



Surrey Heath Local Plan: Preferred Options (2019 – 2038)

Chobham Village Green Belt Boundaries Study



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Over 44% of land within Surrey Heath is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt. The boundaries of the Green Belt within Surrey Heath were first established through the Surrey Heath Local Plan 1987. When the Borough's Green Belt boundaries were first identified, extant Policy at the time enabled the Borough to make choices in respect of whether to 'wash' the Green Belt designation over villages within the general extent of the Green Belt, or exclude them. The choice had ramifications for the type and amount of development that would subsequently be permissible within them.
- 1.2. Whilst settlements at Windlesham (including Snows Ride), Bisley and West End were excluded from the Green Belt, the settlement of Chobham was washed over and a settlement boundary defined. A number of much smaller settlements, such as Castle Grove, Mimbridge and Brickhill, were washed over by Green Belt with no identified boundaries.
- 1.3. The Green Belt boundaries have not been reviewed since 1987 and in that time, national policy in respect of Green Belts has changed. In view of this, as part of the evidence to support the emerging Local Plan, the Council has been undertaking a portfolio of work to enable the Council to develop a robust understanding of how the Green Belt within Surrey Heath is currently functioning against up-to-date policy. To date this has included the following:
 - a) The Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017. This document undertakes a strategic review of the Green Belt and the countryside beyond the Green Belt within Surrey Heath, to establish how the non-urban areas of the Borough function against the Purposes of the Green Belt; and
 - b) The Surrey Heath Green Belt Review 2022. This document undertakes a more focused review of the Green Belt within Surrey Heath in order to develop a more robust understanding of how the Green Belt within the most sustainable parts of the Borough's Green Belt functions and to identify the risks to the wider Green Belt if land is released from the designation. This Study also discusses the potential harm arising from the release of Green Belt land.



- 1.4. Both studies have identified that there is land within the settlement of Chobham that does not function, or does not function well against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which provides up to date policy for the Green Belt. This is particularly pertinent as the NPPF has removed the choice-based approach to assessing settlements within the Green Belt, which had originally informed the Councils treatment of Green Belt settlements. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF indicates:

“if it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included within the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used...and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt”

- 1.5. Taking into account the findings of the 2017 and 2022 Green Belt studies and the notable change to Policy set out in Paragraph 1.4, it is considered that further, detailed consideration should be made in respect whether retention of the Green Belt designation across the settlement of Chobham remains appropriate.
- 1.6. In view of this, this Study assesses in detail the extent to which land within and surrounding the washed over Green Belt settlement area of Chobham continues to meet the requirements of Paragraph 144 of the NPPF.
- 1.7. The Study identifies that the general extent of the settlement of Chobham does not exhibit an open character and does not make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. As a result, the Study recommends that in view of the guidance set out in Paragraph 144, the settlement should be excluded from the Green Belt.
- 1.8. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered through the plan-making process where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified (as set out in Paragraph 140 of the NPPF). Whether or not a settlement continues to meet the requirements of the NPPF is relevant to the consideration of exceptional circumstances warranting an alteration to Green Belt boundaries, but it is only part of the consideration. The scope of this Study is limited to the consideration of whether the settlement of Chobham continues to meet the requirements for washed over villages as set out within Paragraph 144 of the NPPF. Consideration of whether there are exceptional circumstances to warrant such a change through the emerging Local Plan will be made separately in the Councils Exceptional Circumstances Background Paper.



2. Policy Background

Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2): Green Belts

- 2.1. Prior to the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework, the national policy approach to villages within the Green Belt was set out within PPG2. PPG2 indicated:

“If it is proposed to allow no new building beyond the categories in the first three indents of paragraph 3.4, the village should be included within the Green Belt. The Green Belt notation should be carried across ("washed over") it.

If infilling only is proposed, the village should either be "washed over" and listed in the development plan or should be inset (that is, excluded from the Green Belt). The local plan should include policies to ensure that any infill does not have an adverse effect on the character of the village concerned. If the village is washed over, the local plan may need to define infill boundaries to avoid dispute over whether particular sites are covered by infill policies.

If limited development (more than infilling) or limited expansion is proposed, the village should be inset. Development control policies for such settlements should be included in the local plan”

- 2.2. PPG2, whilst amended in 1995 and 2001, provided a largely unaltered Policy framework for Green Belts for the following 23 years.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.3. In March 2012, PPG2 was replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and an updated version of the NPPF (adopted in June 2021) sets out the current policy framework for Green Belts. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF sets out a revised approach to dealing with villages within the Green Belt, indicating:

“if it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included within the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used...and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt”

- 2.4. As such, whether a village should be included or excluded from the Green Belt now rests on the contribution that the open character of a village has on the openness of the Green Belt, rather than defining a village in the Green Belt in terms of the type and scale of development the Local Authority desire to permit within it.



