not particularly concerned with this vulnerable area, as it consists of two detached fields to the north and south of The Meadway.

The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural setting to the edge of Cuffley and the opportunities for habitat creation.

The whole of the area to the east of Cuffley that lies within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

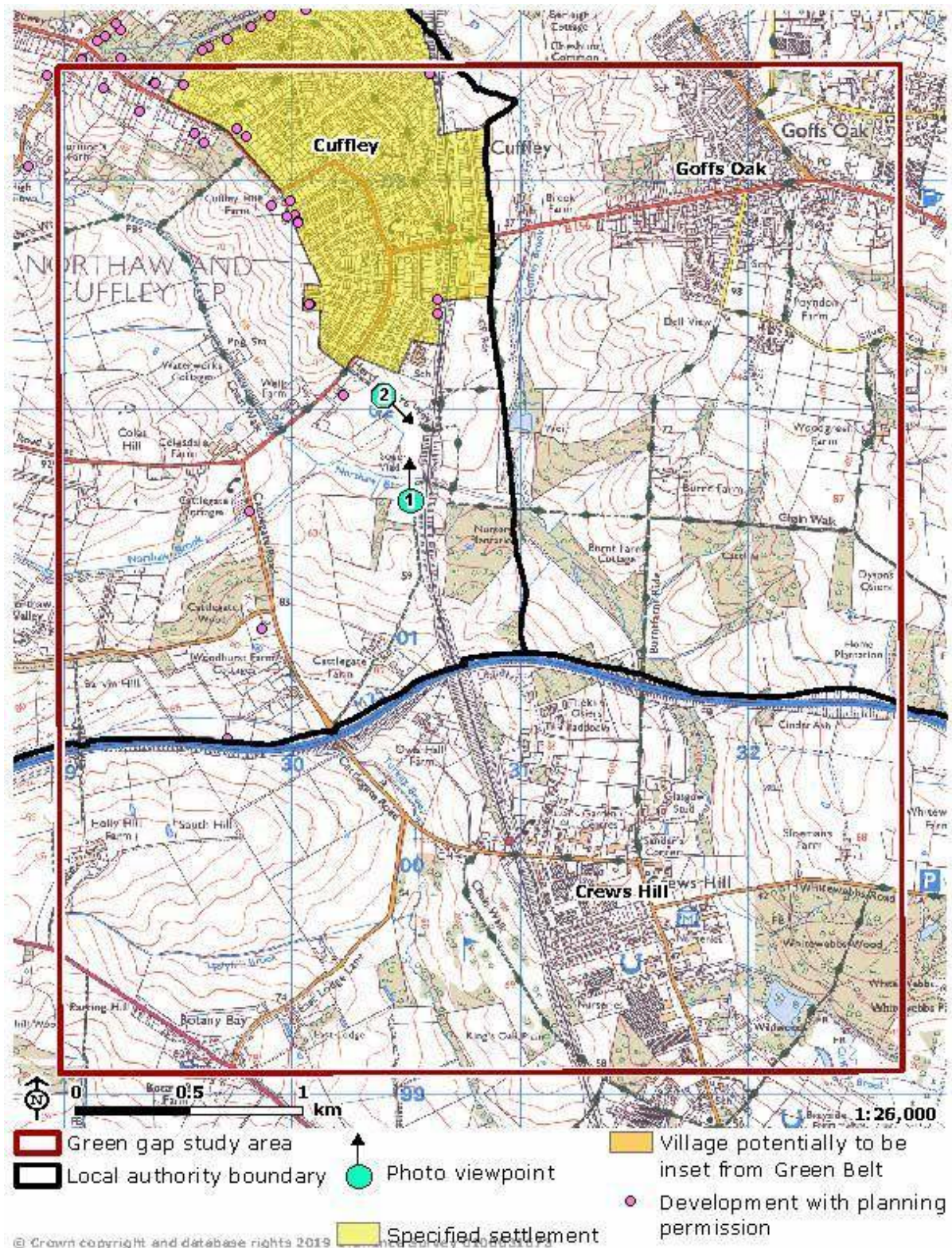
- Avoid the coalescence of Cuffley and Goff's Oak, taking account of what is being planned across the Borough boundary in Broxbourne, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road, rail or foot;
- Ensure development does not extend any further than the existing eastern extents of Cuffley or intrude onto the valley floor of Cuffley Brook;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Cuffley;
- Ensure there is no additional inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including remaining hedgerows and deciduous, and seek opportunities for extending and linking areas of acid grassland and wetland along the Cuffley Brook.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

The settlement of Cuffley is a large 20th century village, which grew up around a station on the Great Northern Railway (the railway reached the village in the early 20th century). It has since expanded even further as a series of estates, particularly the west of the railway line.

Crews Hill is an area of garden centres, plant nurseries and some housing that has grown up around the former hamlet of Sanders's Corner, close to Crews Hill station. It is part of the London Borough of Enfield.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Cuffley and Crews Hill is approximately 2km, and therefore they read as clearly separate settlements on the ground. The M25 runs between the settlements, which also provides a sense of separation.

The area between the two settlements is an undulating rural landscape comprising a patchwork of agricultural fields surrounded by hedgerows and woodland, and containing watercourses (Northaw Brook in the north and Turkey Brook in the south). The undulating topography, presence of woodland and distance between the settlements means they are not inter-visible with each other.

The railway line and Cattlegate Road provide transport links between Cuffley and Crews Hill. The Hertfordshire Way and Chain Walk long distance footpaths also provide a link between the two. Users of these routes experience a clear sense of separation between the settlements, travelling through a rural landscape between the two. There are no major planning permissions for development in the gap.

Landscape Sensitivity

Within Welwyn Hatfield's part of the gap are two Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). LCA 55 'Theobalds Estate' is an area associated with the Theobalds Park deerpark, and it still retains a parkland character as well as mixed farmland. The evaluation as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment is to 'conserve and strengthen' this area. LCA 56 'Cheshunt Common' is a sloping open farmland landscape that lies to the southeast of Cuffley. The evaluation as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment is to 'improve and restore' this area.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 55 is divided into two areas (55 and sub-area 55a), which both lie between Cuffley and Crews Hill. Area 55 occupies the majority of the gap. LCA 56 relates to just one field on the edge of Cuffley.

The landscape sensitivity of area 55, which occupies the majority of the area between the settlements, is described as **moderate**. This is because, although it contains visually prominent slopes, important priority habitats including woodland and long distance footpaths, it is disturbed by the railway line, the M25 and pylons. The key sensitivities are:

- The rural character.
- Open views from public rights of way.
- Northaw Brook and associated riparian vegetation.
- Open and visually prominent slopes.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 55a is described as **low-moderate** at the settlement edge due to its urban fringe character whereas the area to the south is considered to have **moderate** sensitivity. The key sensitivities associated with this area are:

- Mature vegetation which encloses the settlement edge.
- The Hertfordshire Way long distance footpath.

The landscape sensitivity of LCA 56 is described as **low-moderate** as it is strongly influenced by the urban edge and railway line. The key sensitivities, relevant to this area are:

- Vegetated boundaries which enclose the area including deciduous woodland along the railway line and field boundaries.
- Cuffley Brook and associated riparian vegetation.
- Visibility from higher ground to the west.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are no ecological designations within the area immediately between the two settlements although there is a Local Wildlife Site and Ancient Woodland at Cattlegate Wood on the edge of the area to the west of Cattlegate Road. There are, however, some areas of priority habitat which relate to areas of deciduous woodland along the railway line (also a Local Wildlife Site) as well as in other blocks throughout the area.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. However, the Herts Ecological Network data indicates that much of the area between Cuffley and the M25 has potential for habitat creation – particularly acidic open or deciduous woodland. There could also be opportunities to maintain, enhance and extend areas of deciduous woodland, and restore neutral grassland habitats.

In respect of cultural heritage, within the Welwyn Hatfield part of the gap there is one Grade II listed building at Cattlegate Farmhouse.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The area has some recreational value in the form of the King George V Playing Fields on the edge of Cuffley (which includes a NEAP) and playing fields at Cuffley JMI School. There are also a number of footpaths, including part of the long distance Hertfordshire Way.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

There are three draft allocations on the southern edge of Cuffley (south of Northaw Road West, north of Northaw Road East, and Wells Farm). The draft allocations and promoted sites from the Call for Sites would extend Cuffley south a little, however these would not pose any threat to the gap between Cuffley and Crews Hill, which would still be almost 2km.

There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites along the west and south of Cuffley. Those that would most affect this gap are Land at Northaw Road East (Cuf12), Colesdale Farm (Cuf13), Land East of Colesdale Farm (Cuf14), King George V (Cuf15) and Land at Hill View Farm (Nor2). Although these would extend the edge of Cuffley south to Northaw Brook, they would not pose any threat to the gap between Cuffley and Crews Hill which would still be over 1.5km.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

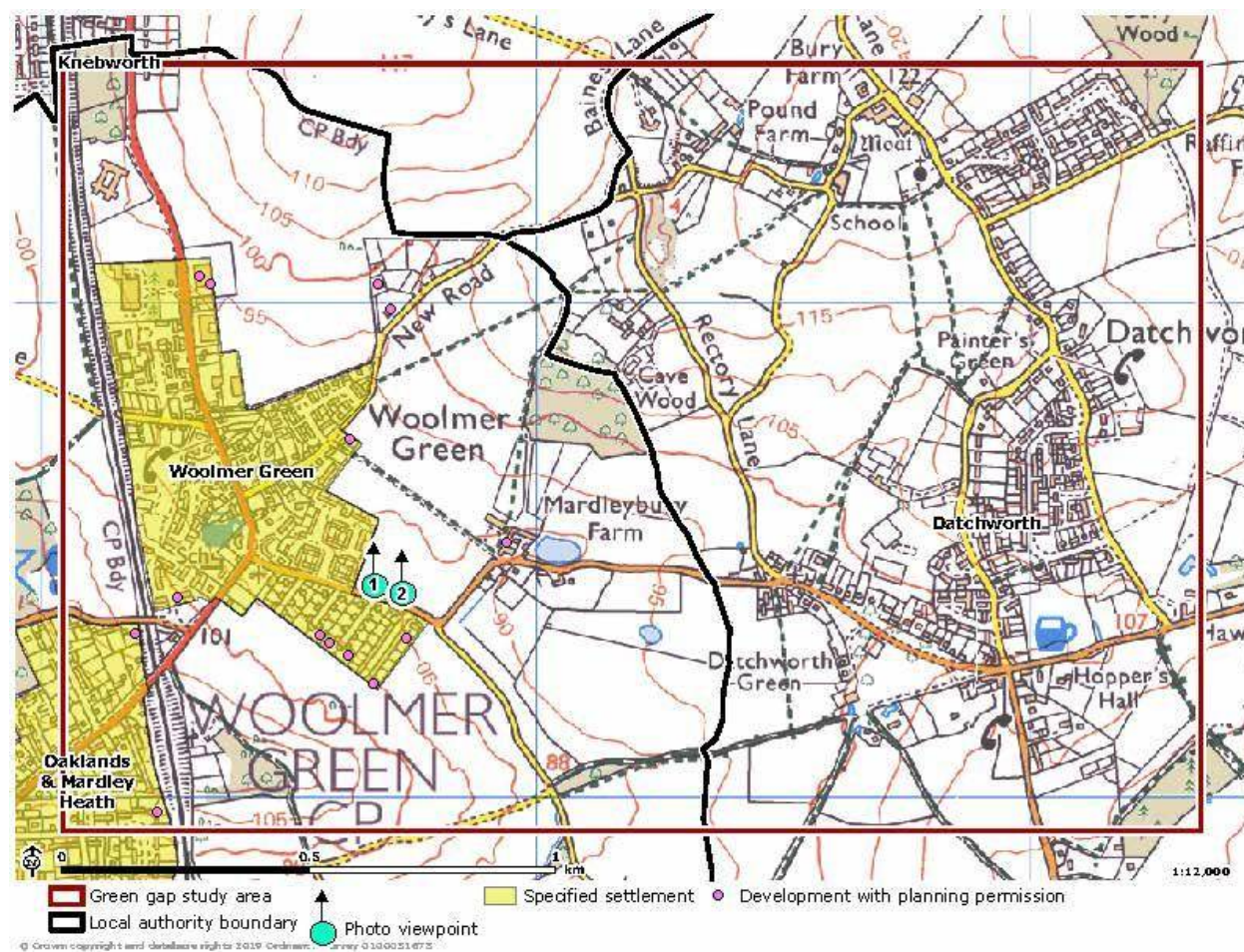
Summary and Recommendations

There is a relatively large (around 2km) gap between Cuffley and Crews Hill, and character of the gap (wooded and undulating) and presence of the M25 corridor ensure that there is a good sense of separation between the two settlements.

It is suggested that a 'gap policy designation' is not needed between these settlements. Any issues likely to arise in relation to proposed development over the next Local Plan period are likely to be related to effects on landscape character and the setting of Cuffley, rather than the separation of Cuffley from Crews Hill.

Area between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire)

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Woolmer Green is a nucleated village which grew up around a village green. It expanded with the building of the railway, and again through the 20th century. Nevertheless, it retains a largely nucleated form.

Datchworth, located across the administrative boundary in East Hertfordshire, originated as two villages: Datchworth on higher ground to the north and Datchworth Green on lower ground to the south. The villages slowly expanded so that they are now joined.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Woolmer Green and Datchworth varies. The narrowest point is around 680m between the southeastern edge of Woolmer Green and Datchworth Green. Nevertheless, the area between the settlements increases to over 1km between the north of Woolmer Green and the north of Datchworth and this gap is sufficient to avoid coalescence.

The area between the settlements is undulating and consists of a mix of pasture and arable fields bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and blocks of woodland including Cave Wood, which provides a visual and physical separation between the settlements on the ground, so that there is no direct inter-visibility between the two.

Roads and footpaths between the two villages cross rural areas, and provide a sense of leaving one village and travelling to another. There are no major planning permissions that would intrude into the gap.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows that the area between the two settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 37 'Datchworth Settled Slopes'. This is an area of undulating open arable farmland, large blocks of woodland and modern settlements. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and conserve' the landscape.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment (2019) LCA 37 is divided into two areas with sub-area 37a comprising of the land between Woolmer Green and Datchworth.

The landscape sensitivity assessment notes that the landscape provides a strong rural setting to Woolmer Green, and is important in retaining distinction between the west of Woolmer Green and Datchworth.

The landscape sensitivity of sub-area 37a is described as **moderate-high** although the sloping open landform and limited hedgerow boundaries provide visual prominence and provision of setting to Woolmer Green, the area is impacted by the railway line, the A1(M) and Woolmer Green.

The key sensitivities, relevant to the area, are:

- Sloping land which has high inter-visibility with existing settlement;
- Local Wildlife Sites, both within the area and adjacent;
- The rural setting of Woolmer Green;
- Features of ecological interest including remaining hedgerows and areas of priority habitat deciduous woodland; and
- Rural agricultural character of the visually prominent slopes.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

In terms of ecological value, Cave Wood is recognised as a Local Wildlife Site and a BAP priority habitat.

The area does not contain any of Natural England's Habitat Network Enhancement Zones, but the Herts Ecological Network data notes that there is potential for habitat creation in this area, including the restoration/ creation of acidic and neutral grassland habitats. There could also be opportunities to enhance the network of hedgerows within the gap to improve habitat connectivity by planting and restocking gappy or missing hedgerows, planting additional copses and linking these to the existing hedgerow and woodland network.

In terms of cultural heritage value, there are some Listed Buildings at Mardleybury Farm in the gap. There is also an area of archaeological significance next the Hempstall Spinney although this is on the edge of the area.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There is a good network of footpaths in this area which provide access to the rural area between the villages and provides recreational value. The Hertford Circular WHBC cycle route also runs between Woolmer Green and Datchworth along the Datchworth Green Road.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There is a proposed draft allocation to the NE of Woolmer Green. Although this would extend the settlement edge further into the countryside, it would not move the existing eastern extent of Woolmer Green any further east towards Datchworth.

There are no promoted sites arising from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites within the gap.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

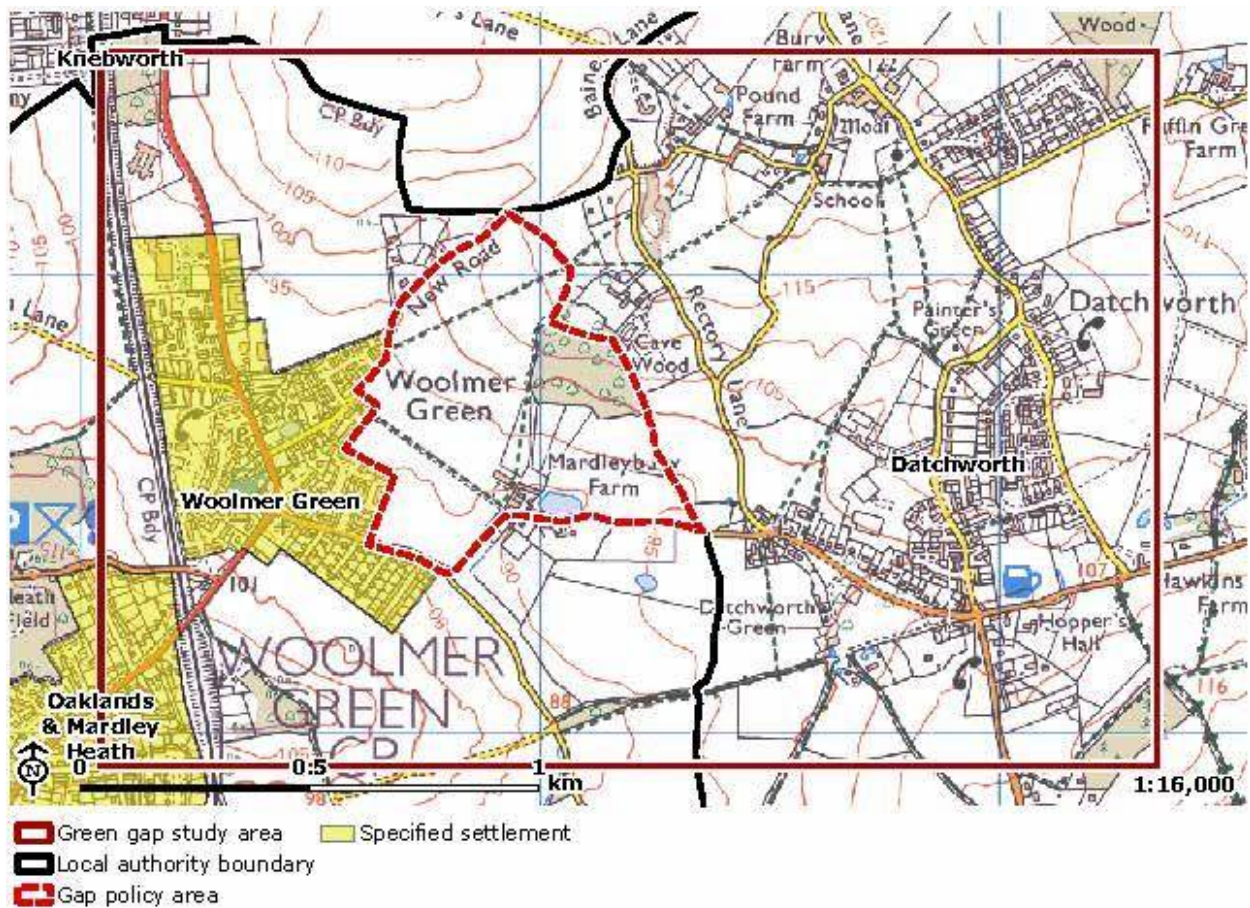
The physical gap in this location is currently strong, but potentially vulnerable to ribbon development along Datchworth Green Road. Therefore it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area in this location to protect settlement pattern and the sense of separation between Woolmer Green and Datchworth.

The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the rural character of the area, its moderate-high landscape sensitivity and the recreational value provided by a good network of footpaths.

A suggested area is shown on Map 2. Within this area, the aims should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Woolmer Green and Datchworth, taking account any development being planned across the Borough boundary in East Herts, and ensure each settlement retains its own separate identity.
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot, particularly along Mardleybury Road.
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Woolmer Green.
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function.
- Protect the existing areas of deciduous woodland and hedgerows which are of ecological interest and seek opportunities for strengthening, extending and linking these.
- Conserve a rural setting to the listed building at Mardleybury Farm.
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further public rights of way connections where possible.

