



Gilston Area, East Hertfordshire  
Green Belt Strategy  
October 2016



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Preamble

- 1.1.1 Places for People is promoting strategic development in the Gilston Area in East Hertfordshire. This development would be capable of contributing to the housing and regeneration needs of both East Hertfordshire and Harlow, and is a sustainable solution of meeting the growth requirements of the neighbouring authorities.
- 1.1.2 There is a clear, identified need for a significant amount of new housing within East Hertfordshire whilst Harlow itself is in need of regeneration. This is reflected in emerging local planning policy set out in the East Hertfordshire Draft District Plan. The Pre Submission version of the document was published in November 2016 and identifies sites and areas to meet the housing needs forecast for the District to 2031. The document identifies a substantial area of land to the north of Harlow as a Site Allocation under the title 'Gilston Area'.
- 1.1.3 The current development proposals for the Gilston Area are distinct from those promoted prior to the review of the District Plan, in terms of both scale and approach. The Illustrative Masterplan for the Gilston Area is founded on the concept of a series of villages which respond positively to the landscape north of Harlow.
- 1.1.4 A Green Belt Strategy for the Gilston Area was prepared by Capita in 2014 and submitted to East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) pursuant to the Preferred Options stage of the District Plan. The 2014 Strategy promoted a specific rolled back Green Belt boundary in the Gilston Area to accommodate the development on land owned by Places for People (PfP).
- 1.1.5 At the same time separate representations were submitted to EHDC by an adjoining landowner, City and Provincial Properties (CPP) who are promoting an area of land immediately west of the PfP site. PfP are now jointly promoting development in the Gilston Area with CPP: Consequently the Illustrative Masterplan for the Gilston Area includes land to the west of the PfP site in the vicinity of Church Lane.

- 1.1.6 CPP's work has concluded that there are other boundaries in this area which could be used to define a new Green Belt boundary such as the historic hedgerow and edge of Lord's wood to the west of Church Lane. This revised boundary is supported by PfP and CPP.

## 1.2 Purpose of Document

- 1.2.1 In the context of the NPPF and the recognition by EHDC that some housing development will need to be accommodated in the Green Belt, this Green Belt Strategy evaluates the existing Green Belt in the Gilston Area with a view to identifying and justifying where new robust inner and outer Green Belt boundaries in the Gilston Area should be located. Boundaries that are identified in this area will be defined to ensure they are defensible and appropriate in the long term.

## 1.3 Structure and Content of Document

- 1.3.1 The initial part of this Strategy explains the methodology to be used for reviewing the Green Belt in the Gilston Area (section 2).
- 1.3.2 The Strategy then reviews the current Green Belt in the Gilston Area, by assessing how it performs against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in national planning policy (section 3).
- 1.3.3 Section 4 of the Strategy defines and justifies new inner and outer Green Belt boundaries in the Gilston Area, using national planning policy as criteria. The boundaries identified are similar to those defined in the 2014 Strategy but some minor changes have been made to reflect more logical boundaries in places.
- 1.3.4 Section 5 provides a summary of the findings and conclusions of this Strategy.



## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 There is currently no specific guidance on the methodology to be used for undertaking a review of Green Belt land.
- 2.1.2 A number of Local Planning Authorities throughout the country have undertaken reviews of Green Belt land within their areas, including EHDC. The particular approach adopted by each authority in reviewing their Green Belt has been determined by the specific purpose of the review being undertaken.
- 2.1.3 A common element of all of the reviews is the evaluation of land against the purposes of the Green Belt, as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 2.1.4 The purposes of the Green Belt are set out at Paragraph 80 of the NPPF. These are:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.1.5 Accordingly, in the absence of any specific guidance on reviewing Green Belts, this Strategy assesses the Green Belt in the Gilston Area primarily against the five purposes of the Green Belt as stated above.
- 2.1.6 The Strategy also considers the existing and proposed Green Belts in the Gilston Area in terms of them achieving the main aim of the policy, which is set out at Paragraph 79 of the NPPF:

*“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”*

### 2.2 Key terms

- 2.2.1 Several technical terms are referred to throughout this Strategy. The definitions of these terms are provided below.
- Inner boundary - The boundary of the Green Belt closest in proximity to the urban edge of Harlow.
  - Outer boundary - The outer boundary of the Green Belt where the transition occurs from Green Belt to non - Green Belt countryside.
  - Coalescence - The occurrence or perception of settlements merging.
  - Defensible boundary - This is a Green Belt boundary that is well defined using readily recognisable landscape features such as roads, streams, belts of trees or woodland edges.
  - Openness - The key characteristic of Green Belts, this refers to keeping the landscape within Green Belts open and free from inappropriate development.
  - Conservation Area - Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
  - Urban Sprawl - The uncontrolled or unplanned extension of urban areas.

### 2.3 Methodology – Key stages

- 2.3.1 This Strategy comprises two main parts. The first part reviews the current Green Belt in the Gilston Area which has been undertaken in the context of the five purposes of the Green Belt set out above, and has used these as a basis for assessment. The assessment was undertaken through a combination of desk top research of available documentation/ studies and site visits to appropriate locations within the area.
- 2.3.2 The second part of the Strategy is the definition of new Green Belt boundaries in the Gilston Area. In order that a comprehensive and complete assessment is made, and a robust long-term Green Belt defined, it is necessary to look at both the inner and outer boundaries of the Green Belt.

- 2.3.3 In the absence of any specific and detailed published guidance on reviewing and defining new Green Belt boundaries, the advice contained in paragraphs 82 to 86 of the NPPF is used as the basis of the methodology, and will further inform any assessment undertaken in testing potential new boundaries. Several steps are involved as set out below.