- 2.5. Paragraph 137 of the NPPF states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The NPPF stipulates at Paragraph 140 that, “*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans*”.
- 2.6. When defining Green Belt boundaries, Paragraph 143 of the NPPF indicates that plans should:
 - a) ensure consistency with the development plan’s strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
 - b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
 - c) where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
 - d) make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;
 - e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and
 - f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

- 2.7. Whilst Planning Practice Guidance (‘PPG’) does not provide any further guidance on the assessment of Green Belt villages, it does provide an additional layer of clarification and guidance to the NPPF in respect of the definition of openness. Paragraph 001 on Green Belt states: “...openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume...”
[Reference ID: 64-001-20190722, published 22 July 2019]



3. The Green Belt within Surrey Heath

Background

- 3.1. The Green Belt in Surrey Heath forms part of the wider area of the Metropolitan Green Belt surrounding London and comprises 44% of land within Surrey Heath. The precise boundaries of the Metropolitan Green Belt within Surrey Heath were set down within the Surrey Heath Local Plan 1987. At that time, having regard to relevant national planning policy set out within PPG2 a decision was taken to inset Windlesham (including Snows Ride), Bisley and West End within the Green Belt. This enabled those settlements to accommodate limited development (more than infill). A decision was taken to wash the Green Belt designation over the newly defined settlement area of Chobham; this decision was attributed in part to the desire to maintain the integrity of the historic settlement. In defining the settlement of Chobham in this way, development opportunities were limited to infill only. Much smaller settlements at Mimbridge, Castle Grove and Brickhill were washed over with the Green Belt designation and their extent as settlements went undefined; in these locations, development was limited to agriculture and forestry, essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and the limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings.
- 3.2. Since 1987, Surrey Heath has developed and adopted three successive plans for the Borough, all of which have maintained the extent of the Green Belt set down within the Local Plan 1987.

Surrey Heath Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017 and Surrey Heath Green Belt Review 2022

- 3.3. In 2017 to inform the development of the emerging Local Plan, Surrey Heath Borough Council undertook a Green Belt and Countryside Study. This examined how effectively land within the Green Belt (and the countryside) within Surrey Heath functions against the 5 purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 3.4. The Green Belt and Countryside Study identified that whilst the majority of the Green Belt within Surrey Heath meets the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in Paragraph 144 of the NPPF, there are some areas that do not function, or do not function well against the NPPF Purposes. Much of the land considered to function poorly in this respect lies within the settlement area of Chobham.



- 3.5. The findings of the Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017 were confirmed by the Green Belt Review 2022 which undertook a finer grained assessment of land within Surrey Heath. The Green Belt Review reconfirmed that land within the existing settlement area of Chobham did not function against the Purposes of the Green Belt and removal of land within the settlement area of Chobham would generally result in low harm to the wider Green Belt in the event that it were released from the Green Belt.

How does the current Study relate to the existing Studies?

- 3.6. It could be argued that the existing Studies (both of which give reasonably detailed consideration to land within Chobham) are sufficient in themselves to draw to an informed conclusion as to whether the settlement meets the criteria for washed over villages as set out in the NPPF, however on balance, it is not considered that this would be appropriate for the following reasons:
- a) Whilst the existing Studies do consider openness, they do not give explicit consideration to Paragraph 144 of the NPPF;
 - b) In the event that it is considered that Chobham does not meet the criteria for washed over villages within the Green Belt, the existing Studies are not positioned to set out to define proposed alternative Green Belt boundaries.
- 3.7. As such the current Study is considered both necessary and appropriate to address these shortfalls. Notwithstanding this, in undertaking the current Study, regard will be had to assessments undertaken through both the 2017 and the 2022 Studies as relevant.



4. Best Practice Review

Introduction

- 4.1. An appropriate methodology is required to carry out a thorough, robust and consistent study. It is recognised that in the absence of any national level guidance in respect of how to assess the function of villages against Paragraph 144 of the NPPF, it falls to the Council to develop a bespoke methodology. To inform the development of the methodology, the Council initially undertook a best practice review of other comparable studies to reflect on what can be learnt from others' experiences.
- 4.2. With the aim of establishing a robust and transparent methodology for the assessment, the following comparative studies have been examined:
 - a) Runnymede Council Green Belt Village Review Stage 1 and 2 Update (2018);
 - b) Guildford Council Green Belt and Countryside Study (Volume IV) (2014); and,
 - c) Vale of White Horse Council Green Belt Review (2014).
- 4.3. All of these studies have been through Examination and therefore represent robust examples which will provide a sound basis to develop the methodology for this study.