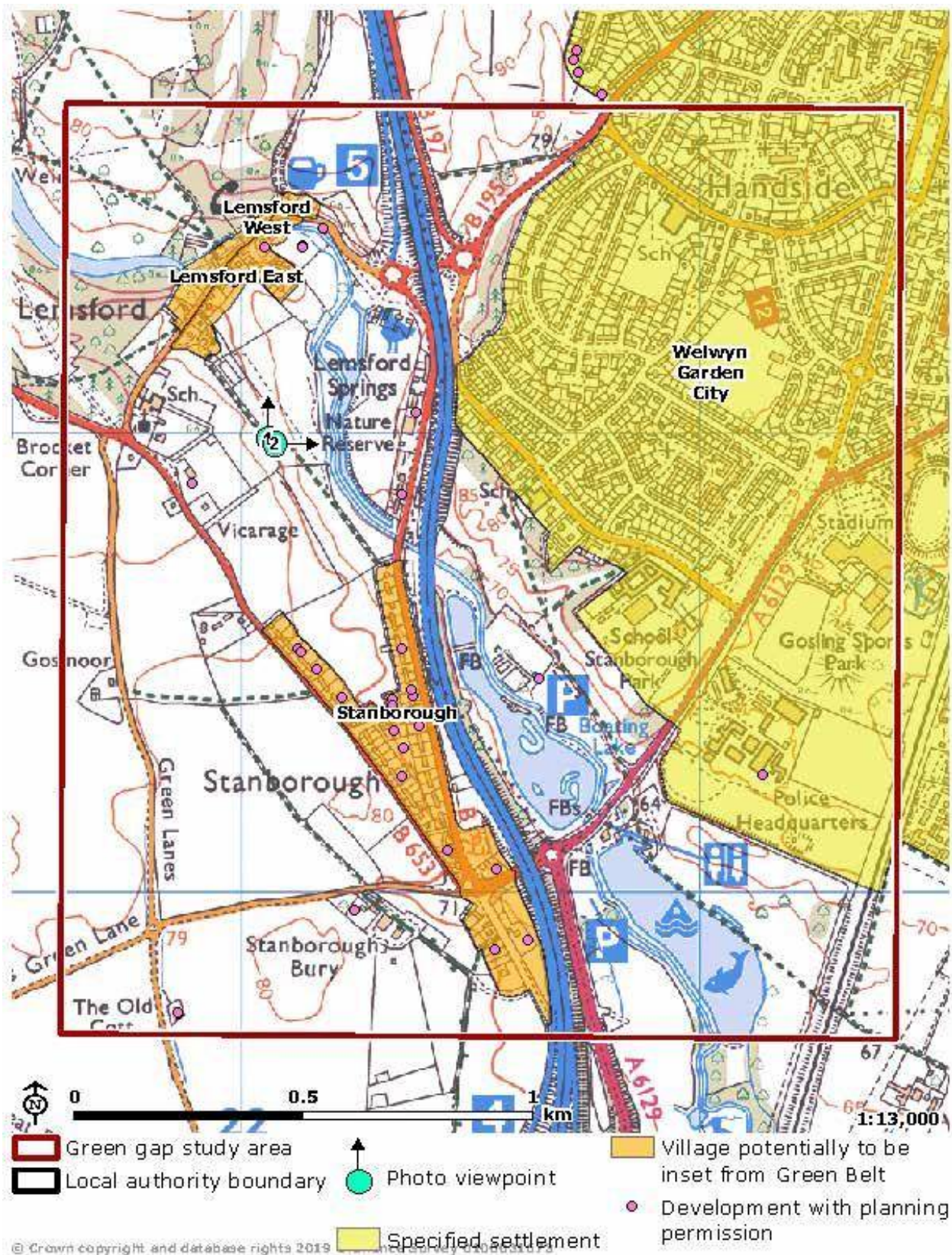
Map 2. Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



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Area between Welwyn Garden City, Lemsford and Stanborough

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Welwyn Garden City was founded in 1920 by Sir Ebenezer Howard as the second Garden City. Since its inception Welwyn Garden City has expanded, particularly in the south at Hatfield Hyde and Woodhall and in the north towards Digswell. Welwyn Garden City is located east of the Lea Valley.

Lemsford is a small village, located to the west of Welwyn Garden City in the valley of the River Lea. It was originally known as Lemsfordmills and has not expanded a great deal in the last century.

Stanborough originated as a small hamlet on the Great North Road to the west of the Lea Valley. 20th Century ribbon development has since extended the settlement northwards along the B653 and B197.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between both Lemsford and Welwyn Garden City and Stanborough and Welwyn Garden City is very narrow with both villages being less than 500m from the settlement edge of Welwyn Garden City. The River Lea and A1(M) both act as physical and visual barriers within this narrow gap, providing a sense of separation between the small villages and Welwyn Garden City.

The gap between Lemsford and Stanborough is defined by a mixture of arable and pasture small to moderate sized fields. These fields are enclosed by mature tree hedgerows and therefore there is limited intervisibility between these two villages despite their close proximity to one another.

There are no direct and easily accessible footpaths linking either village with Welwyn Garden City as the motorway forms a barrier to movement (albeit you can walk to both villages, passing underneath the motorway). The B195 and the A6129 also provide access underneath the motorway. The presence of woodland around Lemsford and the motorway junction means there is a sense of separation when travelling from Lemsford to Welwyn Garden City while woodland and the boating lakes at Stanborough Country Park provide a sense of separation when travelling from Stanborough to Welwyn Garden City.

A public footpath that links Lemsford to Stanborough enables a sense of separation to be experienced between the two villages, although built development is visible from this footpath, including views to all three settlements. Brocket road (B653) and the Great North road (B197) also connect the two villages. A sense of separation can be appreciated when travelling along the B653, but ribbon development along the B197 imparts a suburban character along part of its length.

There are no major developments for which planning permission has been granted in the area between these three settlements. Nevertheless the area is vulnerable to incremental ribbon development that could gradually close the gap between the settlements, in particular the two smaller villages.

Landscape Sensitivity

The gap between Welwyn Garden City and the two villages falls within two Landscape character Areas with the half closest to Welwyn Garden City within the Welwyn Fringes Landscape Character Area (LCA 45) and the eastern part of the gap in the Middle Lea Valley West Landscape Character Area (LCA 65), as well as the northern extent of the gap being within the Upper Lea Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA 33)

Most of the rural gap between the two villages (Lemsford and Stanborough) is within the Middle Lea Valley West Landscape Character Area (LCA 65), although development in the De Havilland Plain Landscape Character Area (LCA 31) directly to the west of Brocket road (B653) has the potential to encroach on the rural gap between the villages.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 45 is divided into two areas with sub-area 45a comprises of the land between Welham Garden City and the two villages.

All of LCA 45a within the study area has a **moderate** landscape sensitivity rating (aspects that increase sensitivity are the parkland scenery, the recreational value at Stanborough Park and the undeveloped character including commons woodland, while aspects that decrease sensitivity are the urban fringe character and presence of busy roads/railway).

Key landscape sensitivities of this area are:

- Blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows / woodland copses along field boundaries and rural lanes;
- Small area of BAP Priority Habitat semi-improved grassland adjacent to The Commons;
- The rural/parkland character and sense of remoteness in the east; and
- Views from the public rights of way and National cycle routes running through the area.

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 65 is divided into three areas. LCA 65 (west) has an overall **low-moderate** landscape sensitivity (although there are some valued ecological features and a sense of openness, the area is surrounded by roads and housing and has strong urbanising elements. To the east of the A1(M), Stanborough Park and the lakes here have recreational amenity value which increases the sensitivity to **moderate**.

Key landscape sensitivities of this area are:

- Prominence of woodland along the edge of Lemsford Springs, including avoiding detracting from their role as skyline landscape features;
- Riverside setting of the historic core of Lemsford;
- Frequent blocks of priority habitats being purple moor grass and rush pasture and the deciduous woodland; and
- Public right of way connecting Lemsford to Stanborough.

For the most part LCA 31 lacks distinctive landscape character, although visual openness, lack of settlement and pockets of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands do create some sensitivity. The evidence of mineral extraction reduces the sensitivity where it has altered the field pattern and limited the coverage of habitats. Most of the area to the north of Coopers Green Lane is therefore of a **low-moderate** landscape sensitivity to residential development.

Key landscape sensitivities of this area are:

- Pockets of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, as well as other large areas of semi-natural or restored habitats associated with past mineral extraction;
- Rural agricultural character;
- Visually prominent areas that have an open character;
- Listed buildings and their rural setting; and

- Public footpath connecting Lemsford to Stanborough.

*Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Within the rural gap between the three settlements there are a series of ecologically important areas. These include three Local Wildlife Sites; Lemsford Mead, Lemsford Springs and Valley Road Open Space. There are also several areas of BAP Priority Habitats including a large area of Purple moor grass and rush pastures at Lemsford Mead and several areas of deciduous woodland.

Almost the whole of the area between Lemsford and Stanborough is within one of Natural England's Habitats Network Enhancement Zones. The Herts Ecological Network data also indicates that there is a diverse network of habitats located in this area including semi-improved neutral grassland, semi-improved poor grassland, mixed plantation woodlands, broadleaved plantation woodlands, coniferous plantation woodlands, standing water and scrub areas. These areas require varying levels of upkeep with many needing restoration, whilst others need maintenance and enhancement. There are also a significant proportion of areas which require creation, as well as a considerable amount of land particularly on the western side of the gap between Stanborough and Lemsford which have no identified habitat, and therefore have the potential for habitat creation.

There are two areas of archaeological significance in the area, as well as a number of listed buildings in Lemsford.

*Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There are several public rights of way in the study area including a public footpath directly between Lemsford and Stanborough. Stanborough Country Park is located in the gap between Welwyn Garden City and Stanborough and is a recreational resource open to the public all year round, containing 2 lakes and 126 acres providing fishing, nature trails, children play and a range of water sports.

There are also several areas of amenity green space, particularly near the junctions of the A1(M), as well as outdoor sports facilities (associated with Lemsford Playing Field in the east and St John's JMI School) and allotments.

There may be opportunities to enhance the rights of way network, particularly across the motorway which provides a barrier to movement.

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are no draft allocations within the area between these three settlements (although there is a large strategic draft allocation between Hatfield and Stanborough – this is more relevant to the gap between Stanborough and Hatfield).

There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'calls for sites' on land north, east and west adjacent to Stanborough as well as on the southwest settlement edge of Lemsford. If these areas were to be developed they would expand these villages, and 'Land at and adjacent to The Holding' would potentially join Stanborough to Bocket Corner and Lemsford. The sites would not affect the sense of separation between the villages and Welwyn Garden City.

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

Summary and Recommendations

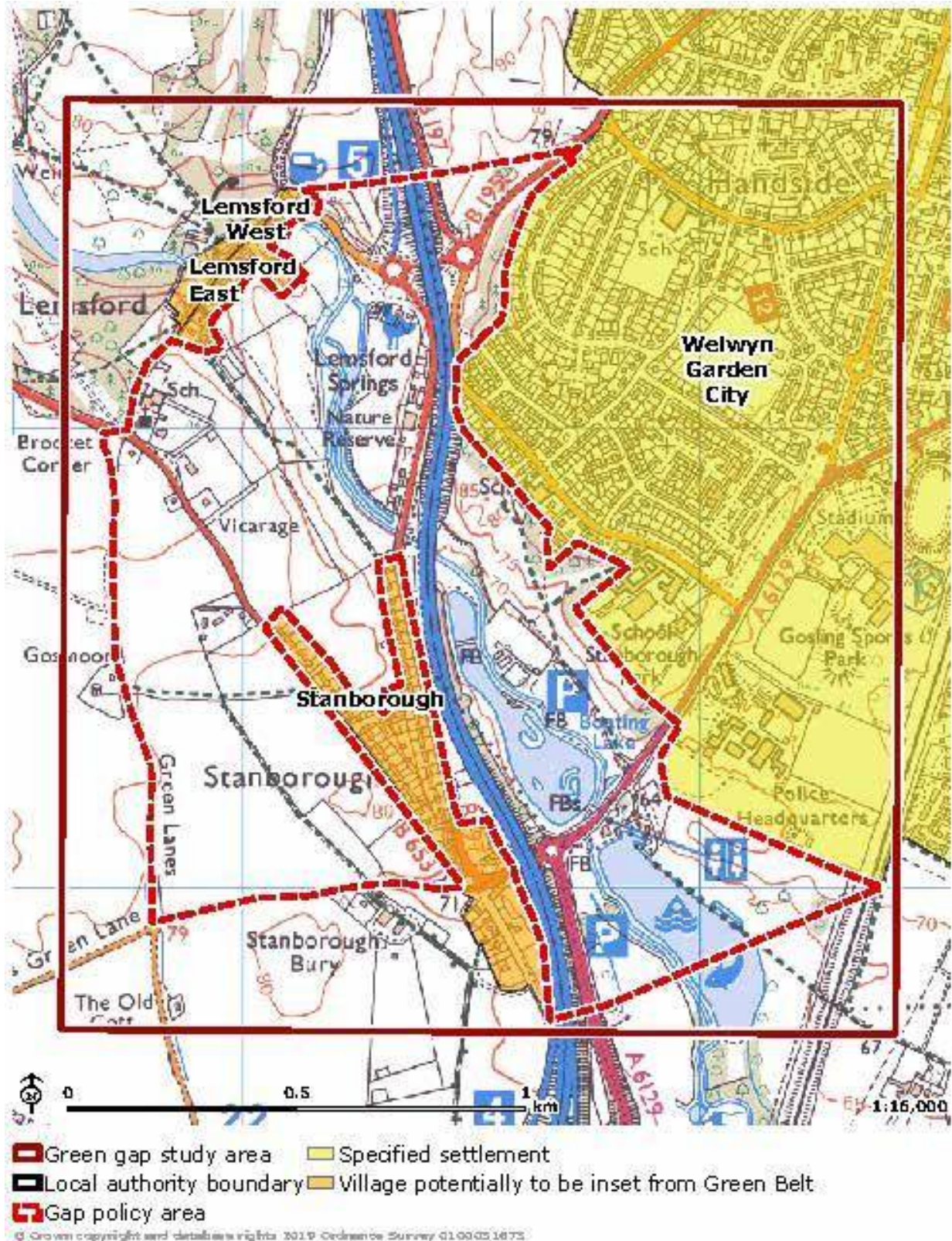
The gap between Welwyn Garden City and the two villages of Lemsford and Stanborough is occupied by the Lea Valley the A1(M) corridor, and these features are likely to keep these settlements from merging. Nevertheless, a gap policy area following the Lea Valley would ensure that the settlements remain separate. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of priority habitats and local wildlife sites along the valley, the potential for biodiversity enhancement as part of Natural England's 'network enhancement zone', and the recreation function provided by the Country Park .

Lemsford and Stanborough currently retain separate identities, but the gap between them is vulnerable to erosion by ribbon development. A gap policy area between the two villages would help maintain their separate identities. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the area of archaeological significance and potential for biodiversity enhancement, forming part of Natural England's 'network enhancement zone'..

A gap policy area could be considered to occupy the area between all three settlements of Welwyn Garden City, Lemsford and Stanborough, as shown on **Map 2**. Within this area, the aim should be to:

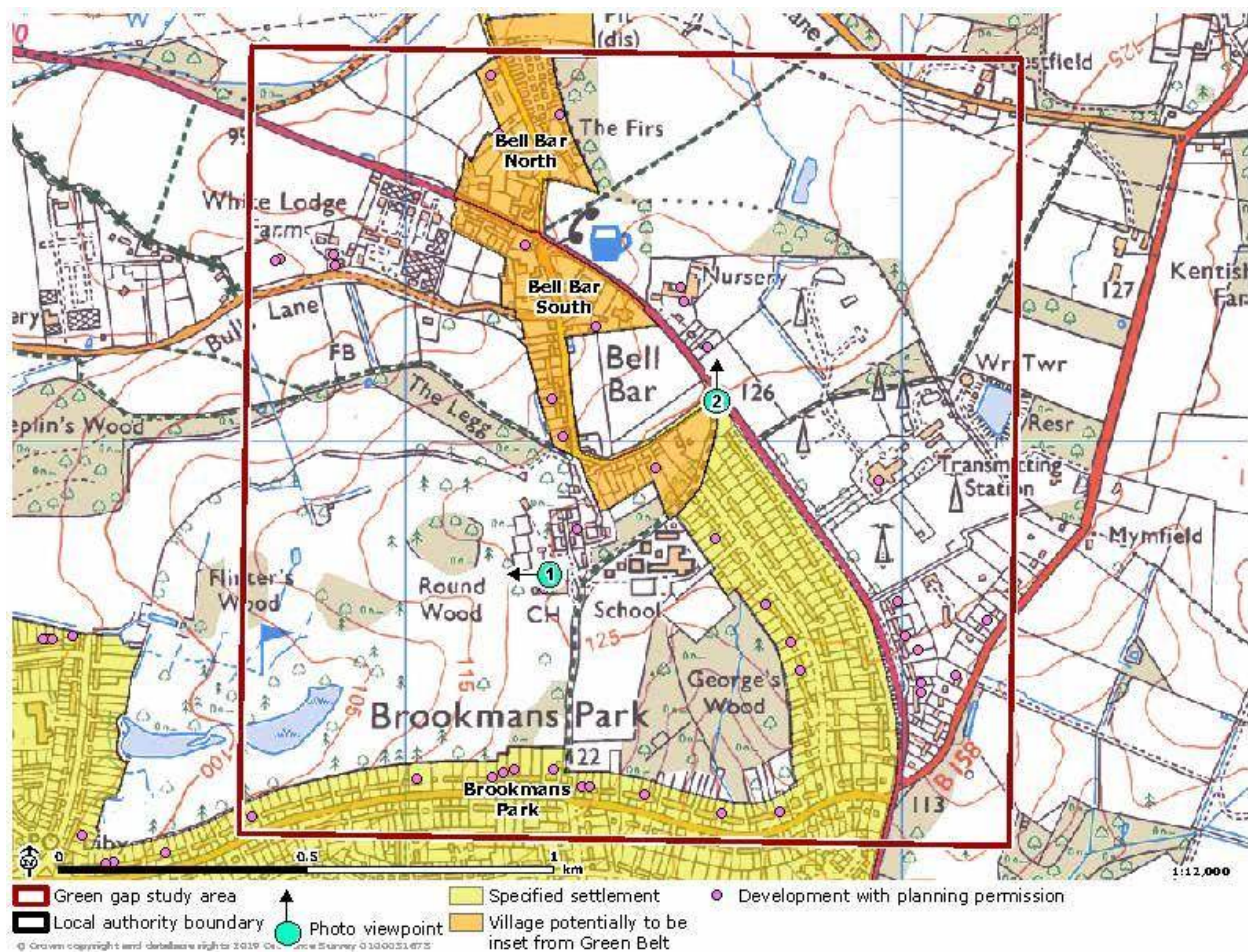
- Avoid the coalescence of Stanborough, Lemsford and Welwyn Garden City, to ensure each settlement retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot.
- Ensure that it remains possible to appreciate the form of the Lea valley as a distinct feature between Welwyn Garden City and the two villages;
- Retain the rural character of the two villages of Stanborough and Lemsford, and ensure the area within the gap between these two villages continues to provide a rural setting to the settlements;
- Ensure there is no additional inter-visibility between the settlement edge of Lemsford and Stanborough (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function;
- Seek opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the land between Stanborough and Lemsford including enhancing grassland and hedgerow diversity and joining up areas of deciduous woodland;
- Seek opportunities to enhance habitats in the Lea Valley including extending Purple moor grass and rush pastures and wetland habitats;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections where possible;
- Protect the character of the historic cores of the two villages; and
- Protect Stanborough County Park as an open space and recreational landscape and enhance recreational access to the riverside where possible.

Map 2. Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Brookmans Park is a large village built in the inter-war years in response to the arrival of a new railway station (in 1926) on the London & North Eastern Railway with direct links to Kings Cross. It is located on the site of the former Brookmans Manor and Park. There has been some infill and expansion in the mid-late 20th century, but the village is essentially a linear settlement (extending along Brookmans Avenue),

and located between the mainline railway line (to the west) and the A1000 to the east.

Bell Bar originated as a cluster of dwellings around a coaching inn on the Great North Road (which at that time ran along Bell Lane). The road was altered in the mid 19th century to avoid the steep hill south of Bell Bar, to follow the route of the A1000. Later development has extended the village north along Woodside Lane, and south along Bell Lane. It is therefore now a linear settlement that meets Brookmans Park in the south.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

According to the settlement boundaries, these two villages are already joined (separated only by footpath 068 and a narrow belt of woodland that border the path).