#### **Stage A - Mapping of constraints noted in the purposes of the Green Belt**

- 2.3.4 This stage of the process of identifying a new inner Green Belt boundary involves undertaking a mapping exercise to understand the context of the area, specifically in terms of the location and juxtaposition of other settlements and historic areas. It is imperative that any new Green Belt responds to, and protects where necessary, these elements within the area surrounding any proposed development, and ensures their long term protection in the context of NPPF.

#### **Stage B- Mapping of key landscape features within and outside the development site that can help to define boundaries.**

- 2.3.5 Identifying and mapping the major landscape elements both within and outside the site boundary enables the structure of the landscape to be more fully understood, and informs which features, if any, can contribute towards redefining a new inner (and outer) Green Belt boundary.

#### **Stage C - Investigate the redefinition of the remaining areas other landscape/infrastructure elements and features of the area and ability of this to function as boundaries.**

- 2.3.6 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF sets out the key principles for defining new Green Belt boundaries. These principles are intended to guide local planning authorities in reviewing their local plans but several of them are relevant to the objectives of this Strategy.

2.3.7 These principles include:

- not including land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
- ensuring that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
- defining boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent

2.3.8 The boundaries identified for the new Green Belt in the Gilston Area should respond to this guidance.

2.3.9 Criteria for the selection of revised boundaries should therefore prioritise ‘strong’ boundaries (i.e. expected to be maintained over the long term, very difficult to alter or destroy by physical means or by planning decisions) rather than weak boundaries (those that are visible but which may be relatively easily altered, destroyed or modified by physical means).

2.3.10 The NPPF does not contain any guidance on the width of new Green Belts, nor does it state which landscape features and elements would be appropriate to define new Green Belt boundaries (other than that noted in the para 85). In this context it is useful to consider the advice contained in previous national Green Belt policy (Planning Policy Guidance note 2: Green Belts). Whilst PPG2 has been superseded, paragraph 2.9 offered the following with regard to defining new Green Boundaries:

*“Wherever practicable a **Green Belt should be several miles wide**, so as to ensure an appreciable open zone all round the built-up area concerned. Boundaries should be clearly defined, using **readily recognisable features such as roads, streams, belts of trees or woodland edges** where possible. Well-defined long-term Green Belt boundaries help to ensure the future agricultural, recreational and amenity value of Green Belt land, whereas less secure boundaries would make it more difficult for farmers and other landowners to maintain and improve their land.”*

### 3 Existing Green Belt in the Gilston Area

#### 3.1 Current Extent

- 3.1.1 The existing Green Belt in the Gilston Area extends approximately 2km from its inner boundary, beyond the open countryside around Gilston and Eastwick towards the lanes and tracks between Hunsdon House and High Wych. The width of the Green Belt is relatively uniform, its outer boundary remaining approximately 2km from the River Stort except where it adjoins the western and eastern extents of Harlow.
- 3.1.2 The dominant land use within the Green Belt in the Gilston Area is agriculture, with fields being generally medium to large in scale. Large woodland blocks break up this landscape, for example Home Wood, Golden Grove and Sayes Coppice, whilst the landscape around Gilston House provides additional woodland cover and built form.
- 3.1.3 The southern portion of the Green Belt in this area sits within the River Stort floodplain and as such is undeveloped save for a number of small agricultural buildings and sheds. As with the area further to the north, the land use is predominantly agricultural, although livestock farming and rough grazing/ horse pasture is more prominent in this area.

#### 3.2 Green Belt compliance & success

- 3.2.1 This section provides an assessment of the current Green Belt in the Gilston Area in terms of the extent to which it meets the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF. These are considered in turn below.

##### 1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

- 3.2.2 There has been relatively little development within the Green Belt in the Gilston Area. This can be attributed to the Green Belt designation in this area although the River Stort and its floodplain has prevented the northward expansion of Harlow, irrespective of the Green Belt designation. However the Green Belt has undoubtedly been the key factor in checking urban growth to the north western edge of the town, in the vicinity of Harlow Business Park, Harlow Stadium and the A1169.