Findings of Best Practice Review

- 4.4. It is important to recognise that each review is different, having been devised in response to a specific brief and tailored to each authorities circumstances; in spite of differences however, common themes in respect of undertaking an assessment of Green Belt settlements were evident.
- 4.5. All studies sought to employ a staged process to assess settlements, consisting of some, or all, of the following stages:
 - a) Identify settlements to be assessed;
 - b) Identify development limits of the settlement;
 - c) Assessment of open character;
 - d) Assessment of openness;
 - e) Decision on in-setting or washing over of the settlement; and
 - f) Review development limits/boundaries where settlement is to be inset.
- 4.6. In respect of identifying settlements for the purposes of study, most of the studies determined the settlements to be assessed based on an established settlement hierarchy set out within adopted planning policy. Where such a hierarchy did not exist or was vague, definitions of a 'village' were identified using established sources.



4.7. Open character was largely assessed based on factors relating to the built form and open space within the settlement, these included:

- a) Density;
- b) Settlement pattern;
- c) Types of dwelling/property;
- d) Distribution of properties;
- e) Plot size;
- f) Building heights;
- g) Enclosures or barriers;
- h) Scale and Form;
- i) Extent of open space;
- j) Vegetation; and,
- k) Topography.

4.8. There was some overlap between the studies on the assessment of open character and openness, with similar criteria applied to both assessments. Where the assessment of openness was different, it was emphasised that openness focused on the physical and/or perceptual connection between the openness of the village and the openness of the Green Belt. The following criteria were generally considered:

- a) The continuation of open areas within the village with the surrounding open land beyond the village;
- b) The relationship between the Green Belt and/or open space and built form;
- c) The boundaries of the village and whether these were indistinguishable; and
- d) Views into and out of the village and their restriction by natural or man-made features.

4.9. Assessments of both open character and 'openness' in Green Belt terms were generally qualitative and often involved a variant of the High, Medium and Low ranking system based on locally set definitions of these according to the relevant criteria.

4.10. The main area of divergence in the Studies examined related to drawing to conclusions in respect of whether the village should be washed over or inset. Notwithstanding this however, all studies stated that professional judgement should be applied. Runnymede took a qualitative approach, indicating:

"If the majority of the village is considered to have a high degree of open character and its impact on the openness of the Green Belt is high then the village should be 'washed over'. If the majority of the village exhibits a low open character with a low impact on the openness of the surrounding Green Belt, the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.



However there will be occasions which are less clear cut, for instance, a village is open in character but does not make a contribution to the openness of the Green Belt or is not open in character but does make a contribution. There will also be occasions where villages show a degree of both open/closed characteristics and a degree of contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, but not uniformly across the whole village area. In these instances it will be necessary to form a view as to whether the village should be 'washed over' or excluded, accepting that some areas may still exhibit a much higher or lower degree of open character or contribution to openness." (Paragraph 3.24-3.26)

- 4.11. In contrast, Guildford Council utilised a scoring mechanism to draw to conclusions on whether a village should be washed over or inset, by applying a '+' or '-' to three criteria, as follows:

"Does the majority of the village exhibit an open character?

Do open areas within the village appear continuous with surrounding open land beyond the village – from within and/or outside of the village?

Does the majority of the village exhibit incomplete, indistinguishable boundaries that would not permit the provision of new Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the requirements of NPPF paragraph 85 (last point)?"

- 4.12. Villages that scored 2 or pluses or more were classed as making an important contribution to the Green Belt and insetting was not considered appropriate. Villages that scored 2 or more minuses were classed as making no important contribution to the Green Belt and should be inset. Planning judgement was used to draw to a conclusion on the insetting of settlements which exhibited a combination of both pluses and minuses.
- 4.13. Another point of variation was the definition of revised boundaries. In most cases, boundaries were defined using durable, visible and permanent features in line with guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. Runnymede used an existing settlement boundary based on a former Local Plan policy, but sought to adjust the boundary to take account of discrepancies in OS base mapping or where a more defensible boundary could be utilised.



5. Surrey Heath Methodology

Introduction

5.1. In the absence of an established methodology for undertaking a review of washed over Green Belt settlements under Paragraph 144 of the NPPF, Surrey Heath has developed a bespoke methodology, taking account of national policy and guidance and the approaches employed by other authorities which have been deemed sound at examination in public. The following section discusses the methodology used, which comprises four Stages:

- Stage 1: Subdivision of the study area;
- Stage 2: Establishing whether the settlement has an open character;
- Stage 3: Consideration of how areas contribute to the openness of the Green Belt; and,
- Stage 4: Identifying whether the settlement of Chobham meets the criteria set out in Paragraph 144 of the NPPF and suggesting revised boundaries (where appropriate).