As these are linear settlements, there is an area of golf course/ parkland between the western parts of Brookmans Park and Bell Bar, although this provides more of a 'setting' to the two settlements than a 'gap' between them. There is a planning permission for a replacement building at the golf club in this area.

Landscape Sensitivity

As the two settlements are joined there is no landscape character area between the southern boundary of Bell Bar and the northern boundary of Brookman's Park.

Nevertheless the area of golf course/ parkland between the western parts of Brookmans Park and Bell Bar is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 54 Potters Bar Parkland (as set out in the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment, 2015).

For the purpose of the landscape sensitivity assessment this LCA was divided into sub-areas. The area between the western parts of Brookmans Park and Bell Bar is occupied by sub-area 54b: Land adjacent to Brookmans Park.

This area has a **moderate** landscape sensitivity. The remnant parkland characteristics of the golf course, and the ecological value of deciduous woodland blocks increase sensitivity while the woodland containment and settlement influence reduce sensitivity. The key sensitivities in this area are:

- The parkland character of Brookmans Park Golf Course;
- Visually prominent slopes;
- BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, hedgerows and other semi-natural features.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are no designations relevant to the point at which the two settlements join (along footpath 068).

In the wider setting between the two settlements there are a number of ecological designations relating to the woodlands that surround the parkland. These include Peplins Wood Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site (LWS), The Legg LWS and George's Wood LWS. There is also a meadow north of Peplins Wood that is a LWS.

The golf course contains a number of small areas of deciduous woodland which is a priority habitat.

There are no habitat network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England in this area, but the Hertfordshire Ecological Mapping notes that much of the parkland is a high priority for habitat creation. This could include improving the diversity of grassland within the golf course and enhancing the network of woodland and hedgerows through replanting and management to enhance the age and species structure.

In terms of cultural heritage, there is a small conservation area on the edge of Bell Bar, although this does not fall in the area between the two settlements.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

Public footpath 068 divides Bell Bar from Brookmans Park and also connects two parts of Brookmans Park together, via the Brookmans Park Golf Club House and Chancellor's School. To the east of this path is an area of sports fields associated with the school.

There is also a public footpath (North Mymms 033) which extends west from Bell Bar to Welham Green.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

Although the two settlements are already joined, there is pressure for development in the setting to the two settlements. This includes two small draft allocations for housing on the northern edge of Brookmans Park 'Land west of Golf Club Road' and 'Land east of Golf Club Road'. These are fairly contained areas that would intrude a little into the setting of Brookmans Park but would not join Brookmans Park to Bell Bar.

There are also a number of potential sites put forward in the Council's Call for Sites as follows:

- The area around the Golf Club House 'Land at Brookmans Park Golf Club' which is located in a previously developed area in the golf course on land currently utilised by the golf club for tennis courts and other recreational facilities.
- Two small areas within existing gardens on the northern edge of Brookmans Park.
- Peplins Wood on the northern edge of the western side of Brooklands Park connecting to existing residential development along Bradmore Way.

Although the Peplins Wood site would extend Brookmans Park north, it would not close the gap between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park (these two settlements are already joined along the A1000).

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Since these two settlements are already joined along the A1000, there is no case for designating a 'gap' between the two villages. Although there is an open area of parkland that lies between Bell Bar and the western part of Brookmans Park, this is considered to be more of a 'setting' to the two settlements than a gap between them. Impact of development on landscape character, ecological value and role the area plays in the setting of the settlements will be a consideration.

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Little Heath originated as a village on the Great North Road. It grew in response to the arrival of the railway and Potters Bar station, developing south-westwards towards the station to join the expanding settlement of Potters Bar. It now forms a northern suburb of Potters Bar.

Brookmans Park is a residential area built in the inter-war years in response to the arrival of a railway station (Brookmans Park station) on the London & North Eastern Railway with direct links to Kings Cross. It is located on the site of the former Brookmans Manor and Park. There has been some infill and expansion in the mid-late 20th century, but the village is essentially a linear settlement (extending along Brookmans Avenue), and located between the mainline railway line (to the west) and the A1000 to the east

Swanley Bar is a small nucleated settlement built predominantly in the 1930s at the entrance to Brookmans Park, by the folly. It is formed of short terraces, semi-detached and detached houses.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar: The gap between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park is parkland (mixed farmland and woodland) associated with Gobions Park. The gap between the nearest parts of the two settlements (the north-eastern edge of Swanley Bar and the south-eastern edge of Brookmans Park) is just over 700m, and there is no inter-visibility due to the undulating topography and woodland. Ribbon development extending along the Great North Road decreases the perceived size of the gap when travelling along this road. There is also inter-visibility between the edge of Swanley Bar and this ribbon development. The gap can be better appreciated when travelling between the two settlements along Hawkshead Lane and walking on the footpaths through the parkland. There are no major planning permissions in the gap, although ribbon development outside the settlement limits could result in the two settlements joining to the east of Swanley Bar.

Swanley Bar and Little Heath: The gap between the southern edge of Swanley Bar and the northern edge of Little Heath is only 125m, comprising the Little Heath playing fields and recreation ground and playground equipment which gives the area an urban fringe character. There is also some built development in the small gap including two properties with outbuildings and a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall, which makes the perception of the gap even smaller. Despite this, the undeveloped nature of the agricultural field to the west of the road means there is a sense of passing through a small gap before reaching Swanley Bar. The gap between Swanley Bar and Little Heath is very small, and is vulnerable to being closed by even small amounts of development.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows that the area between the three settlements is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 54 'Potters Bar Parkland'. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'improve and restore' the Potters Bar Parkland.

The landscape sensitivity assessment divides the LCA into sub-areas. The land between Brookmans

Park, Swanley Bar and Little Heath is assessed as 54b and 54c.

A large part of sub-area 54b is not assessed as it is occupied by the Grade II listed Gobions Registered Park and Garden which is an absolute constraint to development in any case. The remainder sensitivity of the remainder of sub-area 54b is described as **moderate-high** due to:

- Visually prominent slopes.
- Parkland character and deciduous woodland.
- Connectivity between natural landscape elements.
- High ground south of Hawkshead Road.

The landscape sensitivity of the sub-area 54c west of Hawkshead Lane is described as **moderate-high** due to the elevated landform and visual openness, and **moderate** sensitivity to the east of Hawkshead Lane because it is more closely related to built development. The key sensitivities, relevant to this gap, are:

- Visually prominent open ground.
- Hedgerow field boundaries and tree cover along A1000.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

The main ecological interest is between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park, with Local Wildlife Sites associated with the woodland within the park (Moffays Meadows and Gobions Wood Central), both of which contain priority habitat deciduous woodland. However, there is also some priority habitat deciduous woodland to the east of Swanley Bar, at the junction of Swanley Bar Lane and the A1000 Great North Road.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. However, the Herts Ecological Network data identifies the agricultural fields within both gaps as high priority for habitat creation, as well as opportunities to maintain and enhance area of standing water and deciduous woodland within the park, and to create new deciduous woodlands and neutral/acidic grasslands in all areas.

The main cultural heritage interest is also between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park, in the form of the Grade II listed Gobions (Gubbins) Registered Park and Garden. This also contains the Grade II* listed Folly Arch. There is also a Grade II listed milestone 30m north of Little Heath Farm Cottage, on the A1000 Great North Road.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

Between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park, Gobions Park is a recreational resource and also contains a number of footpaths. There could be an opportunity for additional connections to be made.

Between Little Heath and Swanley Bar, recreational provision is through the playing fields that are designated as an Amenity Green Space, and the playground as a LEAP. There are no public footpaths in this area, but there could be an opportunity to provide links to existing rights of way in the wider rural setting of these settlements.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential impact of promoted sites on the Gap

Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar: There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' including a cluster of sites around Raybrook Farm (BrP6, 9, 10), a large site to the east of the A1000 (land west of Queenswood School BrP32) and a cluster of sites to the east of Swanley Bar (SB1 and SB2). If the first two site clusters were to be developed, this would extend Brookmans Park south and east into the surrounding countryside. It would erode, but not completely close, the gap between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar. If the cluster to the east of Swanley Bar was to be developed this would extend Swanley Bar up to the A1000, almost meeting the ribbon development stretching south along the A1000 from Brookman's Park, and eroding the gap between these

settlements so that the gap would be almost closed.

Swanley Bar and Little Heath: There are two draft allocations proposed on the northern edge of Little Heath. If these sites were developed, this would erode, but not close the gap between the two settlements. The gap would remain small, and vulnerable. There are also a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites which, if developed, would completely close the gap between Little Heath and Swanley Bar, so that both settlements would form part of the suburbs of Potters Bar.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar: There is a sizeable gap in between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar which is maintained by the presence of Gobions Park Grade II Registered Park. However, ribbon development along the A1000 has reduced the size of the gap to the east, and it would be advisable to designate the area as a gap policy area if the two settlements are to continue to remain separate.

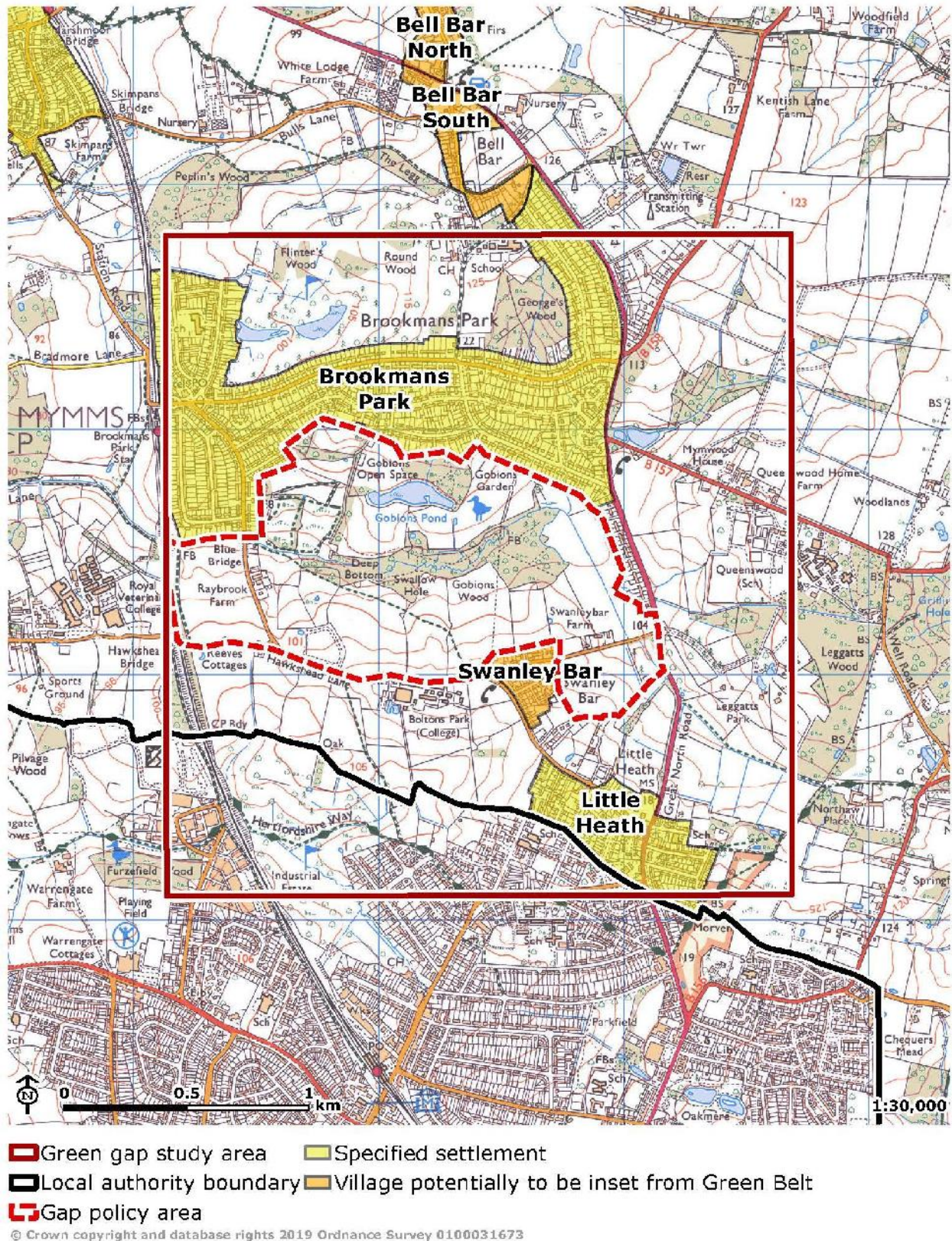
The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of Gobions Park and its associated cultural heritage and recreational value, the ecological value recognised through presence of Local Wildlife Sites and associated priority habitat deciduous woodland, and the relatively high landscape sensitivity of the area.

The gap policy area could include the area between Brookmans Park in the north and Hawkshead Lane in the south. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

- Avoid the coalescence of Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar, resisting ribbon development along the A1000, Swanleybar Lane and Hawkshesad Lane;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or on foot;
- Ensure development does not extend any further than the existing extents to the south of Brookmans Park along the A1000 and to the east of Swanley Bar along Swanleybar Lane – any development south of Swanley Bar Lane should be set well back from the roadside so as to retain a rural edge along Swanley Bar Lane so that there is no perception of the ribbon development on the Great North Road joining the ribbon development along Swanley Bar Lane;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural parkland setting to both settlements;
- Ensure there is no additional inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide an effective screening function;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including standing water, deciduous woodland and neutral/acidic grasslands and seek opportunities for extending and linking these areas;
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections public rights of way connections where possible.

Swanley Bar and Little Heath: The gap between Little Heath and Swanley Bar is very small, and is formed by a playing field, playground and buildings which give the area an urbanised character. There is no real sense of separation between the two settlements, and therefore no justification for the need for a gap policy area between these two settlements.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Newgate Street is a small hilltop village which has not experienced significant growth since the early 19th century. The village is bound by historic Parkland with Ponsbourne Park to the northeast and Tolmers Park to the South. There has however been some additional linear development along New Park Road to the west.

The settlement of Cuffley is a large village situated on the east facing slopes of the shallow valley of the Cuffley Brook, with its western settlement edge on the hilltop ridge. The village experienced expansion as a result of the Great Northern Railway, which reached village in the early 20th century.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between the two settlements is just over 700m at its closest point and is largely made up of a steep sided, southeast facing valley containing Cuffley brook. The distance between the settlements is great enough that currently the settlements are clearly defined as separate.

Closer to Newgate Street in the north, fields are mostly moderate scale pasture. Fields here retain their historic parkland character, containing mature in-field trees. The southern half of the area nearer Cuffley has a more wooded character and contains Tolmers Scout Camp & Activity Centre but also maintains its historic parkland characteristics.

The landform of the northern half of the area between the settlements is a steep south/ southeast facing valley slope, at the bottom of which lies the Cuffley Brook. South of the Cuffley brook the landform rises up to the ridge where Cuffley sits.

The wooded character and the steeply sloping landform mean that despite the proximity of the two settlements, there is a strong sense of separation between them, with both villages managing to retain their separate identities.

There are no direct transport routes between the two settlements although Carbone Hill Road provides a links around the western edge of Home Wood and the Great North Railway line also crosses the eastern edge of the area. The rural character of the gap can be appreciated from both of these routes.

The Hertfordshire Way provides a direct footpath link between the two settlements, from which the rural and wooded nature of gap can be appreciated.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment (2015) shows the area between the settlements to be within the Ponsbourne and Tolmers Parkland Estates Landscape Character Area (LCA 50).

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 50 is divided into two areas both of which are at least partly between the settlements. Sub-area 50a comprises of the land closest to Cuffley in the south, whilst the area in the north, closer to Newgate Street is within the LCA 50 sub-area.

LCA 50a is detached from the settlement edge of Cuffley because of its wooded character which provides it with full enclosure. This sub-area has a large coverage of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland. A very small proportion of this area has no natural heritage designations or BAP Priority Habitat coverage. It is considered that this area has a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity to residential development.

LCA 50 in the north of the rural gap has an elevated landscape sensitivity because of its presence of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, parkland character, sloping landform and the overall rural and undeveloped character. This is slightly lowered by the disturbance from the railway line and the pylon which have adverse effects on the perceptual qualities of the area. Overall the area has a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity to residential development.

Key sensitivities of the undeveloped area between the settlements include;

- Open and visually prominent steep east facing slopes;
- Wooded parkland character of Tolmers Park;
- Ecologically sensitive areas including Local Wildlife Sites and large areas of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland; and
- Route of the long distance recreational route the Hertfordshire Way.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

A large proportion of the area between these settlements is covered by BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands. Home Wood Local Wildlife Site and Tolmers Park Local Wildlife Site are located in the south of the area with a more wooded character. To the west of the two settlements lies the Northaw Great Wood, designated as a SSSI and identified to be an Ancient Woodland.

There are none of Natural England's habitat network enhancement zones in the gap. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the undeveloped area between the settlements as Poor semi-improved grassland, neutral semi-improved grassland, dense/continuous scrub, and mixed plantation woodland requiring restoration, semi-natural broadleaved woodland to be maintained and enhanced and a significant area of land (particularly in the east of the gap area) with no identified habitats and the potential for habitat creation.

Existing hedgerow boundaries containing mature trees and woodland areas have the potential to be strengthened, to further define the sense of separation between the two settlements.

There are no cultural heritage designations between the two settlements.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

There are no public rights of way that directly cross the gap between the two settlements; although Carbone Hill Road links the two settlements travelling round the west of the gap between these settlements with its route around the western edge of Home Wood. The Hertfordshire Way long distance recreational route also passes through the west of the area.

There could be an opportunity to create new links across this area to improve interconnectivity and link this area to nearby Northaw Great Wood Country Park to the west.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are no site allocations between the two settlements, however on the south eastern settlement edge of Newgate Street there are a series of areas put forward in response to the Council's 2019 Call for Sites including: three areas at Tolmers Park Farm, land adjoining Tolmers Park and a larger area Land to the east of Newgate Street. If these were to be developed the village would extend east and south into the former parkland areas, although it would not extend any further south than the existing southern village extent.

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

Summary and Recommendations

Due to the landform, steep landform and wooded parkland character of the rural gap, the settlements are not at a high risk of coalescence from new residential development. However, the relatively close proximity of these two settlements (just over 700m at their closest point) means that they would benefit from a Gap Policy Area to maintain this situation.

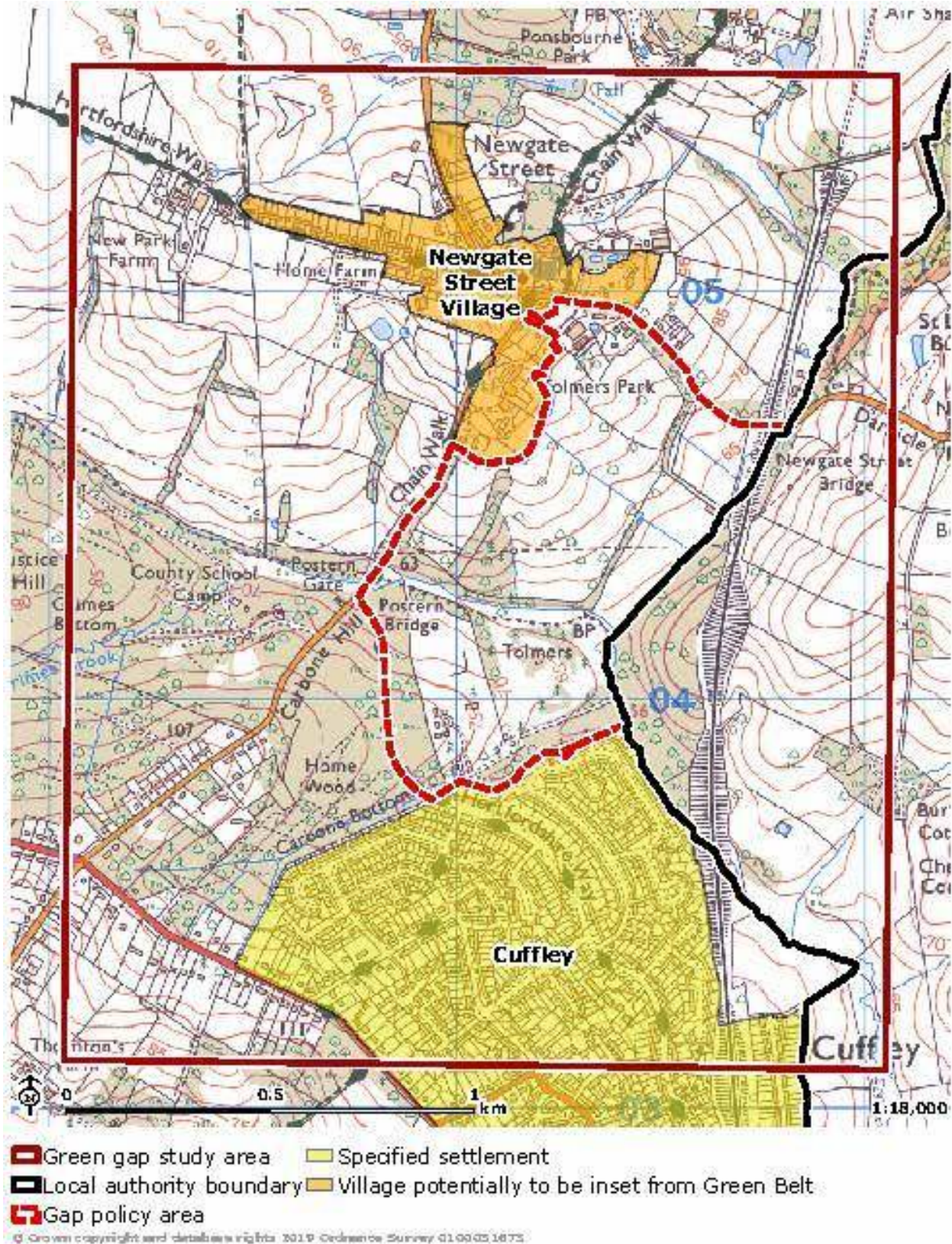
The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland, local wildlife sites, potential for biodiversity enhancement (forming part of one of Natural England's 'network enhancement zones') and moderate-high to high landscape sensitivity.