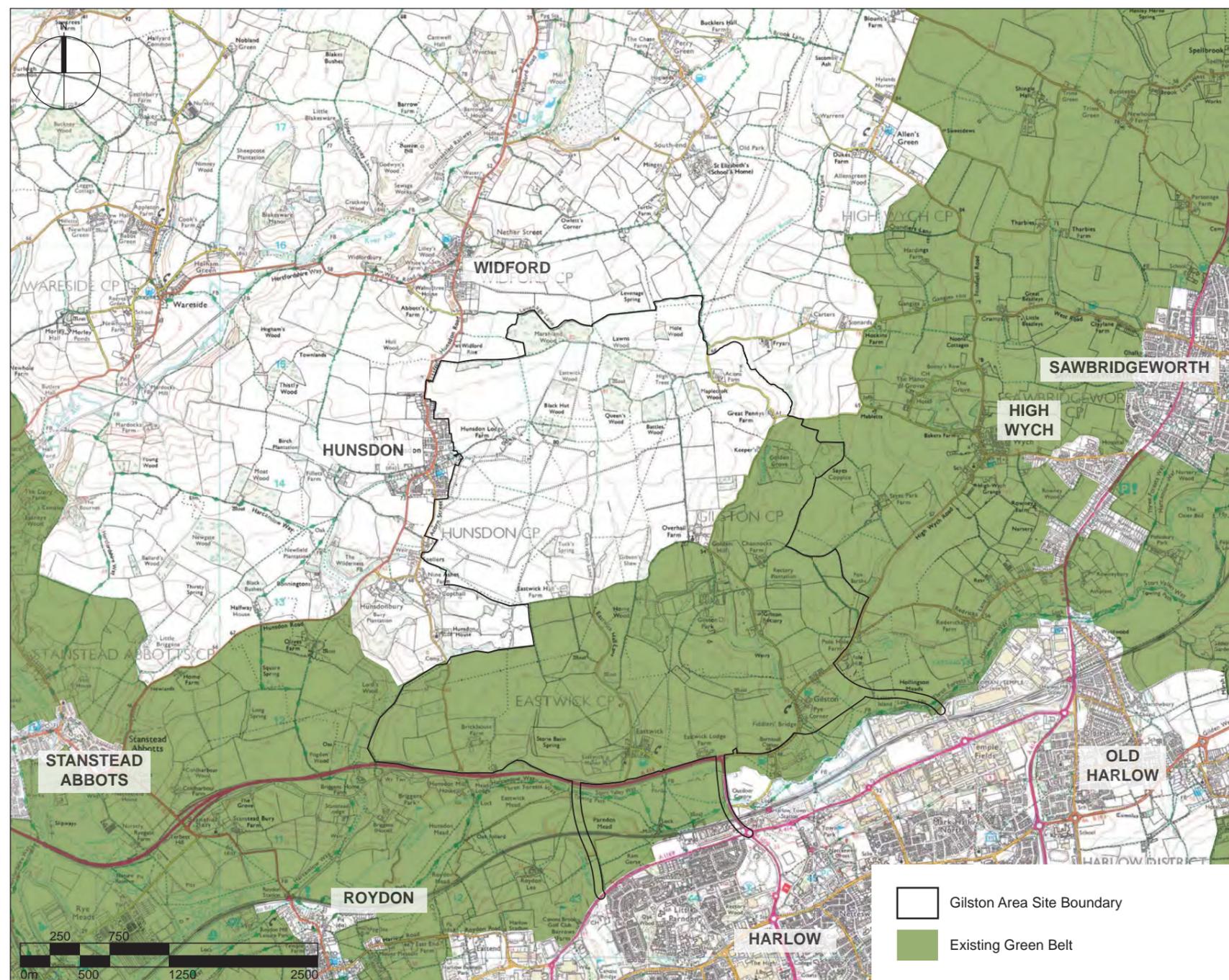


Figure 1: Existing Green Belt to the north of Harlow

## 2. To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another

3.2.3 Within the context of this Strategy, the only neighbouring town in the Gilston Area is Sawbridgeworth. The towns have not merged although some ribbon development has taken place to the south of Sawbridgeworth. As a result there is only a short distance between the southern edge of Sawbridgeworth and the northern edge of Harlow (see Figure 2).

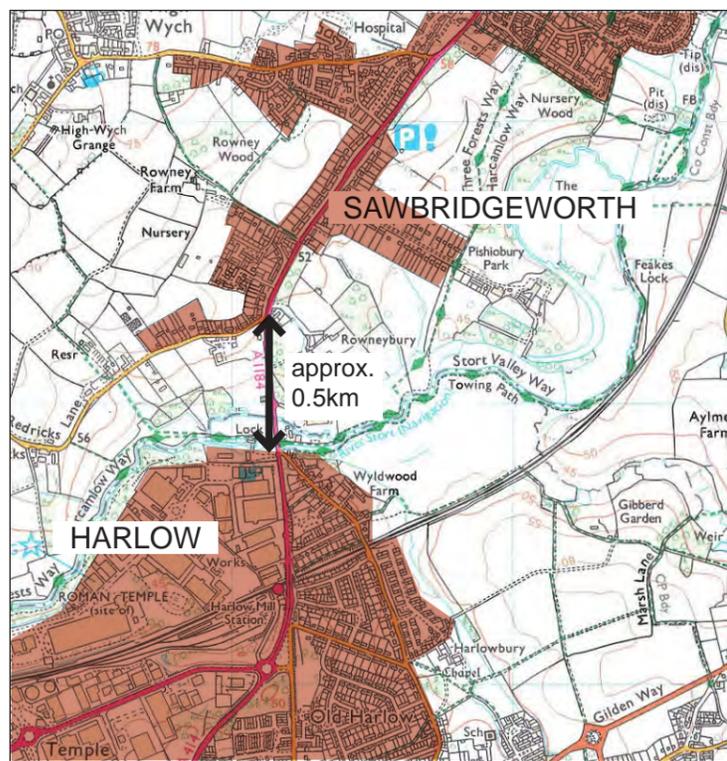


Figure 2: Separation between Harlow and Sawbridgeworth

3.2.4 This part of the Green Belt has not been successful in preventing Sawbridgeworth from expanding to the south and it is more the River Stort and its floodplain that is preventing the town merging with Harlow rather than the Green Belt.

3.2.5 There are no other towns within the Gilston Area. However it is appropriate to consider whether any other settlements in the area have merged since the Green Belt was designated.

3.2.6 To the north west of Harlow, the Green Belt has undoubtedly been instrumental in preventing Harlow from merging with the village of Roydon. Similarly some ribbon development may have occurred between Eastwick and Gilston were it not for the Green Belt designation.

3.2.7 Sawbridgeworth and High Wych are close (less than 250m apart) but each settlement can be perceived as distinctly separate from one another. If the Green Belt had not been established in this part of the area, further ribbon development may have occurred resulting in High Wych becoming subsumed within Sawbridgeworth.

3.2.8 In summary the Green Belt in the Gilston Area has to some extent played a role in preventing settlements from merging in the area. However the Green Belt has not been wholly successful in meeting this purpose in light of the southern expansion of Sawbridgeworth.

## 3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

3.2.9 The Gilston Area contains several areas of ecological and landscape value. The Green Belt designation has assisted in protecting these areas. However the countryside to the south of Sawbridgeworth has been eroded as result of the southern expansion of Sawbridgeworth.