5.2. Each of the Stages followed are set out below.

Stage 1: Identifying the Study Area

- 5.3. In the Studies considered through the Best Practice Review, settlements were usually assessed in the round. However, the settlement of Chobham is notably larger than the settlements assessed through those studies and as a result, it was recognised that there was likely to be some variation in degree of open character across the study area.
- 5.4. As a result, the study area, encompassing land within and immediately surrounding the settlement boundary of Chobham, was initially subdivided into 100m x100m grid squares prior to assessment (see Figure 1). The assessment area incorporated both land falling within the existing defined washed over settlement area of Chobham in addition to developed land connected to the settlement, for the purposes of robustness.
- 5.5. Assessing the degree of openness within each grid square enables a detailed assessment to be made in respect of openness at a fine grain and enables the Council to better understand any variations in the degree of open character and Green Belt openness across the study area.



Stage 2: Establishing the open character of the settlement

- 5.6. Paragraph 144 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consists of two distinct parts; the assessment of open character and the assessment of openness, in the context of the Green Belt. Stage 1 of the methodology focuses upon the degree to which the village can be considered as having an open character.
- 5.7. In considering the degree to which each part of the study area exhibits an open character, each square was assessed to establish the level of openness it exhibits. In doing so, regard was had to the following:
- a) The general pattern of development including density and plot size;
 - b) The scale and form of development including dwelling type;
 - c) Building height and massing; and,
 - d) Extent of open space and gaps between buildings.
- 5.8. The assessment was undertaken as a mapping exercise with each grid square colour coded according to whether it is considered to exhibit a low (red), moderate (amber), or high (green) degree of open character, as described in Table 1 below.
- 5.9. Despite the fine grain of the study, it was noted that in some circumstances, land within a grid square exhibited qualities across more than one criterion. In such cases, the grid square was colour-coded to reflect the function of the greatest area of the grid square.
- 5.10. In making the assessment under Stages 1 and 2, regard was had to the findings of the Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017 and the Green Belt Review 2022, in addition to the Surrey Heath Landscape Sensitivity Study and information gathered from site visits.

Table 1: Assessment criteria for open character

| Level of Openness | Description |
|-------------------|---|
| Low | The area is generally defined by built form with closely spaced two storey or higher flats, terraces or semi-detached/detached properties set in modest/small plots which are often in uniform patterns or blocks. Open areas are few or incidental with limited gaps in frontages restricting or partially restricting short views through. Any longer views through gaps are obscured or partially obscured predominantly by built development. |
| Moderate | Area generally has a built character with clusters of detached/semidetached single/two storey dwellings set in |



| Level of Openness | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| | modest plots. Modest gaps in frontages with largely unrestricted short views through. Longer views partially obscured by built development or obscured/partially obscured by vegetation. Moderate gaps between buildings and open spaces may be present. |
| High | Buildings are dispersed and are predominantly detached single/two storey set in large plots. Extensive gaps between development with short views predominantly unrestricted and long views unobscured or partially obscured by vegetation. |

Stage 3: Consideration of the contribution land makes to the openness of the Green Belt

- 5.11. Given that Paragraph 144 specifically refers to ‘openness’, it is necessary to define openness for the purposes of this study. In the case of *Turner v SSCLG EWHC 2728*, the principle was established that openness has both a spatial and a visual dimension. More recently, the Supreme Court in the case of *Samuel Smith Old Brewery* confirmed that it is not an implicit requirement to consider the visual effects on Green Belt openness and it is up to the decision maker as a matter of planning judgement.
- 5.12. Openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects. Whilst not explicitly defined, it is understood that spatial openness relates to the level of built form and visual openness relates to the perception of openness, for example, the impact topography, long views and vegetation have on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 5.13. This aspect of the methodology focuses upon the relationship between each area and the wider Green Belt. In considering the degree to which each part of the study area contributes to the openness of the Green Belt, regard was had to the following:
- a) Views into and out of the village and whether views in/out are restricted and/or obscured and if so, whether by natural, man-made or topographical features.
 - b) The relationship between open or private amenity areas on the periphery of the village and the surrounding Green Belt.
 - c) The definition of the boundary between the village and open countryside.



- 5.14. As with Stage 2, the assessment was undertaken as a mapping exercise with each grid square colour coded according to whether it is considered to make a low (red), medium (amber), or high (green) contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, as described in Table 2 below. Land within a grid square which exhibited qualities across more than one criterion was colour-coded to reflect the function of the greatest area of the grid square.
- 5.15. In making the assessment under Stage 2, regard was had to the findings of the Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017 and the Green Belt Review 2022, in addition to the Surrey Heath Landscape Sensitivity Study and information gathered from site visits.