The Gap Policy Area could be the whole area between the two settlements and should include the Tolmers Park Local Wildlife Site and part of the Home Wood Local Wildlife Site and BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands between the areas. The SSSI Northaw Great Wood already provides a degree of protection to this area from development and therefore it is not necessary for this area to be included within Green Gap Policy Area. Therefore, the western boundary of the Green Gap Policy Area could follow the Hertfordshire Way/Chain Walk long Distance Recreational Route. The eastern boundary of the Green Gap Policy Area could follow the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary to Newgate Street Village Road. The proposed Green Gap Policy Area is shown in **Map 2**.

Within this area, the aim should be to:

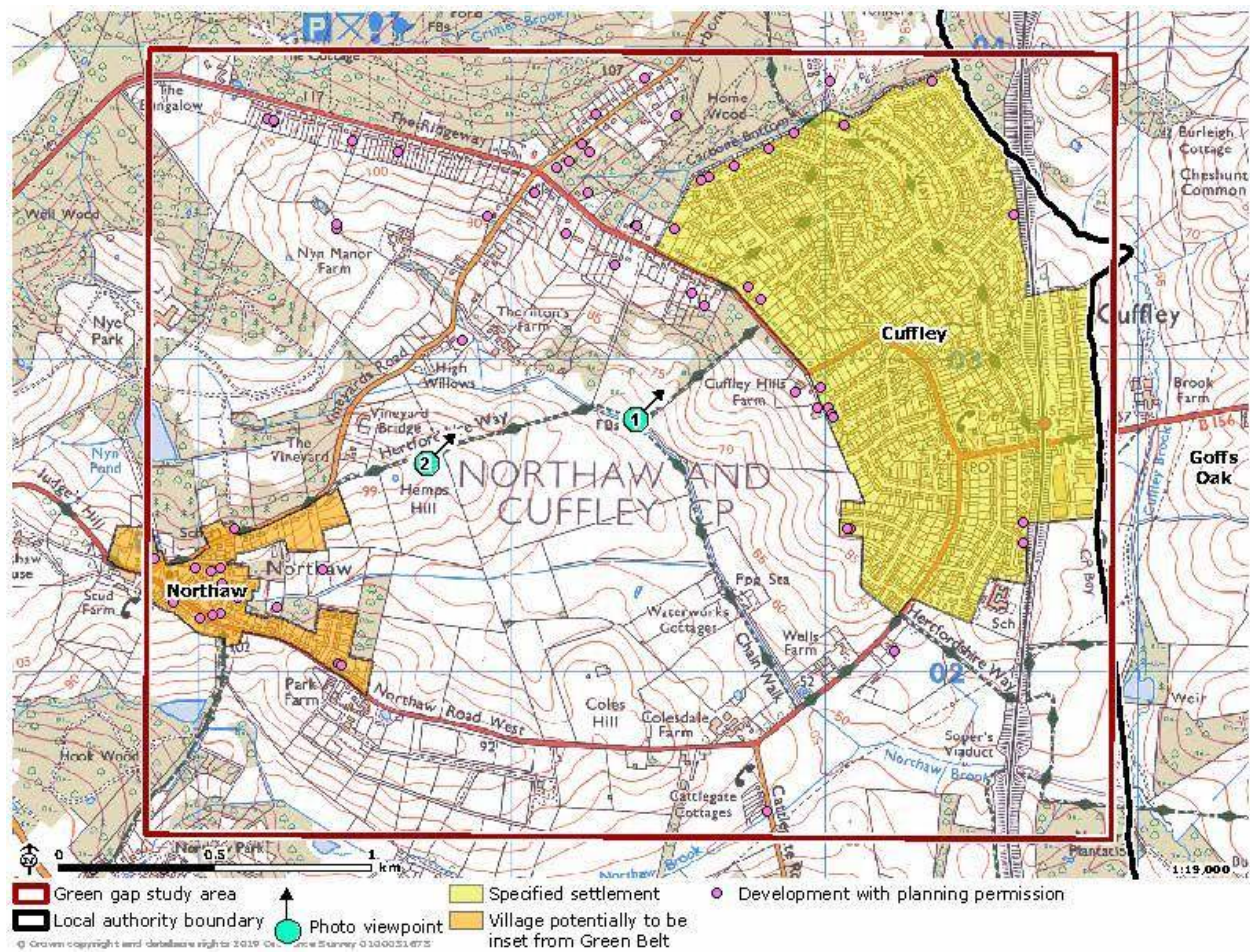
- Avoid the coalescence of Cuffley and Newgate Street, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Maintain a physical and visual separation between the two settlements through retention of an area of rural character comprising pasture, historic parklands, well maintained hedgerows and large woodland areas – there is an opportunity to strengthen the existing hedgerow network and plant more trees;
- Ensure there is no inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function.
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot
- Ensure new development avoids visually prominent sloping land;
- Maintain the wooded character by protecting the BAP Priority habitat deciduous woodland, and seek opportunities for extending and linking habitats; and
- Maintain public access to and across the area, seeking opportunities for further connections public rights of way connections where possible. Ideally, these would link the existing footpaths to the nearby (to the west) Northaw Great Wood Country Park.

Map 2. Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



Area between Northaw and Cuffley

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

The settlement of Cuffley is a large village situated on the east facing slopes of the shallow valley of the Cuffley Brook, with its western settlement edge on the hilltop ridge. The village experienced expansion as a result of the Great Northern Railway, which reached village in the early 20th century.

Northaw is a small nucleated village, which has experienced little modern expansion, with the settlement barely extending further than its historic conservation area. There has however been some linear development of this village along the Northaw Road West and Vineyards Road.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The rural area between Northaw and Cuffley is relatively large, with its narrowest part a distance of just less than 1.6km apart at its closest point.

The area comprises a large area of open rolling fields, which are mostly moderate to large in size. The landform here is rolling and contains the small stream valley of the Northaw Brook. The fields have mixed use with both arable and pasture fields present. Field boundaries are normally well developed hedgerows; however because of the rolling topography there is clear intervisibility between the two settlements, with the elevated location of Cuffley meaning it overlooks Northaw.

There are no roads which directly cross the rural area between the two settlements. However, there are two roads which link the settlements; Vineyards Road and Northaw Road Way.

The Hertfordshire Way crosses through the area and connects the two settlements. There are extensive views across the rural gap from this footpath and both settlements are visible from most parts of long distance recreational route.

Due to the open character of the rural area, expansion of either settlement will be obvious from the other.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the two settlements is occupied by Northaw Common Parkland Landscape Character Area (LCA 53).

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 53 is divided into four areas with sub-area 53c comprising the land on the settlement edge of Cuffley and the rest of the rural area between Northaw and Cuffley being within sub-area 53.

Sub-area 53c is defined to have a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity to development in the landscape sensitivity assessment. The sloping valley-side landform provides a distinct setting to Cuffley and a strong sense of openness. The presence of the Hertfordshire Way increases landscape sensitivity.

The key sensitivities are:

- Sloping landform descending from the settlement edge;
- Mature vegetation;
- Rural character;
- Small areas of traditional orchards; and
- The Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath.

LCA sub-area 53 is also assessed to have a **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity to development. Although there are some urbanising influences, the historic parklands and their associated woodlands, the historic and organic field patterns, the distinctive landform pattern, and the historic buildings within the area, increase **moderate-high** sensitivity to residential development.

The key sensitivities are:

- Rural character and time-depth of the landscape including the historic parklands of Leggatts Park, Nyn Park and Northaw Park;
- Distinctive landform pattern comprising narrow ridgelines and valley bowls;
- Organic and irregular field pattern comprising small-medium scale fields;
- Frequent blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows along field boundaries and rural lanes;

- Relationship between listed buildings clustered within Northaw village and their surrounding rural landscapes; and
- Important public rights of way including the Hertfordshire Long Distance Footpath.

*Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a series of Local Wildlife Sites within the area between Northaw and Cuffley, these include; Northaw Brick Kiln Area, The Dell (Cuffley), Meadow E. of Park Road and Park Road Pastures. Also present are areas of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland, as well as some small pockets of BAP Priority Habitat traditional Orchards on the settlement edge of Cuffley.

There are none of Natural England's habitat network enhancement zones in the gap. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the undeveloped fields in the gap are mostly poor semi-improved grassland, which requires restoration. There are some smaller areas of neutral semi-improved or non-improved grassland on the settlement edges, the majority of which also require restoration. The fields on the southwestern settlement edge of Cuffley are identified to have potential for habitat creation.

There is an opportunity to extend existing BAP Priority Habitat areas, or to create additional habitats particularly riparian vegetation along the Northaw Brook.

There are no cultural heritage designations within the rural area between the settlements, although the village of Northaw has a Conservation Area.

*Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The Hertfordshire Way crosses the area between the settlements. A small part of the Chain Walk long distance recreational route also crosses into the area.

There could be an opportunity to extend the existing footpath routes, as well as new links across the valley to join up with footpaths within North Hertfordshire.

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are two allocated housing sites on the settlement edge of Cuffley following the northern edge of Northaw Road West. The development of these areas would result in infill along Northaw Road West. However, the gap will remain over 1km.

On the steeply sloping land on the western edge of Cuffley there are several areas that have been promoted through the Council's 2019 Call for Sites, including the Land at Northaw Road East. Development here is likely to be visually prominent from Northaw and would intrude into the area between these settlements, although it would not close the gap, which would remain over 1km wide.

There is a site that has been promoted through the Council's Call for Sites on the eastern settlement edge of Northaw (Land at Park and Meadow Farm) and two more small sites along Northaw Road West. These areas if developed would further the linear expansions of the two settlements along Northaw Road West, but would not close the gap.

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

Summary and Recommendations

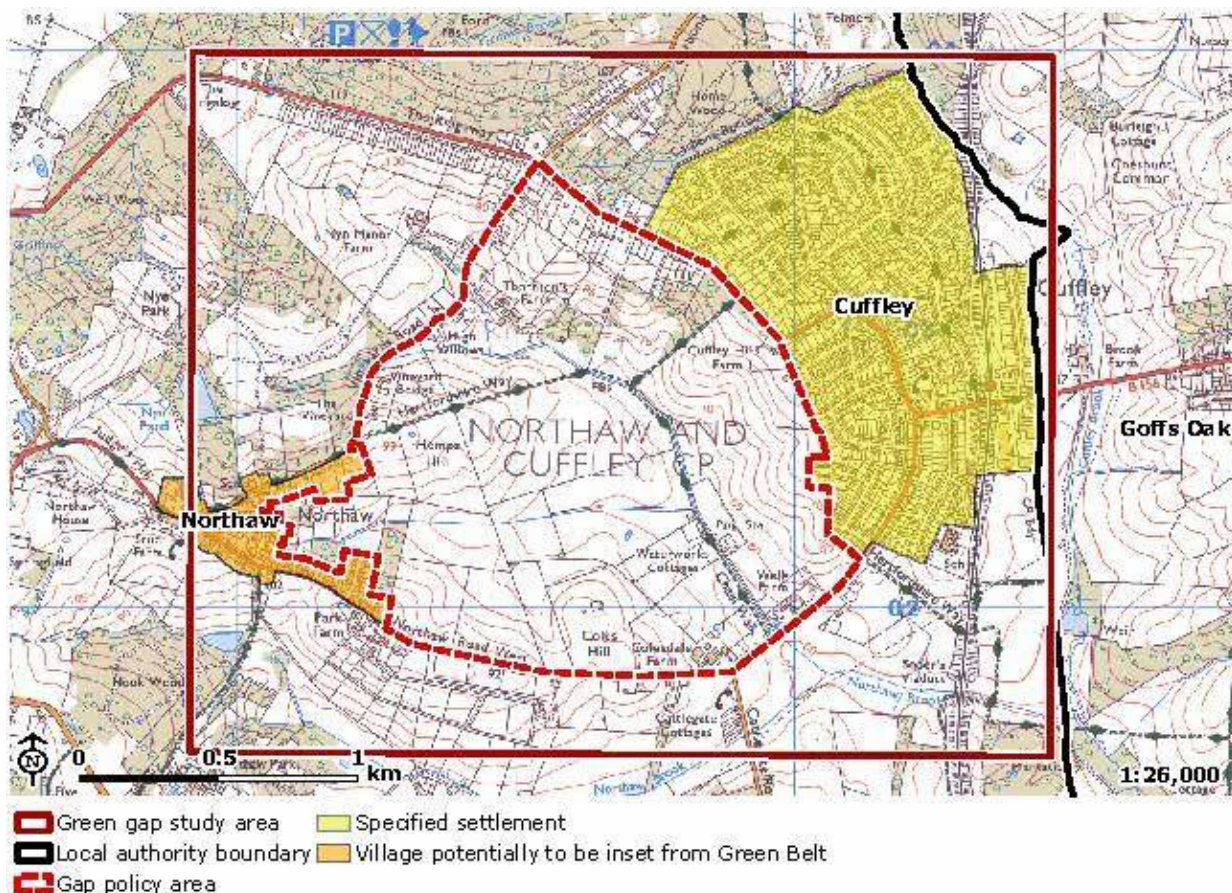
Although there is a clear physical gap, of rural character, between the two settlements of Cuffley and Northaw, the area between the settlements is open and even relatively modest amounts of development would be visually prominent. The gap is also vulnerable to ribbon development along the roads between the two settlements (Vineyards Road and Northaw Road West) and therefore the settlement would benefit from a Gap Policy Area.

The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of local wildlife sites, an archaeological priority area and moderate-high landscape sensitivity. Vineyards Road and Northaw Road West are logical defining features for a Green Gap Policy Area, as shown below in **Map 2**.

Within this area, the aim should be to:

- Preserve the sense of separation between the two settlements and retain the area of open and rural character that defines the area, comprising undulating farmland, well maintained hedgerows and copses;
- Ensure there is no greater inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function; and
- Conserve and enhance areas of ecological importance including the four Local Wildlife Sites and areas of BAP Priority Habitats; and
- Seek opportunities to extend and enhance the existing long distance recreational routes and footpaths.

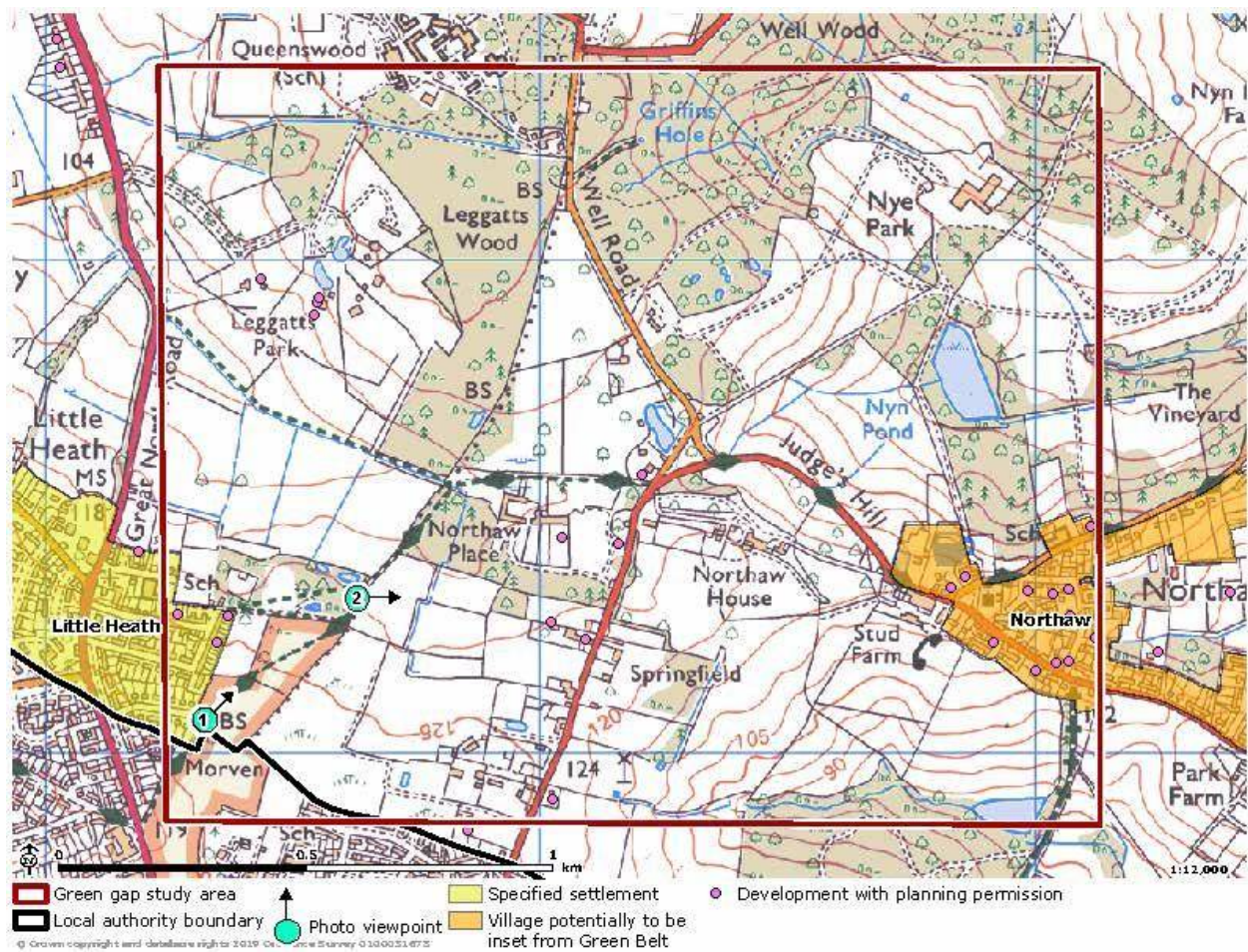
Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



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Area between Little Heath and Northaw

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Little Heath originated as a low density village on the Great North Road. It grew in response to the arrival of the railway and Potters Bar station, developing south-westwards towards the station to join the expanding settlement of Potters Bar. It now forms a northern suburb of Potters Bar.

Northaw is an historic small village, which developed at the junction of two roads. It has experienced little modern expansion, with the settlement barely extending further than its historic conservation area. There has however been some linear development of this village along the Northaw Road West and Vineyards Road.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The distance from the eastern edge of Little Heath and the western edge of Northaw is approximately 1.3km. In between is a rural landscape of fields and woodlands, interspersed by Northaw Place, Northaw House and the hamlet of Springfield. The area has a parkland character with a strong presence of vegetation including frequent blocks of deciduous woodland and well established hedgerows along field boundaries that are organic and irregular in pattern. There is limited intrusion from sports pitches at Old Owens Sports Ground and the nearby timber merchants.