3.2.10 It should also be noted that those sites of ecological and landscape value located in the Stort Valley are effectively afforded protection by virtue of them being located within the floodplain. The role of the Green Belt in this location is therefore of limited importance.

## 4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

3.2.11 Sawbridgeworth is the only town near the Gilston Area which could potentially be affected by any change to the Green Belt boundary in this area. The historic setting of this town has been eroded over time as a consequence of urban expansion, particularly to the south. Accordingly the Green Belt is not considered to be important in preserving the setting or character of Sawbridgeworth.

3.2.12 There are also several established villages in the Gilston Area, some of which contain Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. However this purpose of the Green Belt is concerned with preserving the setting and character of historic **towns** rather than individual historic assets. Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks etc. are therefore considered to be less significant than historic towns in the context of this purpose.

3.2.13 The villages of Eastwick and Gilston are historic settlements although neither contain a Conservation Area. The Green Belt assists in protecting both the immediate and wider setting of these villages by placing a strong constraint on development within and on the edge of the settlements and preventing the setting and character of the settlements from being eroded.

3.2.14 Hunsdon & Widford both contain Conservation Areas but are located some distance from Harlow in the rural area beyond the Green Belt. High Wych also contains a Conservation Area and sits within the Green Belt. The special character and appearance of its Conservation Area has been retained as has the immediate setting of the Conservation Area, but the wider setting has been eroded by ribbon development along High Wych Road to the east of the village.

3.2.15 Old Harlow is the original settlement of Harlow located to the north east of the post-war New Town development. Prior to the building of the New Town, Old Harlow was a small, rural village. It's setting has changed significantly over the last 50 years, but it remains distinct from Harlow New Town and has retained much of its original village character.

3.2.16 The village of Roydon only has a limited separation from Harlow. However the Green Belt has enabled it to remain in isolation and to retain its inherent character.

3.2.17 In summary the Green Belt in the Gilston Area has played a limited role in achieving this purpose. It has assisted in preserving the setting of Eastwick and Gilston although these are both small villages not towns. The Green Belt has not been particularly effective in maintaining the setting of Sawbridgeworth although the setting of the historic town would have been eroded prior to its designation.

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

- 3.2.18 The current Green Belt around Harlow was designated in the early 1970s. Whilst the Green Belt may have resulted in some development being directed towards urban sites (which might otherwise have occurred in rural areas) it is also likely to have been influential in limiting the regeneration of Harlow by preventing development to the north of the town. The regeneration of Harlow is a key economic policy objective which has been established for a number years but has not been realised to date.
- 3.2.19 In light of the above it is concluded that the Green Belt has not contributed to this purpose.

## **3.3 Summary**

- 3.3.1 The Green Belt in the Gilston Area has generally played a significant role in meeting the purposes set out in the NPPF. However it achieves some purposes more successfully than others.
- 3.3.2 In terms of preventing urban sprawl, the Green Belt has assisted in meeting this objective, though the River Stort and its floodplain has prevented the northward expansion of Harlow, irrespective of the Green Belt designation.
- 3.3.3 With regard to preventing coalescence the Green Belt has to some extent played a role in preventing settlements from merging in the area. However the Green Belt has not been wholly successful in meeting this purpose in light of the southern expansion of Sawbridgeworth.
- 3.3.4 The Green Belt designation has been influential in safeguarding the countryside in the Gilston Area, with the exception of the area south of Sawbridgeworth where there has been notable encroachment. It is also considered that the Stort Valley is effectively afforded protection from inappropriate development by virtue of it being located within the floodplain.

- 3.3.5 In terms of preserving the special character and setting of historic towns, the Green Belt has played a limited role in achieving this purpose. It has assisted in preserving the setting of Eastwick and Gilston although these are both small villages not towns. The Green Belt has not been particularly effective in maintaining the setting of Sawbridgeworth although the setting of the historic town would have been eroded prior to its designation.
- 3.3.6 With regard to assisting in urban regeneration the Green Belt is likely to have played a part in limiting rather than encouraging the regeneration of Harlow by preventing development to the north of the town. It is therefore not considered to have contributed to this purpose.



## 4 Revised Green Belt Boundaries in the Gilston Area

### 4.1 Overview

4.1.1 Having reviewed the existing Green Belt in the Gilston Area and assuming that the Green Belt will be changed in this area, this part of the Strategy identifies new robust inner and outer boundaries, based on the guidance set out in the NPPF.

### 4.2 Inner Green Belt boundary

#### A - Key constraints mapping

4.2.1 The constraints identified in the area surrounding the site, and an explanation of their importance relative to a redefined inner boundary, are identified and explained below.

##### *Sawbridgeworth*

4.2.2 This town, which has a population of around 7,800, sits immediately to the north-east of Harlow, and contains a Conservation Area within its centre. Preventing the coalescence of Sawbridgeworth with the Gilston Area is a key objective in this area.

4.2.3 A gap of over 3km exists between the western edge of Sawbridgeworth and the closest part of the site boundary (adjacent to High Wych Road). Given this distance and the presence of intervening built form and vegetation, Sawbridgeworth does not influence the location of the proposed inner Green Belt boundary.

##### *High Wych*

4.2.4 This village is situated about 1.5km east of the site. Avoiding coalescence with this village, and protecting its Conservation Area status, has been a key determinant in redefining the boundary in this part of the area.

4.2.5 Important considerations include the proximity of High Wych to the site and the visual context of the village, which has expansive views available from its western fringe. Whilst visibility and intervisibility are not specifically referred to in the NPPF as being determinants of defining Green Belt land, there is little doubt that visibility of the Gilston Area from within a Conservation Area would affect its setting, and therefore impact upon it.