Table 2: Assessment criteria for Green Belt openness

| Relationship with Green Belt | Description |
|------------------------------|---|
| Low | Views into and out of the village are largely restricted or partially restricted by built development or topography with any views through obscured predominantly by built development. There is no continuance of open areas into the surrounding Green Belt. Land clearly associates with the built up area. |
| Moderate | Views into and out of the village are partially restricted by built development or topography. Views through the village are partially obscured by built development. Few open areas continue into surrounding area. Where relating to the edge of the settlement, parts of the village boundary are clearly defined but other parts are unclear. |
| High | Views into and out of the village are largely unrestricted by built development or topography. Views through the village are unobscured by built development or only partially by vegetation. Open areas continue into the surrounding Green Belt. Where relating to the edge of the settlement, there is no clearly defined village boundary. |



Stage 4: Identifying whether the settlement of Chobham meets the criteria set out in Paragraph 144 of the NPPF and suggesting alternative boundaries (where appropriate)

- 5.16. At Stage 4, planning judgement was used to draw to a conclusion on whether Chobham still fulfilled the requirements of Paragraph 144, taking account the findings of 2 and 3.
- 5.17. In making such an assessment it can generally be expected that if a village or other settlement is largely found to lack an open character and has a relatively poor relationship with open Green Belt land, the settlement fails to meet the criteria set out in Paragraph 144 of the NPPF and should be excluded from the Green Belt, where exceptional circumstances to do so have been clearly justified. A settlement that is found to largely exhibit an open character and that makes a significant contribution toward the openness of the Green Belt should be expected to meet the criteria set out in Paragraph 144 and should remain within the Green Belt. Where there is a significant degree of variation in the open character and/or contribution to the openness of the wider Green Belt across a village or other settlement, it is necessary for planning judgement to be used to draw to a conclusion on whether to exclude the settlement from the Green Belt or keep the Green Belt designation across it. In cases where variation has been identified, it is also prudent to consider whether the whole of the village or settlement should be inset or whether some areas should remain washed over.
- 5.18. If it is found that Chobham (or parts thereof) does not meet the criteria for the washing over of a settlement set out in Paragraph 144 of the NPPF and the settlement is duly recommended for exclusion from the Green Belt, a new Green Belt boundary should be proposed taking into account guidance contained within the NPPF. If this step is deemed necessary, the following criteria will be taken into account in identifying a suggested revised Green Belt boundary:
- a) The excluded area will only include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open (for example land which is already developed, or disconnected from the wider Green Belt), with regard had to the findings of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 assessments.
 - b) The boundary is expected to be based on physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent wherever possible.
 - c) Any revised boundary should be durable and defensible now and beyond the Local Plan period.
 - d) A new settlement boundary will be identified that is coincidental with the Green Belt boundary.



- 5.19. In addition, because the focus of this work is upon whether the envelope of Chobham should or should not be excluded from the Green Belt and not whether the village should be extended, it is expected that for the purposes of this Study, boundaries should be tightly drawn around developed areas.
- 5.20. Any suggested boundaries will be identified using planning judgement, with regard had to the above criteria, which will be considered in the round. There will be occasions where some criteria are met but others are not or where criteria may be partially met. In these instances, professional judgement will be applied.