The only vehicular access connecting the two settlements includes travelling along Coopers Lane and, despite the presence of some ribbon development, the rural character of the gap can be appreciated when travelling on this road. The Hertfordshire Way Long Distance footpath also connects the two settlements and the rural character of the gap can also be appreciated from this route.

There are only a few sites with planning permission within the area and typically comprise a change of use within existing buildings. The gap is likely to be most vulnerable from scattered buildings in the countryside, or roadside ribbon development.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between Little Heath and Northaw is occupied by Landscape Character Area (LCA) 53 'Northaw Common Parkland'. The evaluation, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment, is to 'conserve and strengthen' the landscape.

The landscape sensitivity assessment subdivides this character area into assessment parcels. Area 53 and sub-area 53b fall within this gap. These are both assessed as having a **moderate- high** sensitivity.

The landscape sensitivity of the part of sub-area 53 that falls within the gap is described as **moderate-high** because of the historic parklands and their associated woodlands, historic and organic field patterns, and the distinctive landform pattern. The key sensitivities are:

- The rural nature and time-depth of the landscape including the historic parkland of Northaw Park.
- The distinctive landform pattern comprising narrow ridgelines and valley bowls.
- The organic and irregular field pattern comprising small-medium scale fields.
- The frequent blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows along field boundaries and rural lanes.

The level of sensitivity of area 53b is described as **moderate-high** because of the parkland character, organic field pattern, blocks of woodland, hedgerows, and with development along Coopers Lane retaining a historic character and pattern. The key sensitivities are:

- The landform pattern comprising slopes and dips.
- The organic and irregular field pattern.
- The frequent blocks of deciduous woodland and hedgerows along field boundaries and rural lanes.
- The rural nature of the landscape including historic settlement pattern along Coopers Lane which contains listed buildings.
- The Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath.

*Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a small number of Local Wildlife Sites between the two settlements: Hook Wood, Fritillary

Meadow and Woodland area S.E. of Little Heath Farm. There is Ancient Woodland at Hook Wood and priority habitats of deciduous woodland, an area of good quality semi-improved grassland and a traditional orchard at Northaw House.

There are no specific network enhancement zones mapped by Natural England. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that there are areas between the settlements that have a medium/high priority for habitat creation, targeting acid grassland, neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.

There are a number of listed buildings on the edge of Northaw (designated as a conservation area) and along Coopers Lane including at the manors of Northaw House (Grade II) and Northaw Park (Grade II*); both of Georgian style.

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

Public access within the area is very limited. However, the Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath runs to the north of Northaw Place and along Judge's Hill providing a connection between Little Heath and Northaw. There is also a small area of open access land on the western edge of Little Heath (as shown on the OS map). Overall the area would benefit from improving footpath connections.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

There are no draft allocations in this gap area.

There are three promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites located in this area. Two of these sites (Nor12: The Grange, Coopers Lane; and Nor1: Wood Green Timber Co) are located in the hamlet of Springfield and, depending on the proposals in these areas, could extend the northern edge of Potters Bar into this gap. There is also a promoted site at Northaw Place (Nor3: Land off Coopers Lane) which, if developed, could increase the presence of development in the gap.

**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.*

Summary and Recommendations

Although these settlements are some distance apart and the gap robust at present, identification of a gap policy area between the two settlements could help ensure that Little Heath/ Potters Bar and Northaw retain separate identities. It could also be used to help preserve the historic settlement pattern along Coopers Lane.

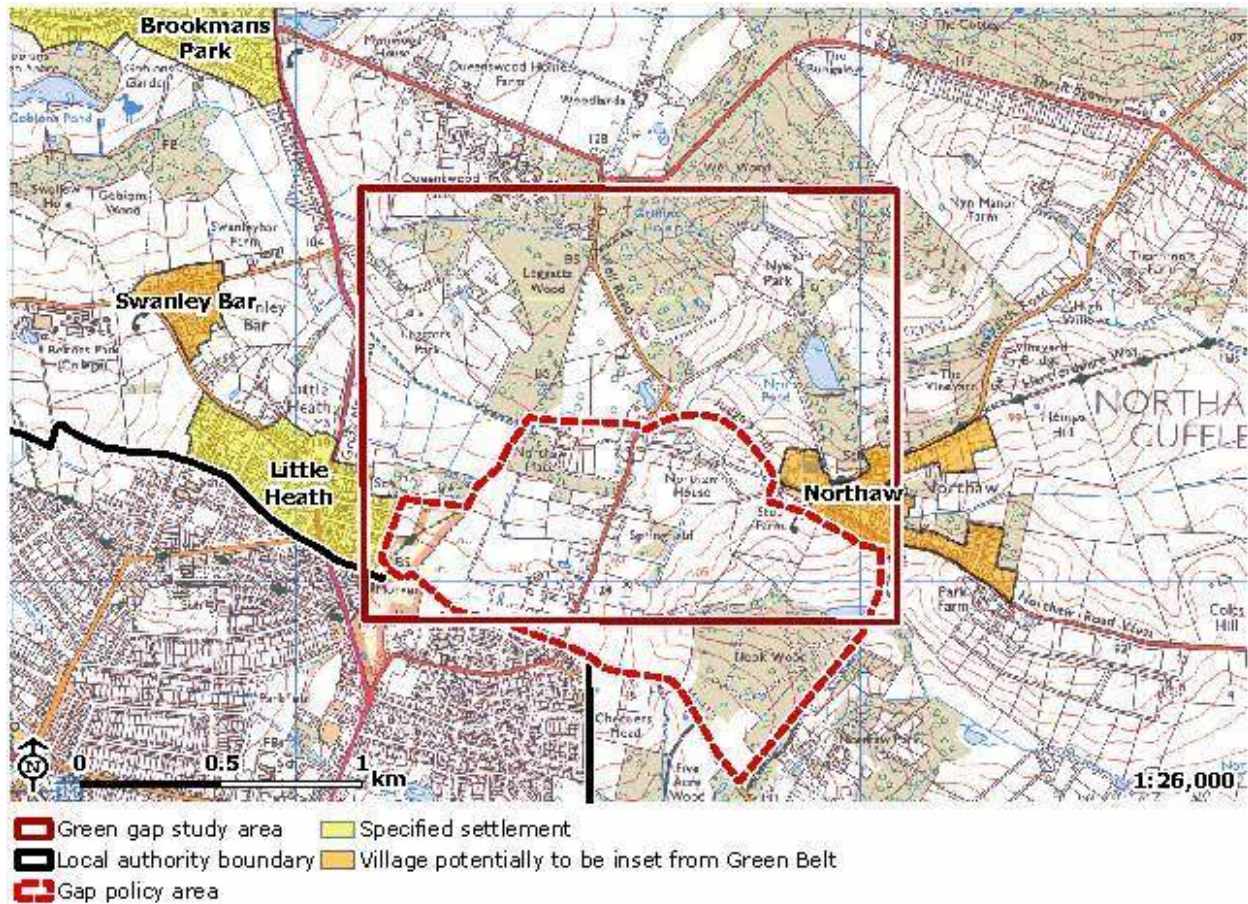
The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural and parkland setting to Little Heath, Northaw, Springfield, Northaw Place and Northaw House, and its relatively high landscape sensitivity.

The whole of the area between the two settlements could form part of a 'gap policy area'. This area is illustrated on Map 2 and within it the aims should be to:

- Maintain a physical and visual separation between Little Heath/ Potters Bar (which are already joined), Springfield and Northaw, high density development that could erode the gap;
- Retain the rural and parkland character that defines the gap, comprising agricultural fields, blocks of woodland, well established hedgerows and scattered low density buildings in the countryside;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, when travelling along the B156 and when walking the Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath;
- Protect existing features of ecological interest including the priority habitat deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland and the traditional orchard at Northaw House, and seek opportunities for improving habitat provision of acid grassland, neutral grassland and broadleaved woodland.

- Conserve the historic low density settlement pattern along Coopers Lane (in the hamlet of Springfield), and the rural setting to the listed and non-listed historic buildings.

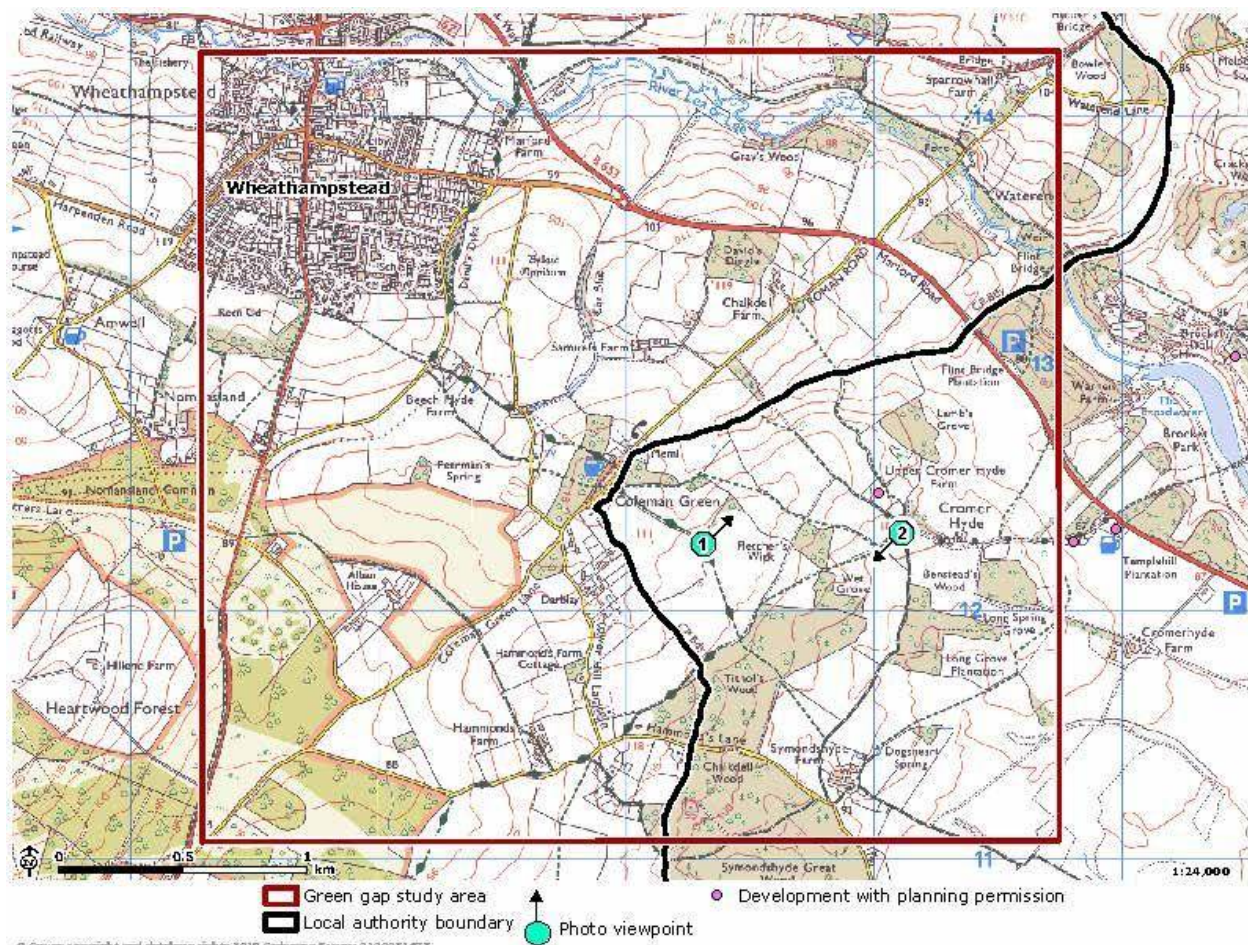
Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



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Area between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Symondshyde is a new proposed village directly northeast of Symondshyde Great Wood. This village would be centred on Symondshyde Farm and would be visually contained by woodland to the west,

southwest and northwest, although to the east it is relatively open.

Wheathampstead is a large nucleated village, focussed on the River Lea, outside of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Boundary in St Albans District.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The gap between the edge of the proposed settlement of Symondshyde and the existing settlement of Wheathampstead is just over 2km. This area comprises agricultural fields (mostly arable) and large areas of woodland. Land here is gently rolling and contains some exposed areas, whilst other parts of the area are well-concealed by the presence of large woodland blocks, including Symondshyde Great Wood which would wrap around the western side of Symondshyde. The two settlements would maintain a sense of physical and visual separation and there would be no inter-visibility between the two.

There are no direct road links between the two settlements, although there are indirect road links and footpaths (including the Hertfordshire Way) that connect between Wheathampstead and the potential new settlement. Users of these routes would experience the rural countryside between the two settlements. There are no major planning applications in the area between the two settlements.

Only part of the area between the two settlements is within the Borough boundary and remainder of this appraisal focuses on the Welwyn Hatfield part of the gap.

Landscape Sensitivity

Within Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap in only one landscape character areas: 32 Symondshyde Ridge Landscape Character Area. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2019) assessed this area as having a **moderate-high** sensitivity due to the undeveloped nature of the area, tranquil perceptual qualities, high coverage of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands and the extensive network of public rights of way. The key sensitivities, relevant to this gap, are:

- The wooded ridgeline on the west and east facing slopes;
- Elevated visually prominent parts of the landscape that are visually prominent (particularly those with limited hedgerow boundaries);
- Rural and tranquil perceptual qualities;
- Retain areas of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland which also characterise the skyline;
- Extensive network of public rights of way including the Hertfordshire Way Long Distance Footpath; and
- Listed buildings and their rural landscape character and setting.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

There are a few Local Wildlife Sites in the gap relating to the woodlands. This includes: Coleman Green Lane, Fletcher's Wick, Wet Grove, Titnol's Wood, Coleman Green Spring and Kents Dell, Sprite Field Spring, Benstead's Wood and Long Spring and Long Grove Plantation. Some of these are also Ancient Woodlands and deciduous woodland is a BAP Priority Habitat.

There are no habitat network enhancement zones (which are mapped by Natural England) in the gap. However, the Herts Ecological Network data indicates that many of the fields have potential for habitat creation and many of the woodlands require maintenance and enhancement. The Herts Ecological Network data also notes that the mixed plantation Lamb's Grove and the coniferous and mixed plantations at Titnol's Wood require restoration.

There are a number of listed buildings within Welwyn Hatfield's part of the gap and Bocket Park is close by. Across the administrative boundary in St Albans are some more listed buildings and a Scheduled

Monument (Wheathampstead earthwork incorporating Devils Dyke and the Slad).

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

The gap area contains a well-connected series of public rights of way, including part of the long distance recreational route the Hertfordshire Way. Some footpaths link to an area of Registered Common Land just across the Borough boundary at Coleman Green.

**Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.*

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

Apart from the new settlement of Symondshyde itself, there are no other draft allocated sites or promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead.

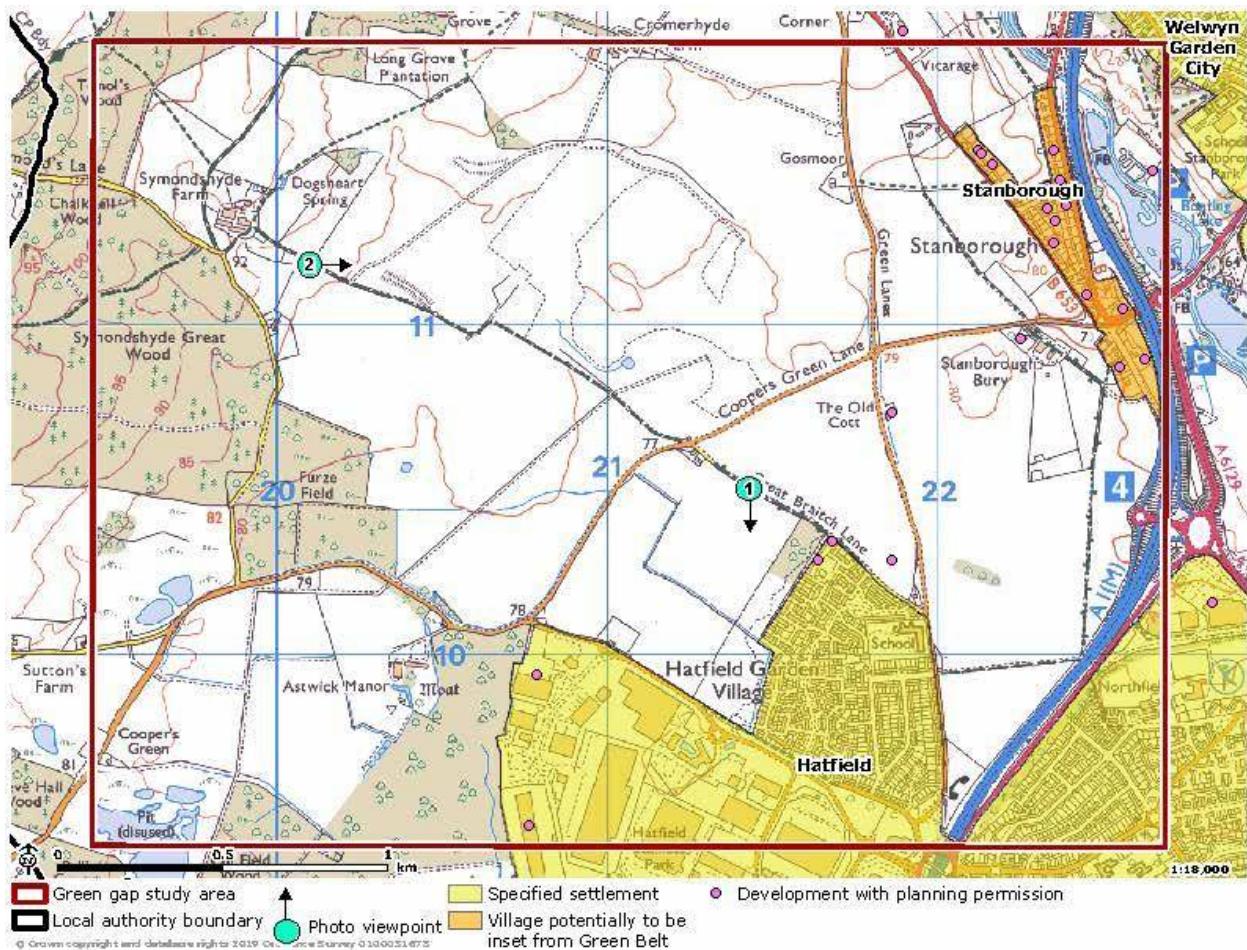
**Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix X.*

Summary and Recommendations

The area between the proposed new settlement of Symondshyde and Wheathampstead around 2km and includes robust features including Symondshyde Great Wood (also a Local Wildlife Site) which would prevent any expansion of Symondshyde north-westwards towards Wheathampstead. It is concluded that there is no need for a 'gap policy' area in this location.

Area between Symondshyde and Hatfield

Map 1: Study area



Representative Photos



Existing Settlement Pattern and Identity

Hatfield is a town which initially grew up around the gates of Hatfield House. However, as one of the post-war New Towns it expanded rapidly in the 20th century with the Government building a new town centre and allocating 9.5km² for the New Town.

Symondshyde is a new proposed village in the emerging Local Plan centred on Symondshyde Farm.

Gap Size, Character and Strength

The area between Symondshyde and Hatfield would be approximately 1.2km at its narrowest point. Although this assessment focuses on the area between Symondshyde and Hatfield, it should also be noted that this area would also separate Symondshyde from Lemsford and Stanborough. The narrowest gap between Symondshyde and Stanborough would be approximately 1.3km and the narrowest gap between Symondshyde and Lemsford would be approximately 1km.

The land use in the rural area between these settlements is made up of large arable fields, with clear evidence of both past and current gravel workings. The topography is particularly flat and there is currently a high level of intervisibility between Hatfield and the proposed area for Symondshyde, with the woodlands directly to the west of the proposed area visible on skylines.

There is currently no direct road to the proposed location of Symondshyde village across the gap (Hammonds Lane links to Symondshyde Farm, although this would not form the main access to the site). There is however a footpath that directly crosses the area between these settlements, from which the openness of the area can be appreciated.

Landscape Sensitivity

The area between the two settlements is occupied by De Havilland Plain Landscape Character Area (LCA 31).

For the purposes of the landscape sensitivity assessment LCA 31 is divided into two with sub-area 31a comprising the land on the settlement edge of Hatfield and the rest of the area being within sub-area 31.