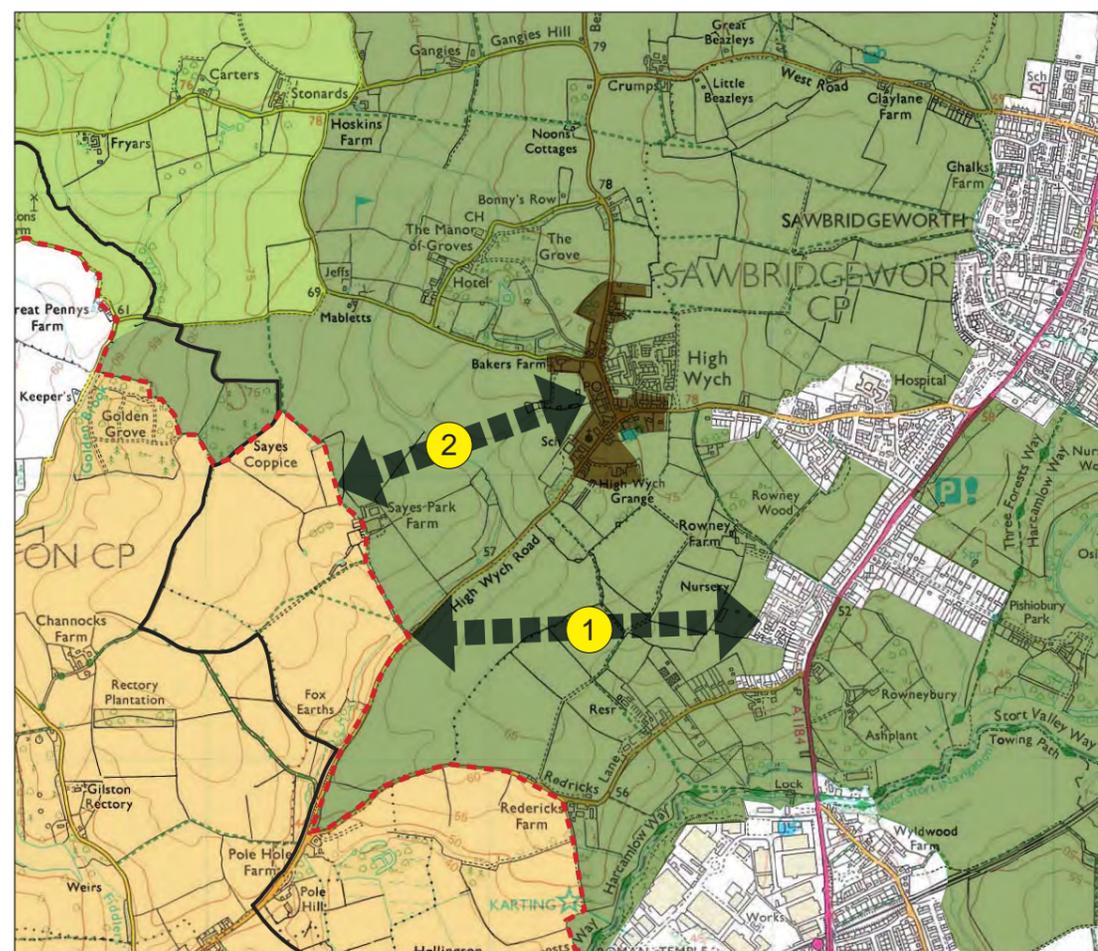


Figure 3: Proposed inner Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of Sawbridgeworth and High Wych



Figure 4: View from western edge of High Wych looking towards Gilston area.

- 4.2.6 The views from the western part of High Wych take in a horizon including Sayes Coppice and Golden Grove (see Figure 4), which forms the approximate extent of visibility. Accordingly views should remain open to fulfil NPPF requirements and thus protect the historic fabric of High Wych.
- 4.2.7 As a result, the proposed inner Green Belt boundary is aligned along the western edge of Sayes Coppice, and crosses in a south-easterly direction towards High Wych road, approximately 1km from the settlement boundary.

### Old Harlow

- 4.2.8 Old Harlow is located in close proximity to Sawbridgeworth. The settlement is separated from the proposed inner Green Belt boundary by the River Stort and the industrial units at Templefields and Harlow Mill. Coalescence is therefore not an issue when considering the new boundary.

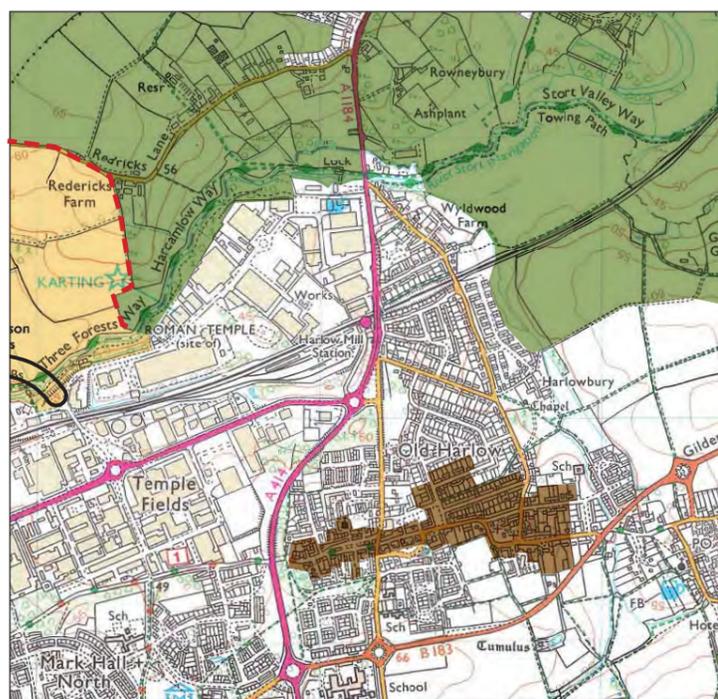


Figure 5: Old Harlow in relation to Proposed Green Belt boundary

- 4.2.9 The setting of Old Harlow Conservation Area is also not an issue due to the appreciable distance between the Conservation Area and the site and the intervening industrial development. The physical and perceptible separation is such that it does not readily impact upon the redefinition of the inner Green Belt boundary in this area.