6. Findings of the Study

Introduction

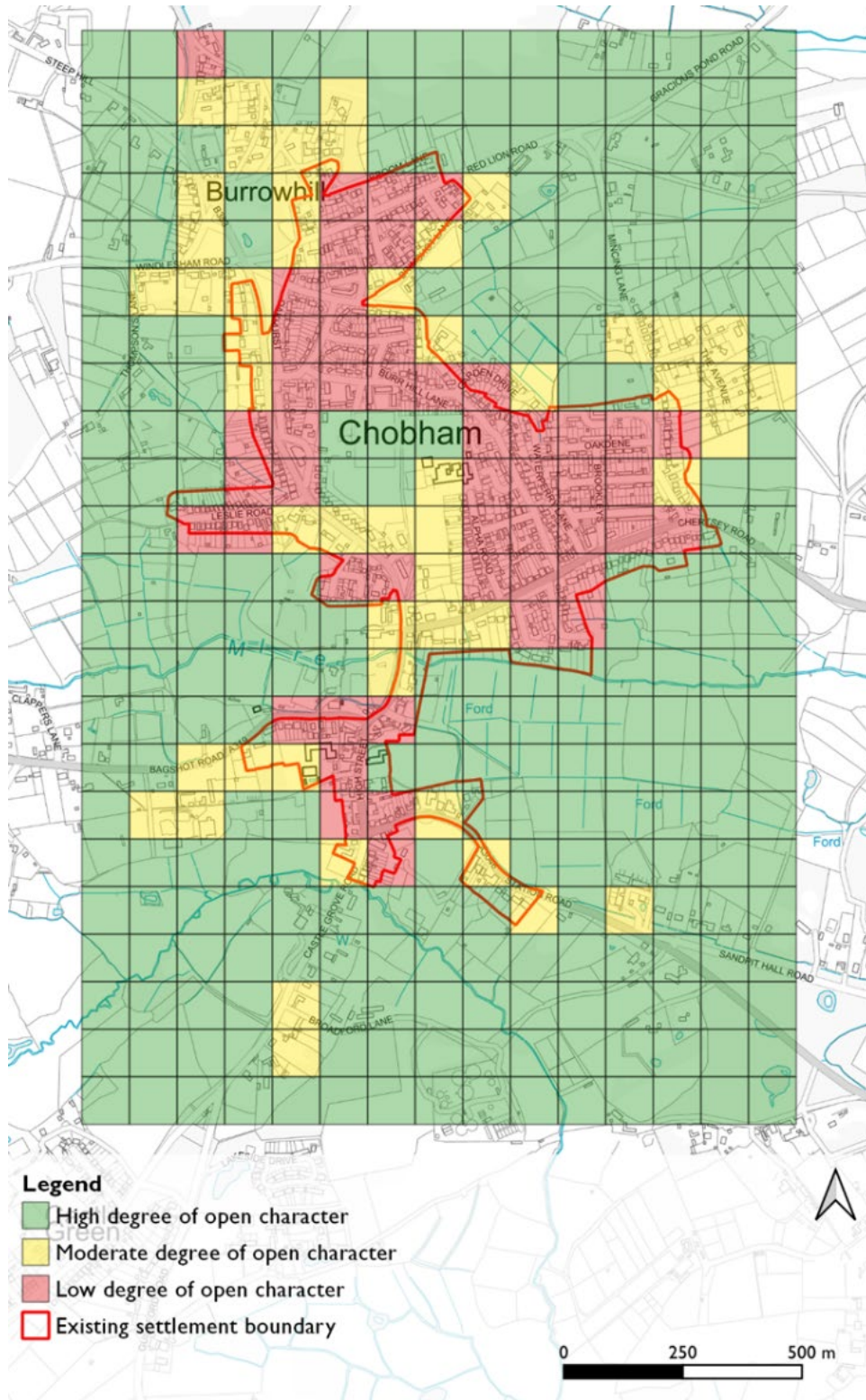
- 6.1. The following section sets out the findings of the Study, commencing with Stage 2, which gave consideration to the degree of open character exhibited by the settlement.

Result of Stage 2 assessment

- 6.2. The results of the Stage 2 assessment are set out in Figure 2 below. The findings generally indicate that much of the settlement does not possess an open character, with large areas of the settlement characterised by relatively dense two storey residential development.