The area within the gap is assessed in the Council's 2019 landscape sensitivity assessment as having a **low-moderate** landscape sensitivity to residential development. The key sensitivities are:

- Pockets of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, as well as other large areas of semi-natural or restored habitats associated with past mineral extraction;
- Rural agricultural character;
- Visually prominent areas that have an open character; and
- Listed buildings and their rural setting.
- Extensive public access enjoyed in this area.

**Please find a map of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings (with absolute constraints) in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Ecological, Cultural Heritage and Habitat Networks

Within the area between the settlements there are some small pockets of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland. The area is also surrounded by a series of Local Wildlife Sites, with its boundary being shared with Furze field Wood, Symondshyde Great Wood, Long Spring Grove and Bensteads Wood Local Wildlife Sites.

There are no habitat network enhancement zones (identified by Natural England) in the gap. The Herts Ecological Network data indicates that the undeveloped fields in the gap have potential for habitat creation, with very few parts of this area having identified habitats present. Habitats existing between these settlements include pockets of poor semi-improved grassland, broadleaved plantations and mixed plantations.

There could be an opportunity to expand the existing woodland areas to screen the new settlement, as well as enhancing the woodland network.

There are two Grade II listed buildings within the area: Gosmoor and The Old Cottage (Symondshyde Farm, which is also listed, lies within the proposed allocation).

**Please find a map of Environmental Designations and Priority habitats and habitat networks in Appendix 1.*

Analysis of Gap Value and Opportunities: Recreation

Recreational value is provided by a bridleway directly connecting the proposed location of Symondshyde to Hatfield. There could be opportunity to strengthen the provision of public rights of way across the area.

*Please find a map of Recreation in Appendix 1.

Pressure on the Gap and Potential Impact of Promoted Sites on the Gap

In addition to the proposed village of Symondshyde (a strategic site allocation) there is a strategic draft site allocation located on the settlement edge of Hatfield, with all of the land to the south east of Coopers Green Lane included within this allocation. If the allocation were to be built this would extend the edge of Hatfield towards Symondshyde. However, there would still be a gap of around 1km between the two settlements.

There is also a large promoted site (submitted in response to the Council's 2019 Call for Sites) which is located on the western edge of Bocket Road directly west of Stanborough. This would not affect the gap between Hatfield and Symondshyde. However, if it were to be developed it would reduce the gap between Stanborough and the proposed village of Symondshyde to approximately a kilometre.

*Please find a map of planning applications, draft allocations and promoted sites in Appendix 1.

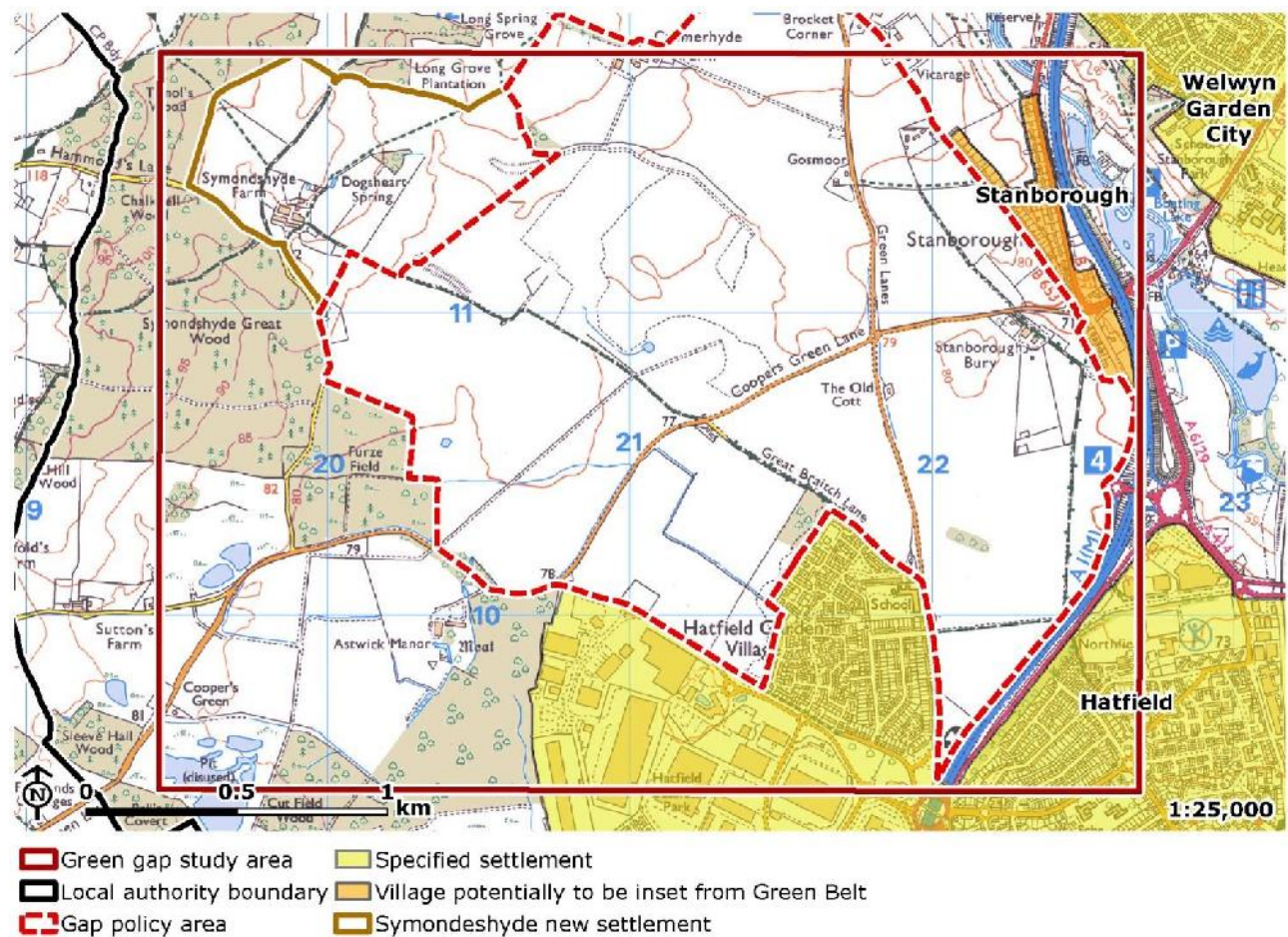
Summary and Recommendations

Since this area is particularly flat with potential for inter-visibility between Hatfield and the proposed area for Symondshyde, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' to retain the sense of separation between these two settlements in the future.

A suggested area for the 'gap policy area' is shown on **Map 2**. Within this area the aim should be to:

- Avoid the physical coalescence of Symondshyde and Hatfield, and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
- Ensure that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next, whether that be by road or foot;
- Ensure the area within the gap continues to provide a rural setting to Hatfield, and the future village of Symondshyde;
- Protect and conserve pockets of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, as well as other large areas of semi-natural or restored habitats associated with past mineral extraction extending these where possible;
- Maintain the rural agricultural character;
- Conserve listed buildings and the rural setting of these buildings;
- Minimise inter-visibility between one settlement edge and the other (making sure to consider the winter situation without leaves on trees) – topography and vegetation can provide a screening function; and
- Protect the public access enjoyed in this area, seeking opportunities for further connections public rights of way connections where possible.

Map 2: Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration



4 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall conclusions

- 4.1 This section firstly summarises which gaps should be taken forward as gap policy areas and why; and secondly it summarises the potential impact the draft site allocations and promoted sites could have on settlement separation.

Gaps recommended to be taken forward as 'Gap Policy Areas'

- 4.2 The results of this study indicate that there are a number of areas that could benefit from a 'gap policy area' to ensure that future development protects settlement pattern and maintains a sense of separation between settlements. For some settlement pairs this is because the gap between settlements is small and vulnerable to even small amounts of development, while for others the existing gap may be robust but worth protecting for the future. Many of these gap areas also have other characteristics and values that would reinforce the case for keeping the land between settlements open/ undeveloped, as set out in the individual gap assessments, and summarised below.
- 4.3 The pairs of settlements for which a 'gap policy area' is recommended are:

Table 4-1: Summary of gaps recommended to be taken forward as a Gap Policy Areas

Proposed Gap Policy Area	Summary Reason
<i>Areas between the 'specified settlements' in the adopted local plan</i>	
Between Woolmer Green and Oaklands	The gap between these two settlements is very small at its closest point, being only just over 40m. Nevertheless the two settlements do have separate identities as a result of their different histories/ character, different topographies (one on high ground, one on low) and the presence of the railway line that runs between them. Since there is a physical gap either side of the railway line, the identification of a 'gap policy area' in this location could assist in maintaining different settlement identities.
Between Welwyn and Oaklands	Although the triangle of land between the A1(M) and B197 is partially developed (and subject to draft allocations to further develop/re-develop this area), there is still a sufficient gap along and to the west of the A1(M) to provide a separation between these settlements, which could be vulnerable to further pressure and it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the presence of Danesbury Park and a number of Local Wildlife Sites and associated deciduous woodland and semi-improved grassland priority habitats.
Between Welwyn and Digswell	There is a clear separation between these settlements currently, and while the gap does not appear to be under particular pressure at this point in time, any development along the A1000 could change this. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by its landscape sensitivity and archaeological significance.
Between Digswell and	There is a clear separation between these settlements currently,

Proposed Gap Policy Area	Summary Reason
Oaklands	and while the gap does not appear to be under development pressure at this point in time, a 'gap policy area' could be introduced to protect the ongoing separation of these two settlements. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the high landscape sensitivity and Local Wildlife Sites with priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient woodland.
Between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City	Although the area of land between the A1(M) and the edge of Welwyn Garden City is occupied by school grounds, it provides a break between the two settlements and a gap policy area could help to protect the separation between these two settlements in the future. The case for keeping this land open (and particularly the eastern part) is strengthened by the presence of the River Mimram and associated Local Wildlife Sites.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell	The Mimram Valley between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell forms an important gap between these two settlements. A gap policy area could be applied in this location to maintain that gap and protect the settlement pattern in this area. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the relatively high landscape sensitivity, the ecological value associated with the valley landscape, and the setting it provides to the listed Welwyn Railway Viaduct.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield	Since there is a physical gap in this location that contains a notable landscape feature (the Lea Valley) and is vulnerable to being closed, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' in this location. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the presence of the Lea Valley, the moderate-high landscape sensitivity around Mill Green and the many Local Wildlife Sites, two Areas of Archaeological Significance and listed buildings.
Between Hatfield and Welham Green	Since there is a physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to being closed by relatively modest amounts of development, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' in this location to protect settlement pattern and identity and prevent the further coalescence of Hatfield with Welham Green.
Between Welham Green and Brookmans Park	There is a physical gap in this location that could be vulnerable to erosion therefore it is recommended that a gap policy area is identified in this area to protect the settlement pattern and prevent the future coalescence of these two settlements. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the moderate-high landscape sensitivity west of the railway line, the presence of ecologically valuable sites (a SSSI and Local Wildlife Sites with associated priority habitat deciduous woodland and ancient woodland) and the recreational value provided by a network of footpaths.
<i>Areas between specified settlements and settlements outside the Borough boundary</i>	
Between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire)	Since the physical gap in this location is vulnerable to being closed by relatively modest amounts of development, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap' designation to maintain the separation between these two village settlements, and to prevent further coalescence. Although some of the area between these

Proposed Gap Policy Area	Summary Reason
	settlements has already been developed (i.e. the care home), enough undeveloped land remains to form a physical and visual separation between the two settlements which could be defined as a 'gap'.
Between Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire)	Since there is a clear physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to erosion from development on the edges of the existing settlements as well as further scattered development in the countryside, it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area to protect settlement pattern and identity, and to prevent coalescence of Welwyn/ Oaklands with Codicote (N.B. as Codicote is located in North Hertfordshire, the gap designation could only form part of Welwyn Hatfield's area). The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in the setting to Welwyn Conservation Area, the presence of local wildlife sites in the Mimram Valley and at Danesbury Park, and the presence of areas of archaeological significance.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire)	As the River Mimram and its associated designation creates a distinct division between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin the area is not at significant risk of closure. However, larger scale developments have the potential to erode the rural character and sense of separation between the two settlements. Therefore, it is recommended that a 'gap policy area' be located within the Welwyn Hatfield part of the area to enable separation of these settlements to be a consideration in any future development proposals. The case for keeping this land (or at least the valley and valley slopes) open is strengthened by the presence of ecological designations.
Between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire)	The area between the settlements of Digswell and Burnham Green is currently rural in character, but is vulnerable to erosion from additional residential properties along Harmer Green Lane. It would therefore be appropriate to identify a Green Gap Policy Area in this location to protect settlement pattern and identity and prevent the further coalescence of Digswell with Burnham Green. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the presence of Local Wildlife Sites, BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands, registered common land open access areas and public rights of way.
Between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans)	Since the gap between Smallford (St Albans) and Hatfield is currently quite small and vulnerable to future development, it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area within Welwyn Hatfield's part of the gap in order to help prevent the future merging of Hatfield with St Albans. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural parkland setting to the edge of Hatfield, as well as its ecological value represented by the presence of local wildlife sites.
Between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne);	Since there is a physical gap in this location that is vulnerable to being closed, particularly along Cuffley Road, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap' in this location to prevent these two villages from merging. This is particularly pertinent where development has extended from Goff's Oak along Cuffley Hill resulting in only a small undeveloped area between the village

Proposed Gap Policy Area	Summary Reason
	and the settlement edge of Cuffley, and where coalescence between the two is at greatest risk. However the part of the gap that lies within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough boundary is not particularly concerned with this vulnerable area, as it consists of two detached fields to the north and south of The Meadway. The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural setting to the edge of Cuffley and the opportunities for habitat creation.
Between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire).	The physical gap in this location is currently strong, but potentially vulnerable to ribbon development along Datchworth Green Road. Therefore it would be appropriate to identify a gap policy area in this location to protect settlement pattern and the sense of separation between Woolmer Green and Datchworth. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the rural character of the area, its moderate-high landscape sensitivity and the recreational value provided by a good network of footpaths.
Areas between specified settlements and potential inset villages	
Between Welwyn Garden City, Lemsford and Stanborough	<p>The gap between Welwyn Garden City and the two villages of Lemsford and Stanborough is occupied by the Lea Valley the A1(M) corridor, and these features are likely to keep these settlements from merging. Nevertheless, a gap policy area following the Lea Valley would ensure that the settlements remain separate. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of priority habitats and local wildlife sites along the valley, the potential for biodiversity enhancement as part of Natural England's 'network enhancement zone', and the recreation function provided by the Country Park .</p> <p>Lemsford and Stanborough currently retain separate identities, but the gap between them is vulnerable to erosion by ribbon development. A gap policy area between the two villages would help maintain their separate identities. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the area of archaeological significance and potential for biodiversity enhancement, forming part of Natural England's 'network enhancement zone'.</p>
Between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar	There is a sizeable gap in between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar which is maintained by the presence of Gobions Park Grade II Registered Park. However, ribbon development along the A1000 has reduced the size of the gap to the east, and it would be advisable to designate the area as a gap policy area if the two settlements are to continue to remain separate. The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of Gobions Park and its associated cultural heritage and recreational value, the ecological value recognised through presence of Local Wildlife Sites and associated priority habitat deciduous woodland, and the relatively high landscape sensitivity of the area.
Between Newgate Street and Cuffley	Due to the landform, steep landform and wooded parkland character of the rural gap, the settlements are not at a high risk of coalescence from new residential development. However, the relatively close proximity of these two settlements (just over 700m at their closest point) means that they would benefit from

Proposed Gap Policy Area	Summary Reason
	<p>a Gap Policy Area to maintain this situation.</p> <p>The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodland, local wildlife sites, potential for biodiversity enhancement (forming part of one of Natural England's 'network enhancement zones') and moderate-high to high landscape sensitivity.</p>
Between Northaw and Cuffley;	<p>Although there is a clear physical gap, of rural character, between the two settlements of Cuffley and Northaw, the area between the settlements is open and even relatively modest amounts of development would be visually prominent. The gap is also vulnerable to ribbon development along the roads between the two settlements (Vineyards Road and Northaw Road West) and therefore the settlement would benefit from a Gap Policy Area.</p> <p>The case for keeping the land open is strengthened by the presence of local wildlife sites, an archaeological priority area and moderate-high landscape sensitivity.</p>
Between Little Heath and Northaw	<p>Although these settlements are some distance apart and the gap robust at present, identification of a gap policy area between the two settlements could help ensure that Little Heath/ Potters Bar and Northaw retain separate identities. It could also be used to help preserve the historic settlement pattern along Coopers Lane.</p> <p>The case for keeping this land open is strengthened by the role the area plays in providing a rural and parkland setting to Little Heath, Northaw, Springfield, Northaw Place and Northaw House, and its relatively high landscape sensitivity</p>
Potential gaps between the new settlement of Symondshyde and other settlements	
Between Symondshyde and Hatfield	<p>Since this area is particularly flat with potential for inter-visibility between Hatfield and the proposed area for Symondshyde, it would be appropriate to identify a 'gap policy area' to retain the sense of separation between these two settlements in the future.</p>

4.4 A map showing these suggested areas is included as **Figure 4.1** (more detailed maps are included in each individual gap policy area assessment).

4.5 Gaps not taken forward are summarised in **Table 4.2** below.

Table 4-2: Summary of gaps not to be taken forward as a Gap Policy Areas

Settlement pair	Summary reason for not taking forward
Areas between specified settlements and settlements outside the Borough boundary	
Between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)Wheathampstead	<p>The area between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead is large (at around 4.3 km) and includes robust features including the A1(M) corridor, woodlands and the Lea Valley which would help prevent the settlements from merging at a future date. It is concluded that there is no need for a 'gap policy area' in this location due to the large distance between the two settlements and the lack of risk of coalescence. Any issues likely to arise in relation to proposed development over the next Local Plan period are likely to be related to effects on landscape character,</p>

	ecological / heritage features and the setting of villages, rather than the separation of Welwyn Garden City from Wheathampstead.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire);	There is sufficient separation between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford that, even with pressure for development on the edges of both settlements, the settlements are unlikely to merge. Further protection is provided by the Grade II* Registered Parkland of Panshanger Park which lies between the two. For these reasons, and the fact that most of the land within the gap is outside Welwyn Hatfield Councils' control (being located in East Hertfordshire), it is suggested that a Green Gap designation would not add much value in this instance. Development in the next Local Plan period is more likely to affect landscape character, ecology/ habitat network value, and setting of cultural heritage features than settlement separation.
Between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield);	There is a relatively large (around 2km) gap between Cuffley and Crews Hill, and character of the gap (wooded and undulating) and presence of the M25 corridor ensure that there is a good sense of separation between the two settlements. It is suggested that a 'gap policy designation' is not needed between these settlements. Any issues likely to arise in relation to proposed development over the next Local Plan period are likely to be related to effects on landscape character and the setting of Cuffley, rather than the separation of Cuffley from Crews Hill.
<i>Areas between specified settlements and potential inset villages</i>	
Bell Bar and Brookmans Park	Since these two settlements are already joined along the A1000, there is no case for designating a 'gap' between the two villages. Although there is an open area of parkland that lies between Bell Bar and the western part of Brookmans Park, this is considered to be more of a 'setting' to the two settlements than a gap between them. Impact of development on landscape character, ecological value and role the area plays in the setting of the settlements will be a consideration.
Swanley Bar and Little Heath	The gap between Little Heath and Swanley Bar is very small, and is formed by a playing field, playground and buildings which give the area an urbanised character. There is no real sense of separation between the two settlements, and therefore no justification for the need for a gap policy area between these two settlements
<i>Potential gaps between the new settlement of Symondshyde and other settlements</i>	
Symondshyde and Wheathampstead	The area between the proposed new settlement of Symondshyde and Wheathampstead is around 2km and includes robust features including Symondshyde Great Wood (also a Local Wildlife Site) which would prevent any expansion of Symondshyde north-westwards towards Wheathampstead. It is concluded that there is no need for a 'gap policy' area in this location.