### Hunsdon

- 4.2.10 Hunsdon is a historic village which adjoins the western boundary of the site. No development is proposed between Hunsdon and the line of pylons which traverse the site (approximately 1.5km to the east of the village) and it is considered that this area, which largely comprises of Hunsdon Airfield, is capable of being afforded protection via white land policy designations.

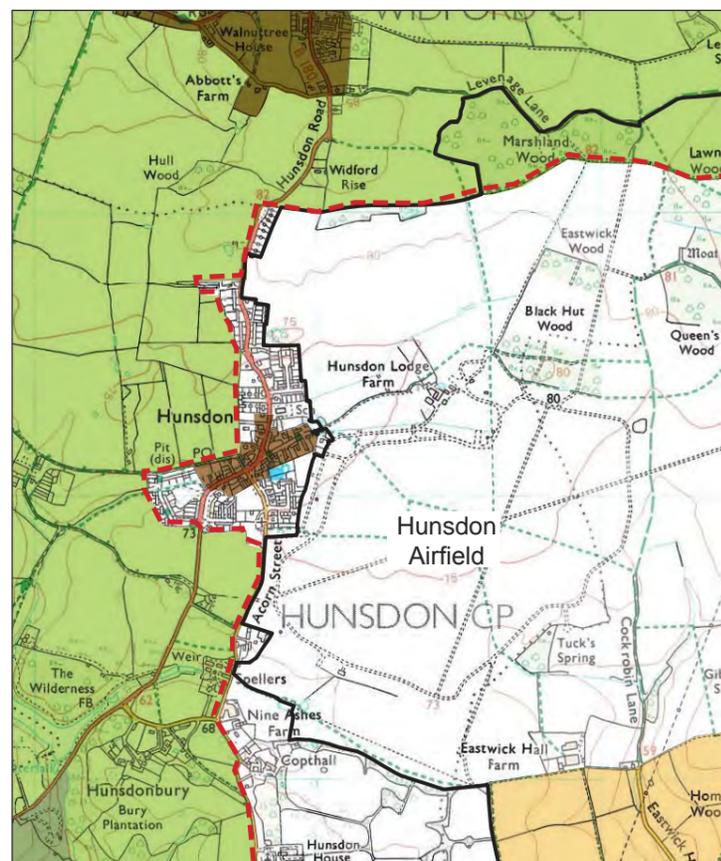


Figure 6: Proposed Green Belt boundary in the vicinity of Hunsdon

- 4.2.11 Acorn Street, and the edge of Hunsdon itself are considered to be the strongest elements for defining the inner Green boundary in this part of the area. Hunsdon does not have a particularly open character as such and therefore is not considered to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. Accordingly the proposed boundary adjoins the western periphery of Hunsdon thereby excluding the village from the Green Belt in its entirety.
- 4.2.12 The central part of Hunsdon is statutorily protected as a Conservation Area. The Conservation Area is well enclosed by the surrounding built form and vegetation. This serves to restrict views into and out of the area, including those to and from Hunsdon Airfield. Furthermore the Masterplan for the Gilston Area proposes Strategic Green Space between Hunsdon and the pylons to the east of Hunsdon Airfield. It is therefore considered that the Green Belt does not need to be defined to further strengthen the setting of the Conservation Area.

### Widford

- 4.2.13 Widford is also a historic village which contains a Conservation Area. In defining a new inner Green Belt boundary in this part of the area, regard must be had to potential coalescence and the protection of Widford's historic fabric.
- 4.2.14 It is proposed to locate the new inner boundary of the Green Belt along the southern edge of Marshland Wood. This boundary would be located approximately 700m from Widford and would be separated from Widford to a significant extent by Marshland Wood itself. Moreover it is not anticipated that any development would be located within 2km of Widford and there would be little or no intervisibility between this village and the Gilston Area. The setting of Widford Conservation Area would therefore be maintained.
- 4.2.15 Accordingly any new development would be separated from the village to a degree which would ensure the Green Belt tests of coalescence and protection of the historic fabric would be achieved.

*Hadham's Cross, Much Hadham & Green Tye*

4.2.16 All of these villages are located at an appreciable distance from the proposed inner Green Belt boundary (over 3km away) such that coalescence issues and the protection of the historic fabric of these settlements would not be an issue.

**B - Key landscape features**

4.2.17 Key landscape features within the area have influenced the redefinition of the inner Green Belt boundary as explained below.

*Woodland Blocks*

4.2.18 The woodland blocks which are located near much of the northern boundary of the site are significant landscape elements within this part of the area. Compared with the surrounding landscape, they provide a series of vertical forms which have a strong influence not only upon the visibility both within and out of the site, but also within the wider landscape setting (see Figures 7 and 8).

4.2.19 The size and orientation of these features within the context of the site, and their visual and physical presence, indicate their ability to provide a natural boundary within the landscape. This is reinforced by their typical location on the higher land in the area.

4.2.20 In consideration of the above, the woodland blocks in these areas directly inform the proposed line of the proposed inner Green Belt boundary.

**C - Remaining Boundaries**

4.2.21 Other parts of the proposed inner Green Belt boundary are addressed through utilising key landscape features within the area (other than the woodland blocks within the northern portion of the development site).