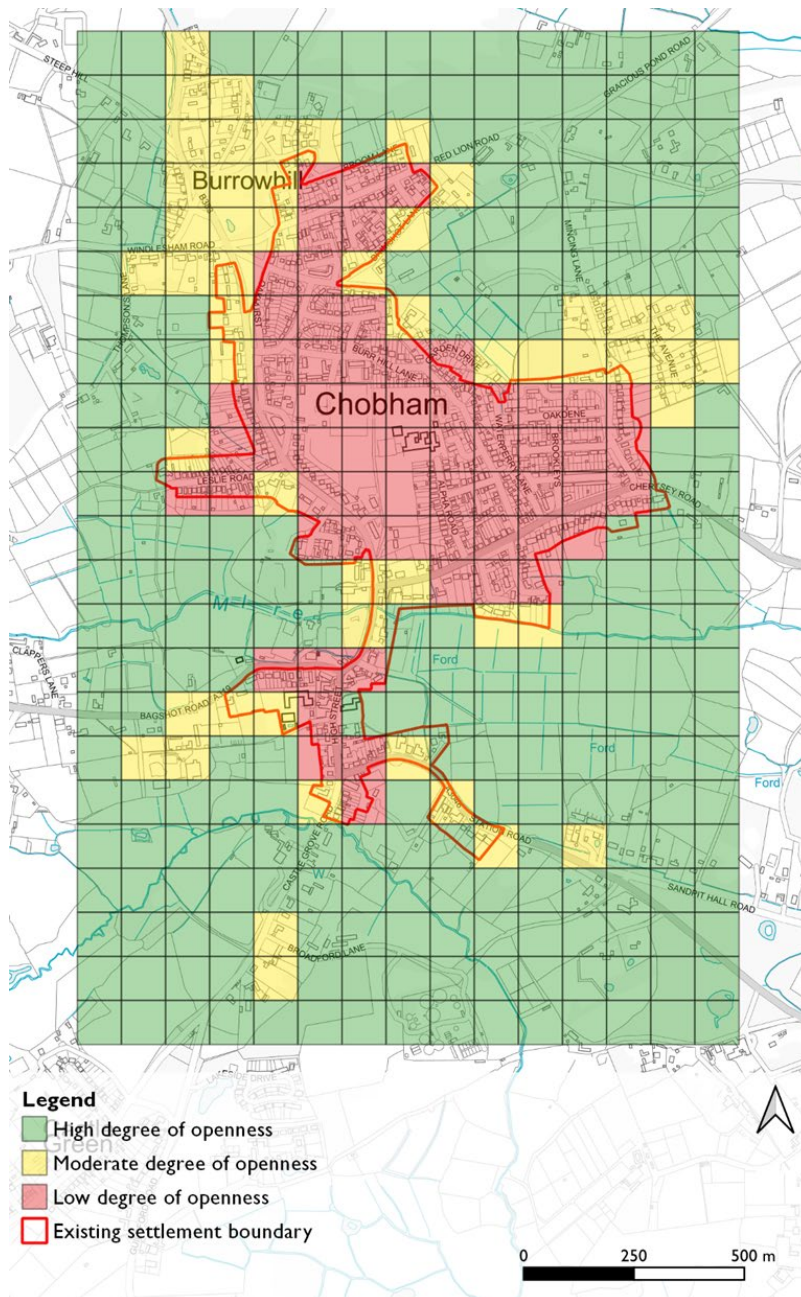
Figure 2: Results of Stage 2 assessment



Findings of the Stage 3 assessment

- 6.3. The findings of the Stage 3 assessment are set out in Figure 2 below. The findings generally indicate that much of the settlement does not contribute significantly to the openness of the Green Belt, with vast areas of the settlement disconnected from the wider Green Belt environment.

Figure 3: Findings of the Stage 3 assessment



Results of the Stage 4 Assessment

- 6.4. At Stage 4, consideration was given to whether the settlement of Chobham was considered to meet the criteria set out within Paragraph 144 of the NPPF, namely that in order for the wash to be retained over the settlement, it should:
- a) Exhibit an open character; and,
 - b) Contribute significantly towards the openness of the Green Belt.
- 6.5. Taking into account the findings of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 assessments it is clear that the majority of the settlement of Chobham does not meet the criteria set out above. As a result, it is recommended that, subject to exceptional circumstances being identified to do so (which falls outside the scope of this Study), Chobham should be excluded from the Green Belt. Notwithstanding this, it was noted that some areas of the settlement and particularly to the north (around Burrow Hill), have a more open textured relationship with the surrounding Green Belt. It was noted that this should be taken into account in the drawing of a suggested revised Green Belt boundary.
- 6.6. Suggested revised boundaries are identified in Figure 4. In accordance with the criteria set out in Stage 4 of the assessment, the boundaries have generally been drawn tightly around the developed area and for the most part are coincidental with the existing settlement area boundary for Chobham.
- 6.7. In some areas, particularly around Leslie Road (to the west of Chobham), between the Bagshot Road and Chertsey Road junctions and to the rear of 46 – 54 Chertsey Road, boundaries have been adjusted to reflect robust physical features that are best suited to providing defensible Green Belt boundaries.
- 6.8. To the north east of Chobham at the Avenue, it has been suggested that land at The Avenue be excluded from the Green Belt and incorporated into the revised settlement boundary. This land was identified in the Green Belt and Countryside Study 2017 and the Green Belt Review 2022 as functioning weakly against the purposes of the Green Belt and relates more closely to the existing developed settlement area than the wider Green Belt.
- 6.9. To the north of Chobham, it has been suggested that land at Garden Drive is excluded from the Green Belt owing to its developed characteristics.



- 6.10. Consideration was given as to whether land at Burrowhill which currently falls outside of the settlement area should be excluded from the Green Belt and brought into the settlement area. On balance, it was considered that this area remains distinct from the wider settlement and exhibits a more open texture, with a closer relationship with the surrounding Green Belt. As a result, it is suggested that in this location, the Green Belt boundary be revised to follow the extent of the existing settlement boundary.
- 6.11. In some areas, it is suggested that boundaries are adjusted to exclude land that currently falls within the washed over Green Belt settlement. This means that these areas would fall within the general extent of the Green Belt. This includes land at Kingswood Farm, which lies to the western end of Leslie Road and land at Chobham Vicarage and Acworth House, to the south of Bagshot Road. In both cases it is considered that the areas have a strong relationship with the open countryside and are not in themselves so developed as to warrant inclusion in the settlement. Land at St Lawrence's Church is also suggested for inclusion within the general extent of the Green Belt.