- 4.6 It is recommended that this evidence study forms the basis of a future Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Such an SPD will help applicants to make successful applications by ensuring that proposed development within a gap policy area is consistent with the aims set out in the Summary and Recommendations section of each policy gap assessment. The SPD could be produced once the allocated sites have been finalised so that the final 'gap policy areas' can be drawn to exclude the final Local Plan allocations.
- 4.7 In addition to the aims for each gap policy area, there are some key principles that apply to all gaps. These are:
- Avoid the physical coalescence of neighbouring settlements and ensure each retains its own separate identity;
 - Retain the rural character of any remaining gaps between settlements so that there is an experience of travelling through rural countryside after leaving one settlement and before entering the next;
 - Retain the open and undeveloped character of the river valleys;
 - Avoid developing on visually prominent slopes where possible, and minimise inter-visibility between settlements, particularly where they are not already inter-visible;
 - Protect existing features of ecological interest and seek to enhance the biodiversity of the land between settlements, extending and linking priority habitats;
 - Maintain public access to and across the areas between settlements and seeking opportunities for further connections where possible.

Impact of draft site allocations and promoted sites on settlement separation

- 4.8 A second purpose of this study was to consider how the draft site allocations and promoted sites in the gaps assessed would affect settlement separation.
- 4.9 A review of the draft allocations indicates that, although some of the draft allocations will erode some of the gaps none will completely close the gaps. This indicates that the draft allocated sites could be accommodated without physical coalescence of settlements. However, the guidance for development within the gap areas (set out in the individual gap area assessments) should be followed and implemented for any development in these areas. Table 4.1 below provides a summary of how draft allocations would affect each gap.
- 4.10 There are also a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' located within the gap study areas, as summarised in Table 4.1 below. Many of the promoted sites intrude into existing gaps, although development of some sites would have more impact on the gaps than others, as summarised in the table. The most vulnerable gaps are between:
- Swanley Bar and Little Heath (there are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' which, if all developed, would completely close the gap between Little Heath and Swanley Bar);
 - Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield (if the promoted site North of Oldings Corner were to be developed this would intrude into the gap and could potentially narrow the gap between the two settlements to as little as 325m);
 - Woolmer Green and Knebworth (which is already a small gap);
 - Welwyn Garden City and the border with East Hertfordshire (the promoted site north of the disused Panshanger Airfield could extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City towards the valley slopes and to the Borough boundary, and therefore if this site were to be developed, the retention of a rural gap between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin would be reliant on a gap being preserved within East Hertfordshire);
 - Hatfield and St Albans (although the gap between Hatfield and St Albans is relatively large across much of the area, the gap between Hatfield and Smallford is vulnerable and development of promoted sites could erode this further).

Table 4-3: Summary of potential effect of proposed/potential site allocations on settlement separation

Gap study area	Potential effect of draft allocations on the gap	Potential effect of Call for Sites on the gap
Between Woolmer Green and Oaklands	No sites between settlements	Two promoted sites from the Council's 'Call for Sites' are located west of the railway line (WGr7 and WGr7a). If these two sites were to be developed, this would erode the rural settings of, and increase inter-visibility between, the two sites (unless substantial landscape treatment was employed).
Between Oaklands and Welwyn	There are some draft allocated sites in the triangle of land formed by the railway, the B197 and Oaklands. Although development here would intensify development in this already developed area, it would have minimal impact on the gap as it currently stands as these areas are already developed (albeit at a lower density). Development would not result in much of a character change (assuming the sites are sensitively developed and vegetation used to soften views within the gap).	There is a cluster of sites put forward in the Council's 'Call for Sites' on the edge of Oaklands (Land to the east of Danesbury Park Road OMH6 and sites on The Avenue OMH7 and OMH9). If these sites were to be developed, the edge of Oaklands would move closer to Welwyn, but Danesbury Park would continue to form a break between the two settlements.
Between Oaklands and Digswell	n/a	n/a
Between Welwyn and Digswell	n/a	There is one promoted site from the 'Call for Sites' at Digswell Pumping Station (WGC2). This is a small site and would not close the gap between Welwyn and Digswell.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Welwyn	There is one draft allocation between the edge of Welwyn and the A1(M). If this site were to be developed it would extend the edge of Welwyn, but would not impact on the gap which is focussed on the east side of the A1(M).	There are some promoted sites east of the A1(M) including 62 Crossway (WGC10) beside the A1(M) and at Digswell Pumping Station (WGC2). If these sites were to be developed they would impinge on, but not close, the gap.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell	n/a	There is a promoted site from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' beside the A1000, east of the railway line 'Junction off Digswell Lane and Bessemer Road' (Dig4). If this site were to be developed it would intrude into, but not totally close,

		the gap.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield	There are draft allocations at North West Hatfield (Stanboroughbury), Creswick, Barbaraville (a very small site) and South East Welwyn Garden City. If these are developed they will extend the settlement edges of Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City, but will not close the gap or narrow the existing smallest part of the gap (which will continue to be around 880m). The river valley will continue to form the separation between the two settlements.	There are two promoted sites from the Council's 'Call for Sites' within the gap: North of Oldings Corner (STL2) and Three Corner Field (Hat14). If the site North of Oldings Corner were to be developed this would intrude into the gap and could potentially narrow the gap between the two settlements to as little as 325m. The Three Corner Field site would be seen as an extension to Mill Green.
Between Hatfield and Welham Green	There is a draft allocation proposed in the gap (Land at Southway). Development of this site would erode, but not completely close, the gap.	There are also three other sites put forward in the 'Call for Sites': Angerland North Hat21 (on the site of the park and ride), Angerland South (Hat20) and Pooley's Lane (WeG12). If these sites were to be developed this would further erode the gap between these settlements, although not completely close it. The area of higher ground between the two settlements would remain open.
Between Welham Green and Brookmans Park	There is a draft allocation west of Brookmans Park and a draft allocation (split into two areas) to the east of Welham Green. Development of these sites would extend these settlements west (Brookmans Park) and east (Welham Green), but would not reduce the existing size of the gap between the two settlements.	In addition, there are a number of promoted sites put forward in response to the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' These include land 'North of Hawkshead Road' (BrP5), 'Peplins Wood' (BrP12/21a) and 'Skimpans Farm' (WeG6), all of which would erode (but not completely close) the gap.
Between Brookmans Park and Little Heath	<i>See Swanley Bar and Little Heath and Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park</i>	
Between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire)	There is a large allocated housing site on the land east of London Road on the northeast edge of Woolmer Green. Whist this development would not extend any further north than the existing settlement boundary (except for the access road), it would result in expansion of Woolmer Green further into the surrounding countryside.	There is a site that has been promoted through the Council's 'Call for Sites' (Heath Lane, WGr7) on the west side of Woolmer Green and a site on the southern edge of Knebworth (WGr3). The site to the west of Woolmer Green (WGr7) would extend the village westwards into open countryside, but would not extend the village further north than its existing northern extent

		and planting could ensure no inter-visibility between the site and the edge of Knebworth. Development of the site south of Knebworth (WGr3) would result in encroachment towards the care home which could result in these two settlements almost joining. (NB the proposed building edge should not go further south than the existing building edge – refer to guidance in the gap area assessment).
Between Welwyn/Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire)	There is a small draft allocation proposed on the edge of Welwyn (The Vineyards). If this site were to be developed, it would extend the edge of Welwyn a little further north-westwards and towards Danesbury Park, but would not reach the Borough boundary or close the gap between settlements.	There are a number of sites put forward in the Council's 'Call for Sites': a cluster of sites around Welwyn cemetery (Wel 1, Wel 2, Wel6, Wel 14, Wel14a, Wel14b, Wel15a) and a large site on the golf course at Danesbury Park (land between Danesbury Park Road and Reynards Road, RN1). If these sites were to be developed, this would extend the edge of Welwyn further north-west towards Codicote, and Danesbury Park could potentially become a park within an urban area rather than on the edge of an urban area, depending on the layout of these sites.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire)	There is a draft allocation on the edge of Welwyn Garden City, on the plateau top at Panshanger Airfield. There is a resolution to permit the development of this allocated site subject to the completion of a S106 Agreement and this will extend development further north towards the Mimram Valley, but would not significantly erode the gap between the settlements – the settlements would still benefit from the undeveloped gap provided by the Mimram Valley.	North of the disused Panshanger Airfield there are two sites that have been promoted through the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (Land North East of Welwyn Garden City WGC4 and Warrengate Farm WGC9). Development of the northern parts of both of these areas would extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City down the valley slopes and to the Borough boundary. The northern edge is particularly sensitive. If the sites were to be developed the retention of a rural gap between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin would be dependent on it being preserved within East Hertfordshire.
Between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire);	n/a	There is one proposed site submitted in response to the council 2019 'Call for Sites' identified directly west of Burnham Green (land north of Harmer Green Lane, Dig3). Development of this area would extend Burnham Green to Harmer Green and change the

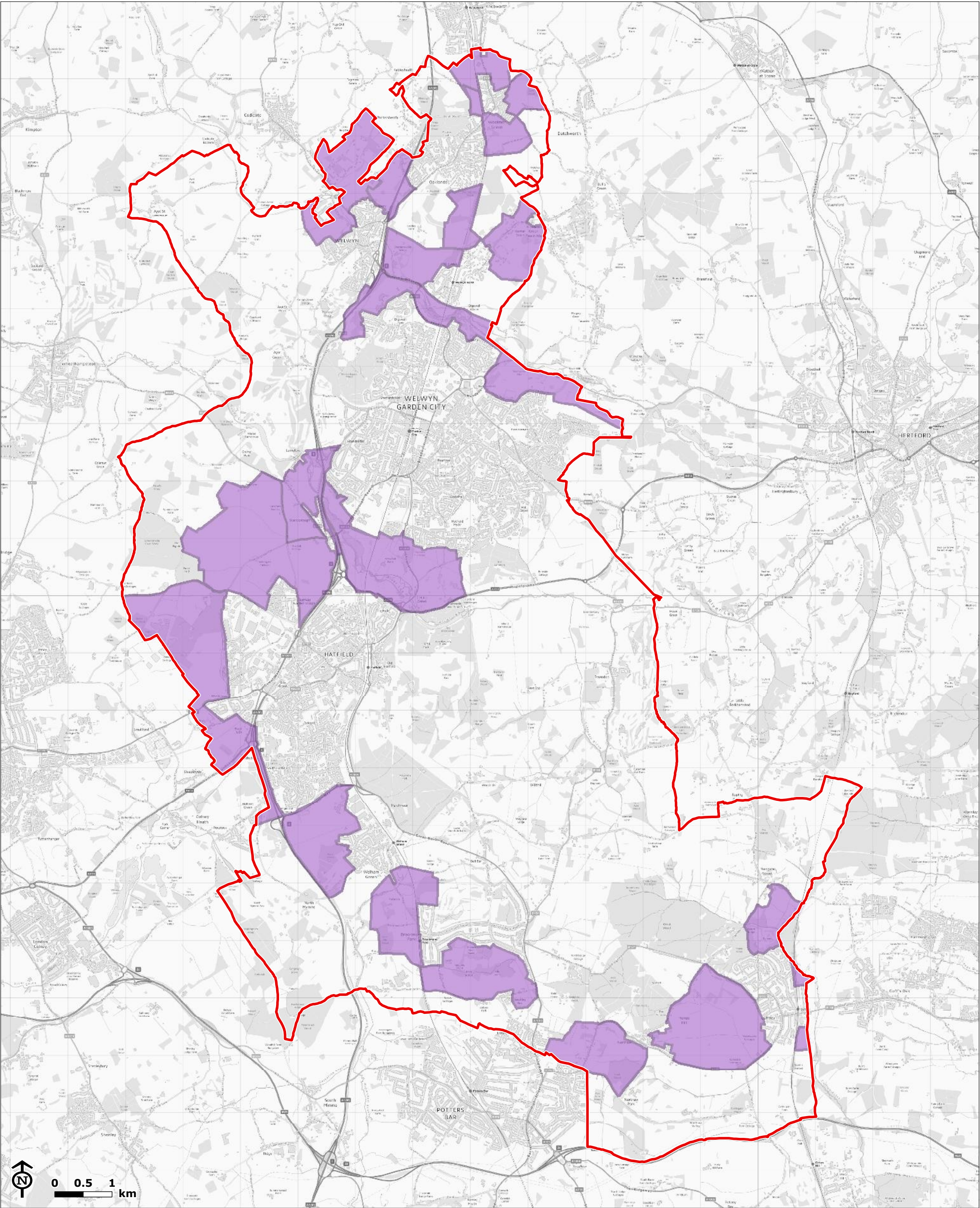
		character of this part of the gap, but will not close the gap between Digswell and Burnham Green.
Between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)	n/a	Whilst there are several sites in the area, the gap is large and while these sites would impact on the countryside outside the existing settlement boundaries, they would not threaten the existing gap between Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead,
Between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire);	Development of the two draft allocations would extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City up to the A414 in the south and to the valley slopes in the north. However, the gap between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford is large, and a clear separation would remain between the two settlements.	Immediately north of the Panshanger Airfield are two promoted sites put forward in response to the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (WGC4 and WGC9). The gap between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford is large, and development of these sites would not extend the edge of Welwyn Garden City any closer to Hertford.
Between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans);	n/a (although there is a draft allocation in the emerging St Albans Local Plan 'East of St Albans')	There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' along the western edge of Hatfield. If these sites were to be developed this would extend the western edge of Hatfield further into the surrounding countryside, and the land at Great Nast Hyde would extend development further west towards Smallford. Although there is a clear gap between Hatfield and St Albans across much of the area, the gap between Hatfield and Smallford is vulnerable and development of these sites will almost join Hatfield to St Albans.
Between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne)	There is a draft allocation proposed in Welwyn Hatfield Borough's part of the gap (Land at The Meadway), although it is noted that the eastern boundary of the allocation would not extend development any further eastwards than the existing development at The Meadway.	n/a
Between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield);	There are three draft allocations on the southern edge of Cuffley (south of Northaw Road West, north of Northaw Road East, and Wells Farm). The draft allocations and promoted sites from the Call for Sites would extend Cuffley south a little, however these would not pose any threat to the gap between	There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' along the west and south of Cuffley. Those that would most affect this gap are Land at Northaw Road East (Cuf12), Colesdale Farm (Cuf13), Land East of Colesdale Farm (Cuf14), King George V (Cuf15) and Land at Hill View Farm



	Cuffley and Crews Hill, which would still be almost 2km.	(Nor2). Although these would extend the edge of Cuffley south to Northaw Brook, they would not pose any threat to the gap between Cuffley and Crews Hill which would still be over 1.5km.
Between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire).	There is a proposed draft allocation in the NE of Woolmer Green. Although this would extend the settlement edge further into the countryside, it would not move the existing eastern extent of Woolmer Green any further east towards Datchworth.	n/a
Between Lemsford and Welwyn Garden City	n/a	Sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (StL5, 13 and 16) would expand Lemsford, but not affect the sense of separation between Lemsford and Welwyn Garden City.
Between Stanborough and Welwyn Garden City	n/a	Sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (StL1 and 3) would expand Stanborough up to Brocket Corner, but not affect the sense of separation between Stanborough and Welwyn Garden City.
Between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park	<i>These two settlements are already joined along the A1000</i>	
Between Swanley Bar and Little Heath	There are two draft allocations proposed on the northern edge of Little Heath. If these sites were developed, this would erode, but not close the gap between the two settlements. The gap would remain small, and vulnerable.	There are also a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' (LHe3, 4 and 5; and SB 1, 2 and 3) which, if developed, would completely close the gap between Little Heath and Swanley Bar, so that both settlements would form part of the suburbs of Potters Bar.
Between Swanley Bar and Brookmans Park	n/a	There are a number of promoted sites from the Council's 2019 'Call for Sites' including a cluster of sites around Raybrook Farm (BrP6, 9, 10), large site to the east of the A1000 (land west of Queenswood School BrP32) and a cluster of sites to the east of Swanley Bar (SB1 and SB2). If the first two site clusters were to be developed, this would extend Brookmans Park south and east into the surrounding countryside. It would erode, but not completely close, the gap between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar.

		If the cluster to the east of Swanley Bar (SB1 and 2) was to be developed this would extend Swanley Bar up to the A1000, almost meeting the ribbon development stretching south along the A1000 from Brookman's Park, and eroding the gap between these settlements so that the gap would be almost closed.
Between Newgate Street and Cuffley	n/a	If the promoted sites (NS1-4) were to be developed the village would extend east and south into the former parkland areas, although it would not extend any further south than the existing southern village extent.
Between Northaw and Cuffley	There are two allocated housing sites which if developed would result in infill development along Northaw Road West. However, the gap will remain over 1km.	<p>There are a number of promoted sites on the steeply sloping land on the western edge of Cuffley (Cuf5, 12, 13, 14, 15 16; and Nor2). Development here would be visually prominent and would intrude into the area between these settlements, although it would not close the gap, which would remain over 1km wide.</p> <p>There are also some promoted sites on the edge of Northaw (Nor13 and 14) which if developed would extend development along Northaw Road West, but would not close the gap.</p>
Little Heath and Northaw	n/a	There are three promoted sites from the Council's 2019 Call for Sites located in this area (Nor 1,3 and 12). Two of these sites (Nor12: The Grange, Coopers Lane; and Nor1: Wood Green Timber Co) are located in the hamlet of Springfield and, depending on the proposals in these areas, could extend the northern edge of Potters Bar into this gap. There is also a promoted site at Northaw Place (Nor3: Land off Coopers Lane) which, if developed, could increase the presence of development in the gap.
Between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead	n/a	n/a

Between Symondshyde and Hatfield	In addition to the proposed village of Symondshyde (a strategic site allocation itself), there is a draft site allocation located on the settlement edge of Hatfield up to Coopers Green Lane. If the allocation were to be built this would extend the edge of Hatfield towards Symondshyde. However, there would still be a gap of around 1km between the two settlements.	There is a large promoted site on the western edge of Bocket Road directly west of Stanborough (StL3). This would not affect the gap between Hatfield and Symondshyde. However, if it were to be developed it would reduce the gap between Stanborough and the proposed village of Symondshyde to approximately a kilometre.
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- 4.11 In allocating any sites it will be important to maintain (or create) a rural character in the remaining gaps between settlements, to maintain the open and undeveloped nature of the valleys, and to minimise inter-visibility between adjacent settlements, especially where they are not already inter-visible with one another.



-  Welwyn Hatfield Boundary
-  Proposed gap policy area

Development of Evidence for
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan:
Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Figure 4.1: Proposed gap policy areas



Source: LUC, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Map Scale @A3: 1:65,000

Appendix 1

Supporting Maps for each Settlement Gap Assessment

Between specified settlements within the Borough:

Area between Woolmer Green and Oaklands
Area between Welwyn, Oaklands and Digswell
Area between Welwyn, Welwyn Garden City and Digswell
Area between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield
Area between Hatfield and Welham Green
Area between Welham Green and Brookmans Park

Between specified settlements and settlements outside the Borough boundary:

Area between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire)
Area between Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire)
Area between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire)
Area between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire)
Welwyn Garden City and Wheathampstead (St Albans)
Welwyn Garden City and Hertford (East Hertfordshire)
Area between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans)
Area between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne)
Area between Cuffley and Crews Hill (Enfield)
Area between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire)

Between specified settlements and potential inset villages:

Area between Lemsford, Stanborough and Welwyn Garden City
Area between Bell Bar and Brookmans Park
Area between Brookmans Park, Swanley Bar and Little Heath
Area between Newgate Street and Cuffley
Area between Northaw and Cuffley
Area between Little Heath and Northaw

Between the new settlement of Symondshyde and other settlements

Area between Symondshyde and Wheathampstead (St Albans)
Area between Symondshyde and Hatfield

Appendix 2

A potential policy approach for Welwyn Hatfield

A2.1 In order to identify an appropriate approach to incorporating gap policy areas into the Local Plan, we have reviewed the approaches taken in other Plans, and how these have fared at Examination and when tested through the development management process. This section sets out the findings of that review and some potential policy recommendations.

Gap policies in national and local policy

A2.2 There is no explicit support or opposition to the maintenance of gaps between settlements or the prevention of settlement coalescence in either the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) or Planning Practice Guidance, outside of designated Green Belts. Nevertheless, the concept of settlement gaps is broadly consistent with the NPPF, in that:

A Local Plan's "strategic policies...should include those...necessary to provide... conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscape and green infrastructure."

(NPPF paragraph 20)

A2.3 In the absence of specific national policy or guidance, local authorities have therefore put forward a range of different policy approaches and justifications for protecting settlement gaps, and have employed a variety of methodologies for assessing the relative merits of different areas of land as gaps. This is reflected in the variety of names used to describe them, including 'Strategic Gaps', 'Settlement Gaps', 'Meaningful Gaps', 'Green Wedges' and 'Green Gaps'.