4.2.22 Within other parts of the area where blocks of woodland or major landscape features are less prevalent, judgments are required to be made in order that a suitable boundary is defined. In many cases, this will involve suggesting boundaries based on existing features such as roads, hedgerows or belts of trees and checking these against the five key purposes of Green Belts on an objective basis.

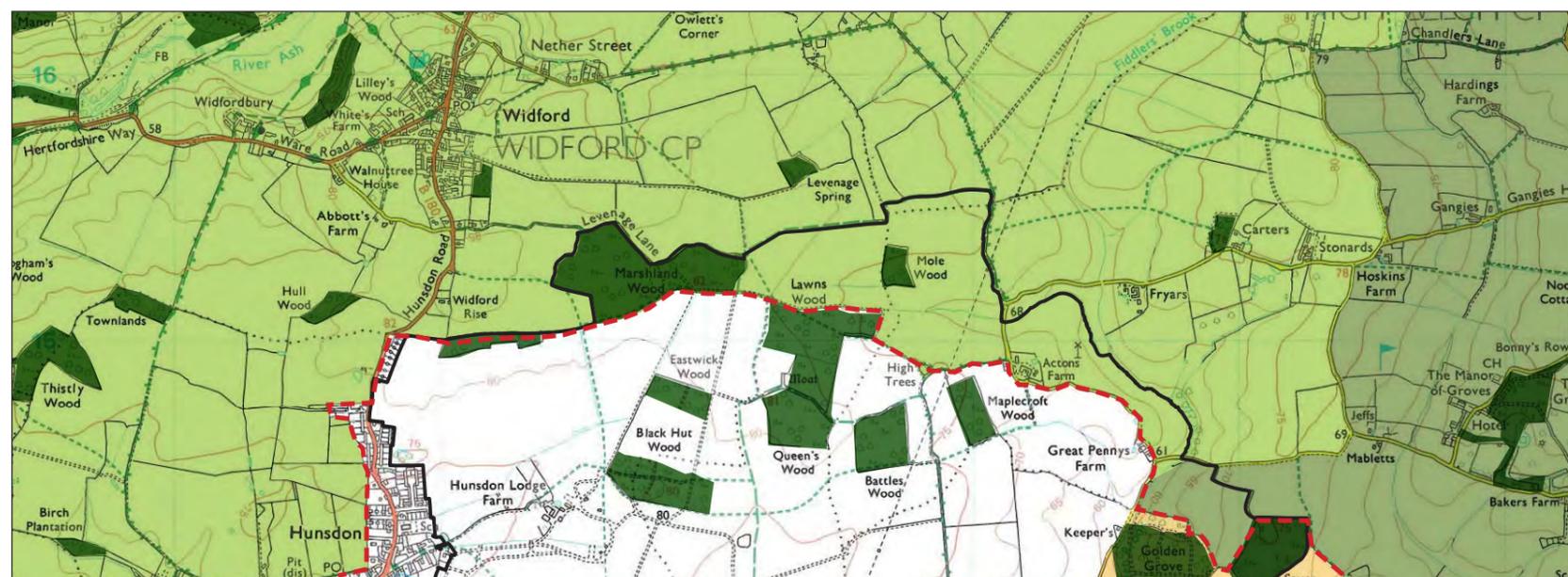


Figure 7: Woodland blocks in the northern part of the site: help to define proposed inner Green Belt boundary in this area

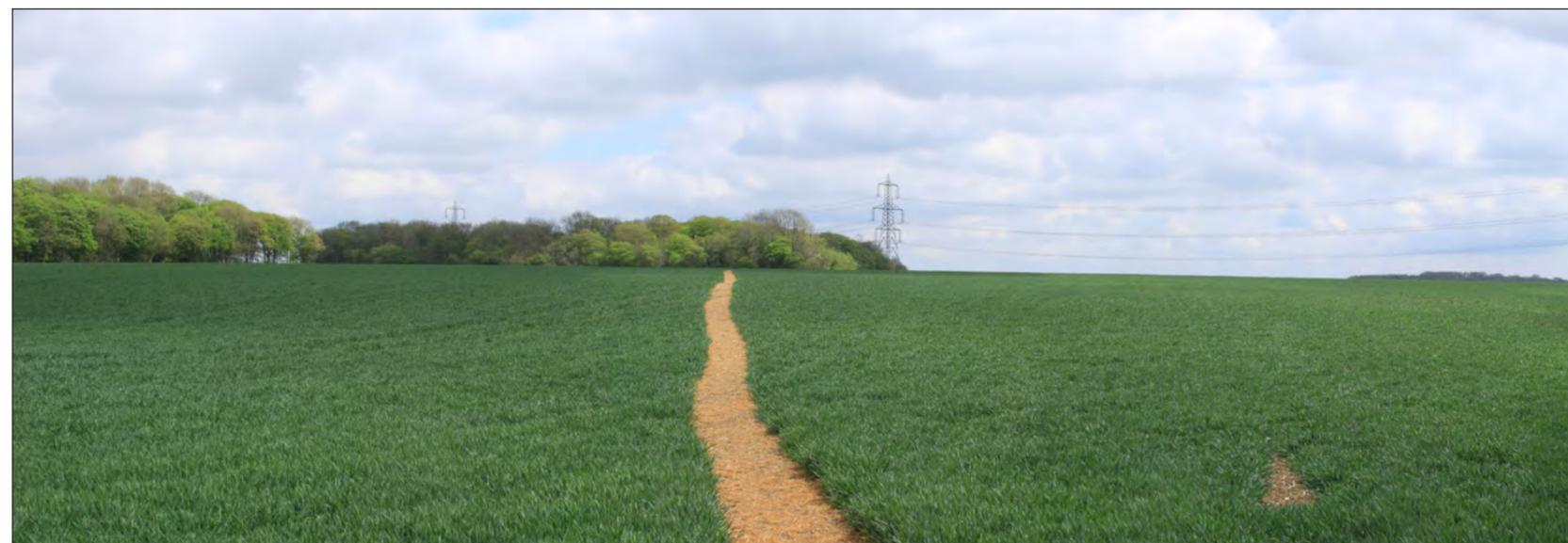


Figure 8: View from footpath towards the woodlands near the northern rolled back Green Belt boundary