Figure 4: Suggested revised Green Belt and settlement boundaries

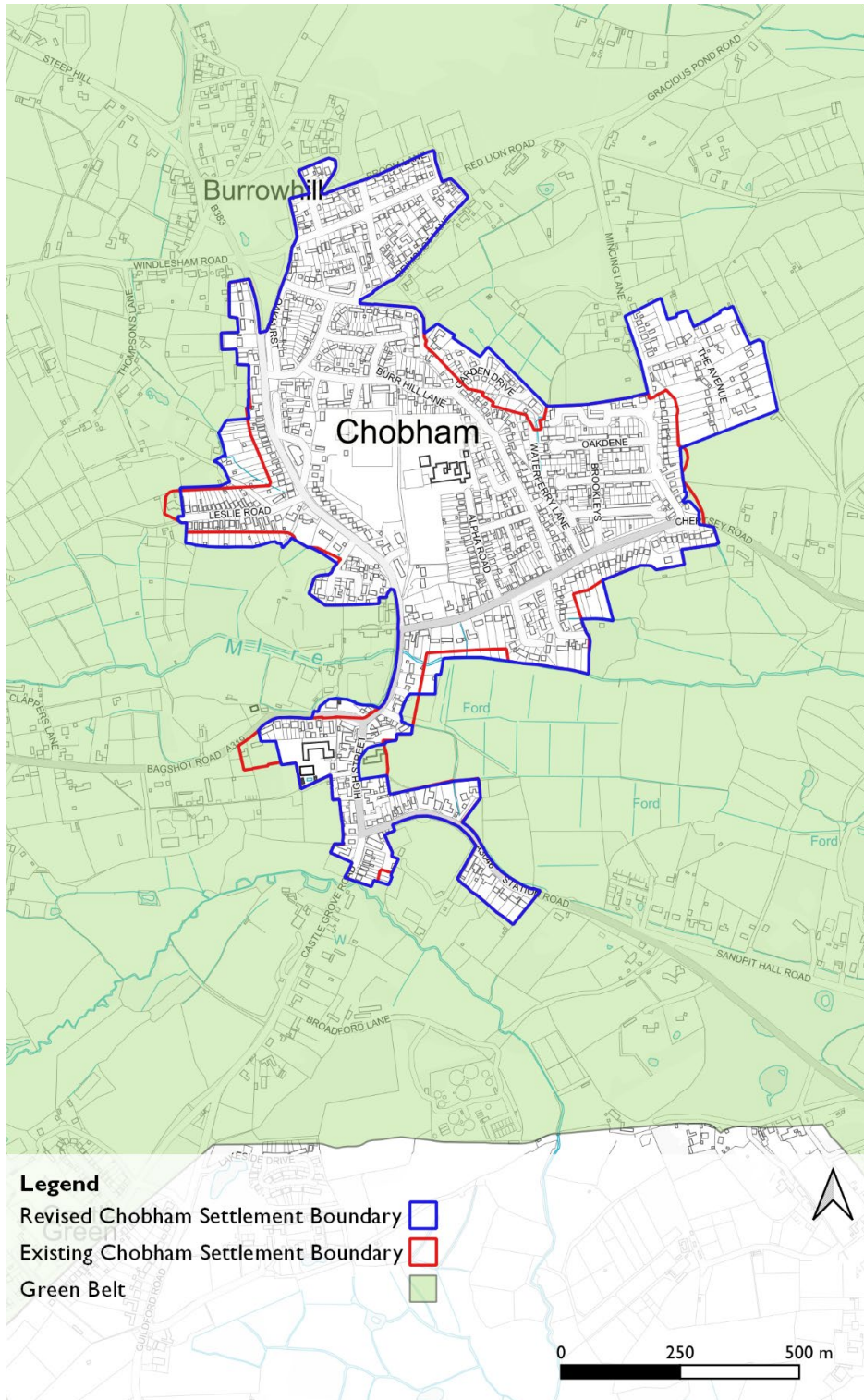


Figure 4: Suggested revisions to Green Belt and settlement boundaries around Chobham



7. Conclusion

- 7.1. Historically the settlement area of Chobham has been washed over by the Green Belt, as policy extant at the time that Green Belt boundaries were defined within Surrey Heath permitted.
- 7.2. Since this time, the national policy approach to addressing Green Belt settlements has changed significantly, requiring washed over Green Belt settlements to both exhibit an open character and contribute significantly to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.3. Chobham is the only settlement within Surrey Heath washed over by Green Belt and in light of the change to national policy, the extent of the wash over the settlement has warranted review.
- 7.4. Having examined the degree to which the currently washed over settlement area of Chobham meets the criteria for washed over Green Belt settlements, the Study concludes that much of the settlement does not exhibit an open character and does not contribute significantly to the openness of the Green Belt. As a result the Study concludes that the settlement should be excluded from the Green Belt and suggests revised boundaries accordingly.
- 7.5. Notwithstanding the above, it is recognised that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered through the plan-making process where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified (as set out in Paragraph 140 of the NPPF). Whether or not a settlement continues to meet the requirements of the NPPF is relevant to the consideration of exceptional circumstances warranting an alteration to Green Belt boundaries, but it is only part of the consideration. The scope of this Study is limited to the consideration of whether the settlement of Chobham continues to meet the requirements for washed over villages as set out within Paragraph 144 of the NPPF. Consideration of whether there are exceptional circumstances to warrant such a change through the emerging Local Plan will be made separately in the Council's Exceptional Circumstances Background Paper.