A2.4 **Appendix 3** sets out the findings of our review of Local Plan policies, using examples from the following authorities:

- Basingstoke and Deane Borough;
- Canterbury District;
- Derbyshire Dales District;
- Fareham Borough;
- Gosport Borough;
- Hinckley and Bosworth Borough; and
- North Warwickshire Borough.

A2.5 The review of Local Plan policies and related Inspector's reports shows that Local Plan policies on settlement gaps are being found sound at Examination but a number of lessons are apparent:

- Settlement gaps must be based on robust evidence (Examinations of Basingstoke and Deane and North Warwickshire Local Plans, for example);
- Evidence supporting gap policy should take into account potential new boundary features that may alter the risk of settlement coalescence in the future to justify their continued inclusion (Examination of the Fareham Local Plan in relation to the Stubbington Bypass);
- Gaps designated to prevent settlement coalescence should only include land that plays a role in maintaining settlement separation rather than other purposes such as protecting the setting of historic environment assets (Examinations of Canterbury and Derbyshire Dales Local Plans);
- Where a policy seeks to maintain separation from a settlement in a neighbouring district, the authorities should cooperate to ensure a consistent approach (Examination of Gosport Local Plan);
- If a settlement gap policy seeks to preclude certain types or scales of development, this must be based on evidence such as landscape sensitivity study (Examinations of North Warwickshire Local Plan).

- A2.6 In addition, the High Court Judgement⁷ cited by the Inspector of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan indicates that settlement gap policies are legitimate provided that they do not seek to protect all rural areas outside settlement boundaries but are focussed on protecting specific areas or features between settlements.
- A2.7 Another lesson from a review of appeal decisions (Appendix 3) is that an otherwise valid settlement gap policy can be undermined by an inability to demonstrate a five-year housing supply. In the appeal against the decision by South Cambridgeshire District Council, for instance, the Inspector ruled that the 'green gap' policy should be considered out of date as the Council could not demonstrate a five year housing supply. This led to the development securing permission despite the Inspector confirming that it would undermine the visual and physical separation between villages, and the land being classified as best and most versatile agricultural land.
- A2.8 In addition, the successful appeal against the decision by Wokingham Borough Council shows that the continued openness of land within a defined settlement gap must be important in maintaining perceived settlement separation, as opposed to other features (for example a substantial railway embankment).
- A2.9 None of the example gaps reviewed overlap with Green Belt. Part of North Warwickshire is designated as Green Belt (related to Birmingham), but the area between Polesworth and Dordon that was reviewed as part of this exercise is not within the Green Belt.

A potential policy approach for Welwyn Hatfield

- A2.10 The effect of development on separation can only be meaningfully assessed once the characteristics of development are known. It is not necessarily the case that *any* development on land within the gap policy areas identified as part of this assessment would adversely affect separation - rather the study has identified all areas in which development *may* affect separation. The boundaries of the gap policy areas are therefore deliberately drawn to capture all areas where separation may be a consideration.
- A2.11 We would recommend avoiding the alternative approach of drawing tighter boundaries combined with recommending a policy approach stating that any form of development anywhere within the settlement gap boundary would be likely to compromise separation. Such settlement gap boundaries would:
- Be very difficult to accurately define and justify;
 - Result in a settlement gap with numerous 'holes' in it (e.g. corresponding to areas screened by woodland or topography or containing existing, isolated development);
 - Be likely to exclude from the settlement gap areas of lower density development on the settlement edge in which development/increased development density would have an adverse effect on perceived separation;
 - Require frequent updating as new development takes place; and
 - Be likely to promote development that was just outside the defined gap boundary but nevertheless capable of some adverse effect on separation.
- A2.12 In light of the above, it is recommended that the Local Plan policy does not seek to prevent all development or development of a particular type or scale within the settlement gaps. Rather, Local Plan policy could be expressed in terms of preventing development that would harm the physical or perceived separation between the settlements. This should be judged with reference to the likely effects of development on the features within these gaps that maintain settlement separation. Similarly, individual development proposals should be judged by reference to their likely effects on these elements. As noted above, the fact that a potential site is located within a defined gap policy area does not automatically indicate that development will in principle be deemed unacceptable.
- A2.13 A possible policy wording could be as follows:

⁷ High Court Judgment between South Northamptonshire Council (claimant) and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Barwood Land and Estates Ltd (defendants) – in particular paragraph 47: Ref [2014] EWHC 573 (Admin); 10 March 2014

Gap policy areas

In order to maintain the separate identities of settlements and prevent their coalescence the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following areas identified in the Policies Map will be protected:

Within the borough:

- Between Woolmer Green and Oaklands;
- Between Welwyn and Oaklands;
- Between Welwyn and Digswell;
- Between Digswell and Oaklands;
- Between Welwyn and Welwyn Garden City;
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Digswell;
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield;
- Between Hatfield and Welham Green;
- Between Welham Green and Brookmans Park;
- Between Welwyn Garden City, Lemsford and Stanborough;
- Between Brookmans Park and Swanley Bar;
- Between Newgate Street and Cuffley;
- Between Northaw and Cuffley;
- Between Little Heath and Northaw;
- Between Symondshyde and Hatfield.

At the borough edge:

- Between Woolmer Green and Knebworth (North Hertfordshire);
- Between Welwyn/ Oaklands and Codicote (North Hertfordshire);
- Between Welwyn Garden City and Tewin (East Hertfordshire);
- Between Digswell and Burnham Green (East Hertfordshire);
- Between Hatfield and St Albans (St Albans);
- Between Cuffley and Goffs Oak (Broxbourne);
- Between Woolmer Green and Datchworth (East Hertfordshire).

Development in gap policy areas will be permitted where it would not have a significant adverse effect on the physical or perceived separation between settlements, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development.

The significance of the effects of development on settlement separation will be judged by reference to the aims for each gap policy area, as set out in the Welwyn Hatfield Green Gap Assessment.

- A2.14 It is recognised that in addition to development within the gap policy areas identified by this study, development outside of these gaps could also reduce perceived separation between settlements in some circumstances, for example if exceptionally tall or prominent new structures were built within existing settlements. It is therefore recommended that this issue is reflected in the Local Plan's design, or other relevant, policy.
- A2.15 Finally, it is suggested that for gap policy areas that seek to maintain separation from a settlement in a neighbouring borough/ district, the authorities should cooperate to ensure a consistent approach.

Appendix 3

Examples of policy approaches elsewhere

Local Plan policies at Examination

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted May 2016)⁸

- A3.1 Policy EM2 in the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan restricts development in five 'strategic gaps' between existing settlements as follows:

Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps

In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:
Basingstoke – Oakley

Basingstoke - Sherborne St John

Basingstoke - Old Basing

Basingstoke/Chineham - Bramley/Sherfield on Loddon

Tadley-Baughurst

Development in gaps will only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or
- c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.

- A3.2 At Examination, the Inspector judged the policy to be sound⁹ by reference to the Council's 'Strategic Gaps Topic Paper', which underlined the strong community support for the policy and argued that these gaps help safeguard local distinctiveness, help deliver the spatial strategy of the Plan and prevent coalescence where the risk is greatest. In designating strategic gaps, the topic paper applied the following criteria:
- the land to be included within the gap is open and provides a sense of separation between settlements;
 - the land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence (in particular from land allocations in the Local Plan);
 - in defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included, having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.
- A3.3 The inspector also relied on case law in concluding that the strategic gaps policy was sound. A 2014 High Court Judgment¹⁰ underlines the legitimacy of such policies, provided that they are focused rather than 'blanket ban policies' designed to protect all rural areas outside settlement boundaries. The Judgement states that: *"policies designed to protect specific areas or features, such as the gaps between settlements....could sensibly exist regardless of the distribution of housing and other development"*.

⁸ Available from <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/rte.aspx?id=275>

⁹ The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council, 6th April 2016, File Ref: PINS/H1705/429/4

¹⁰ High Court Judgment between South Northamptonshire Council (claimant) and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Barwood Land and Estates Ltd (defendants) – in particular paragraph 47: Ref [2014] EWHC 573 (Admin); 10 March 2014

Canterbury District Local Plan (adopted July 2017)

- A3.4 Policy OS6 sets out the basis on which development proposed in identified 'Green Gaps' will be assessed as follows:

Policy OS6 Green Gaps

Within the Green Gaps identified on the Proposals Map (see also Insets 1,3 and 5) development will be permitted where it does not:

- a. Significantly affect the open character of the Green Gap, or lead to coalescence between existing settlements;
- b. Result in new isolated and obtrusive development within the Green Gap.

Proposals for open sports and recreational uses will be permitted subject to there being no overriding conflict with other policies and the wider objectives of the Plan. Any related built development should satisfy criteria (a) and (b) above and be kept to a minimum necessary to supplement the open sports and recreation uses, and be sensitively located and of a high quality design.

- A3.5 Supporting text to the policy explains that the Green Gaps have been identified between built up areas that are gradually expanding, particularly along the road frontages. The green gap designations have been limited to 'pinch points' where settlements, often due to linear expansion, are at a particular risk of coalescence. These areas are considered critical to the objective of retaining separate identities of settlements, and many of them have come under development pressure in the past, including from proposals for isolated development, and may again in the future. This designation draws attention to specific areas where inappropriately located new development could lead to coalescence between settlements and is not intended to replace more general policies that seek to restrict development in the countryside.
- A3.6 At Examination, the Inspector did not oppose to the Green Gap policy but requested that a number of areas put forward for the Green Gap designation be removed on the grounds that they did not have the function of avoiding settlement coalescence.¹¹ For example, the Submission Local Plan proposed a new Green Gap between the main part of the city of Canterbury and the University of Kent. However, the Inspector considered that the role this land plays is more to do with safeguarding the historic setting of Canterbury rather than preventing settlement coalescence. In addition the land in question was protected by other policy relating to the historic setting of Canterbury.

Derbyshire Dales District Council Local Plan (adopted December 2017)

- A3.7 Policy PD10 in Derbyshire's Local Plan seeks to preserve the 'strategic gap' between Matlock and as follows:

POLICY PD10: Matlock to Darley Dale A6 Corridor

In order to safeguard the intrinsic character and quality of the open spaces through the Derwent Valley between Matlock and Darley Dale, and to prevent the further coalescence of the settlements of Matlock and Darley Dale, the District Council will resist development proposals which threaten the open spaces identified on the Policies Map unless:

- a) the development is required for the purposes of agriculture, forestry or outdoor recreation; and
- b) the development does not have an adverse impact upon the character of the area including views into and out from the Derwent Valley.

- A3.8 The Inspector's report¹² dated November 2013 judged the policy to be justified and appropriate based on site visits to the area, and the findings of the landscape sensitivity study, which indicated that significant areas of land between Matlock and Darley Dale were of high landscape sensitivity, including some parcels which were already developed.

¹¹ The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Canterbury City Council, 15 June 2017, File Ref: PINS/J2210/429/5

¹² The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Derbyshire Dales District Council, 13 November 2017, File Ref: PINS/P1045/429/7

- A3.9 However, the inspector proposed the policy be modified to exclude one particular area as it was considered to not play a role in settlement separation. The inspector also proposed an additional area to prevent coalescence between Upper Hackney and Darley Dale.

Fareham Borough Council Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted 2011) and Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies (adopted June 2015)

- A3.10 The settlement gap designations within Fareham are known as 'Strategic Gaps' and are provided for by Core Strategy Policy CS22 as follows.

Policy CS22 Development in Strategic Gaps

Land within a Strategic Gap will be treated as countryside. Development proposals will not be permitted either individually or cumulatively where it significantly affects the integrity of the gap and the physical and visual separation of settlements.

Strategic Gaps have been identified between Fareham/Stubbington and Western Wards/Whiteley (the Meon gap); and Stubbington/Lee on the Solent and Fareham/Gosport.

Their boundaries will be reviewed in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) The open nature/sense of separation between settlements cannot be retained by other policy designations;
- b) The land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence;
- c) In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.

- A3.11 The Core Strategy provides for the detailed boundaries of Strategic Gaps to be reviewed in the Development Sites and Policies Plan and to inform this, the Council commissioned consultants to review the Strategic and Local Gaps in 2012 in line with the Core Strategy criteria. This study informed an update of the Strategic Gap boundaries in the Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies (adopted 2015). Supporting text in the Local Plan Part 2 explains that the Strategic Gaps between towns and villages help define the separate identity of individual settlements, and prevent coalescence. They are important in maintaining the settlement pattern in the Borough, ensuring that individual settlements remain separate. The Strategic Gaps also help to provide opportunities for green infrastructure and green corridors providing opportunities for recreation and biodiversity. The Local Plan Part 2 also contains a policy on Affordable Housing Exceptions Sites and Housing Allocations (DSP7), which requires such development to minimise any adverse impact on the Strategic Gaps.
- A3.12 The Inspector's Report for the Local Plan Part 2,¹³ (dated May 2015) notes that concerns were expressed regarding the delineation of the Strategic Gap boundaries used in the Fareham Borough Gap Review. Particular concern was raised about the Gap between Fareham and Stubbington. This was because the review had not taken into account the route of the proposed Stubbington bypass and road improvements to Newgate Lane. The Council argued that there was no reason to conclude the proposals would justify altering the boundary gap in those locations. Having visited the site, the inspector agreed with the Council's judgement.
- A3.13 Fareham Borough Council is now in the process of reviewing its Local Plan, supported by an updated gap review. The Draft Local Plan policy on Strategic Gaps is as follows.
- A3.14 Policy SP6 states "In order to prevent the coalescence of urban areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, Strategic Gaps are identified between the following areas:
- 1) Fareham / Stubbington and the Western Wards (Meon Gap)
 - 2) Fareham / Bridgemary and Stubbington / Lee-on-the-Solent
- Development proposals will not be permitted where they cause severe adverse harm to the physical and visual separation of settlements, the settlement pattern and the character of settlements in accordance with the Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment."

¹³ The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Fareham Borough Council, 12th May 2015, File Ref: PINS/A1720/429/4

Policy SP6: Development in Strategic Gaps

In order to prevent the coalescence of urban areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, Strategic Gaps are identified between the following areas:

- 1) Fareham / Stubbington and the Western Wards (Meon Gap)
- 2) Fareham / Bridgemark and Stubbington / Lee-on-the-Solent

Development proposals will not be permitted where they cause severe adverse harm to the physical and visual separation of settlements, the settlement pattern and the character of settlements in accordance with the Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment.

Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted October 2015)

A3.15 Policy LP3 Spatial Strategy point 10 states:

"The character and function of the settlement gaps (as shown on the Policies Map) between Gosport/Fareham and Lee-on-the-Solent/Stubbington will be preserved"

A3.16 Supporting text states:

"A key strategic consideration is to retain a significant gap between Gosport/Fareham and Lee-on-the-Solent/Stubbington in order to protect the identity of each settlement and ensure proposals do not physically and visually diminish these open areas. This settlement gap is considered of sub regional importance and is identified in the South Hampshire Strategy. The local boundaries as defined on the Policies Map have been defined in cooperation with Fareham Borough Council to reflect the cross boundary extent of the gap. The Borough Council will work with partners to explore opportunities to enhance the multi-functional benefits of this area as part of the wider PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy initiative of the green grid (see Policy LP41)."

A3.17 The Inspector's report¹⁴ (dated September 2015) questioned whether a further Strategic Gap Review should be undertaken but concluded that this was not necessary for the following reasons.

- The gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent is largely occupied by the Alver Valley Country Park along with the Lee-on-Solent golf course and the Browndown SSSI. The creation of the country park is a key objective of the Council.
- A considerable part of this gap is in within Flood Zone 3.
- In the preparation of the Local Plan the Council undertook a review of the urban boundary area which included a review of the settlement gap and resulted in several changes to the gap.
- The Council co-operated with neighbouring Fareham Borough Council's review of its settlement gap boundaries to ensure a common approach.

North Warwickshire Borough Council Core Strategy (adopted September 2014) and North Warwickshire Local Plan Draft Submission (2017)

A3.18 Policy NW19 of the North Warwickshire Core Strategy seeks to maintain a 'meaningful gap' between the settlements of Polesworth and Dordon, which are important areas for growth in the plan.

NW19 Polesworth & Dordon

The Broad location of growth will be to the south and east of the settlements subject to there being no unacceptable environmental impacts from surface mining and that viable and practicable coal reserves are safeguarded. Any development to the west of Polesworth & Dordon must respect the separate identities of Polesworth and Dordon and Tamworth and maintain a meaningful gap between them.

¹⁴ The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Gosport Borough Council, File Ref: PINS/J1725/429/4

- A3.19 The Inspector's report¹⁵ (dated September 2014) recommended deleting the presumption against anything other than minor development in the gap between Polesworth and Dordon and Tamworth (but ensuring a meaningful gap is retained).
- A3.20 The reasons for this were due to lack evidence, such as landscape analysis, to support the presumption against anything other than minor development. Secondly, it was argued the policy ran contrary to the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal which considered development within part the gap in question would retain the 'character' of settlements.
- A3.21 A new Local Plan is currently undergoing Examination. The new Plan includes Policy LP5:

LP5 Meaningful Gap

- 1 The Meaningful Gap between Tamworth and Polesworth and Dordon is defined on the Proposals Map.
- 2 Any development to the west of Polesworth and Dordon must respect the separate identifies of Polesworth and Dordon and Tamworth and maintain a meaningful gap between them.
- 3 All new development within this gap should be small in scale and not intrude visually into the gap or physically reduce the size of the gap.

Appeal decisions

- A3.22 In addition to the Local Plan Examination examples above, a number of appeal cases relating to gap policies in England were reviewed to help inform the recommended approach in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan.
- A3.23 A summary of the key issues informing the Inspector's decision on these cases is provided in the table below.

Table 3-1. Recent appeal outcomes regarding gap policies, and key issues

Appeal	Decision	Key issues mentioned in the Inspector's Report
Appeal by M Scott Properties Ltd and Parker Farms (Bassingbourn) Ltd against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council. ¹⁶	Allowed – outline planning permission granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 year housing supply shortfall • Limited landscape character harm
Appeal by Bloor Homes Eastern against the decision of Tendring District Council. ¹⁷	Dismissed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to a five year housing land supply (calculated to be 4.84 years) • Negative impact on landscape character • Detract from separate communities • Contrary to local policy on green gaps
Appeal by Grainger PLC against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council. ¹⁸	Dismissed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 year housing supply shortfall, but Council taking proactive approach to development e.g. Didcot Garden Town • In setting of AONB • Negative impact on landscape character

¹⁵ The Planning Inspectorate, Report to North Warwickshire Borough Council, 24th December 2015, File Ref: PINS/R3705/429/4

¹⁶ Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/16/3164657: To the west of the Cemetery, Land North of The Causeway, Bassingbourn Cambridgeshire

¹⁷ Appeal C Ref: APP/P1560/W/16/3156452: Land north of Rush Green Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex CO16 7BQ

¹⁸ Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/16/3153639: Land east of New Road, East Hagbourne

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gap preserves settlement separation
Appeal by Hicks Developments Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council. ¹⁹	Allowed – planning permission granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 year housing supply shortfall Moderate harm to landscape character Other features (substantial railway embankment) provide settlement separation other than gap Other open land helped to maintain separation
Appeal by Tony Morris & Sons against the decision of Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council ²⁰	Allowed – planning permission granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 year housing supply shortfall Other features (trees and vegetation providing soft edge) help maintain settlement separation

¹⁹ Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/15/3130829: Land West of Park Lane, Charvil, Reading RG10 9TS.

²⁰ Appeal Ref: APP/K2420/A/11/2167650: Land at St Mary's Court, Barwell, Leicestershire LE9 8DF

Appendix 4

Glossary

Term	Definition
Biodiversity	The variety of plant and animal species living in their natural environment.
Coalescence	The joining or merging of elements to form one mass or whole.
Gap	A space or break between two objects (in this case between settlements)
Gap policy area	Area in which impact of development on settlement separation should be a consideration.
Identity	The qualities of a settlement that makes it different from others.
Inter-visibility	The ability to see in a direct line of sight from one settlement to another.
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 elements	Individual components which make up the landscape. Examples include trees, hedges and woodlands.
Landscape features	Particularly prominent or eye catching landscape elements.
Priority habitats	Priority habitats cover a wide range of semi-natural habitat types, identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).
Rural (character)	Relating to, or characteristic of, the countryside rather than the town.
Separation	A situation in which two or more things are separated. In the context of this study the 'things' are the settlements.
Topography	The physical appearance of the natural features of an area of land, especially the shape of its surface.
Undeveloped	An area of land that does not have built development on it.
Visually prominent	Eye catching or very noticeable.