4.2.23 The boundaries proposed are described and explained below.

### *South-east near Redericks Lane*

4.2.24 The proposed inner Green Belt boundary in this location follows Redericks Lane to its junction with High Wych Road, tracking this road to the northeast for approximately 1 kilometre before turning along a public footpath to Sayes Park Farm and beyond to Sayes Coppice. The key drivers for the boundary in this location are the offset required to High Wych and Sawbridgeworth (to prevent coalescence and protect the historic fabric of these settlements). The proposed Green Belt boundary amendment provides a strong defensible Green Belt boundary with sufficient offset to respect these two settlements.

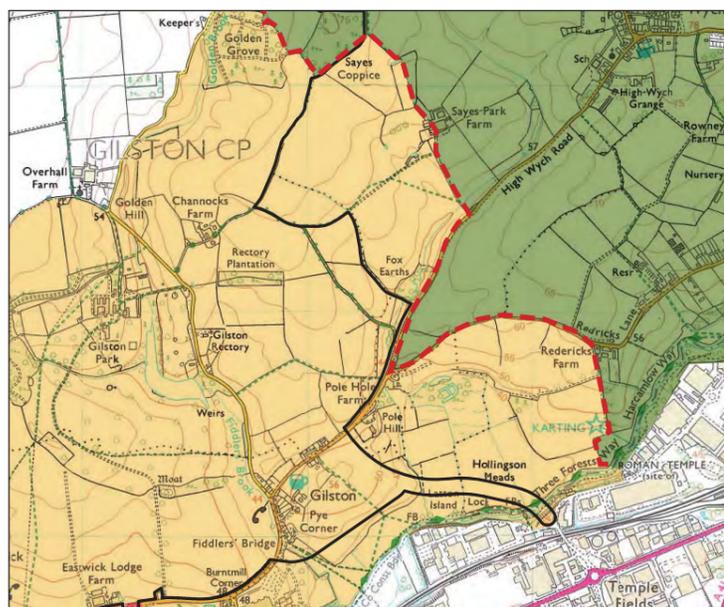


Figure 9: Proposed inner Green Belt boundary from Redericks Lane to Sayes Coppice

### *North-east near Actons Farm*

4.2.25 Within this area, the proposed boundary follows the minor road linking Lawns Wood to Golden Grove (see Figure 9). This minor road follows a slight ridge within the landscape, and has recently been planted on its south-western side with

a circa 10m wide broad leaf tree belt. To the south-west of this line, the relatively expansive landscape differs sharply in character to that on its north-east, which is more intimate and rolling in nature.

4.2.26 The key issues relative to the five Green Belt purposes in this area are the restriction of urban sprawl and avoiding encroachment into the wider landscape, both of which this boundary address by virtue of its juxtaposition with the river valley to the north-east and its close relationship to the site to the south-west.

4.2.27 The combination of the minor road and proposed additional woodland belt planting along this line provide a robust and defensible boundary in Green Belt terms.

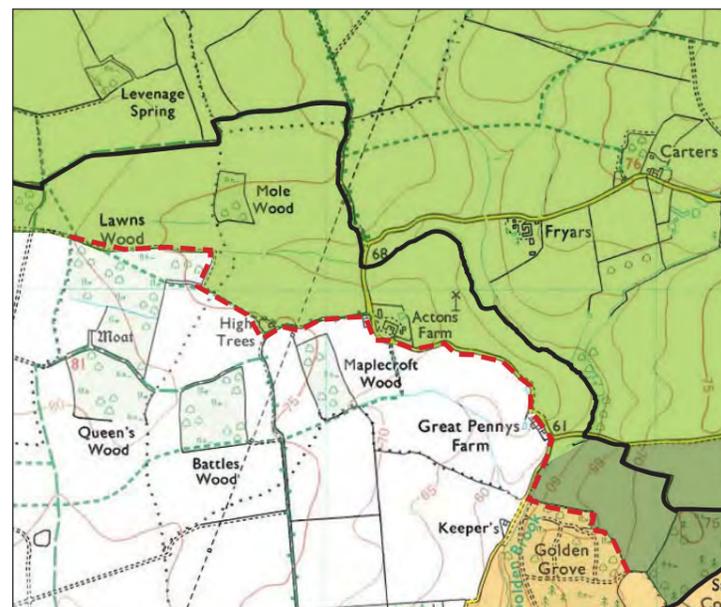


Figure 10: Proposed inner Green Belt boundary from Lawns Wood to Golden Grove

### *South-west near Hunsdonbury*

4.2.28 The proposed inner Green Belt boundary in this location follows the line of the historic hedgerow and edge of Lord's wood to the west of Church Lane.

4.2.29 This line is drawn primarily to protect Hunsdonbury from coalescence. The boundary runs to the west of Hunsdon House, along Church Lane linking the A414 to Hunsdon, extending west at St Dunstan's Church to follow the small valley of Hunsdon Brook to Lord's Wood thereby excluding this enclosed landscape from the Green Belt area. The dense woodland around this area, and specifically along the minor road, helps create a natural boundary and helps restrict views from the wider landscape.

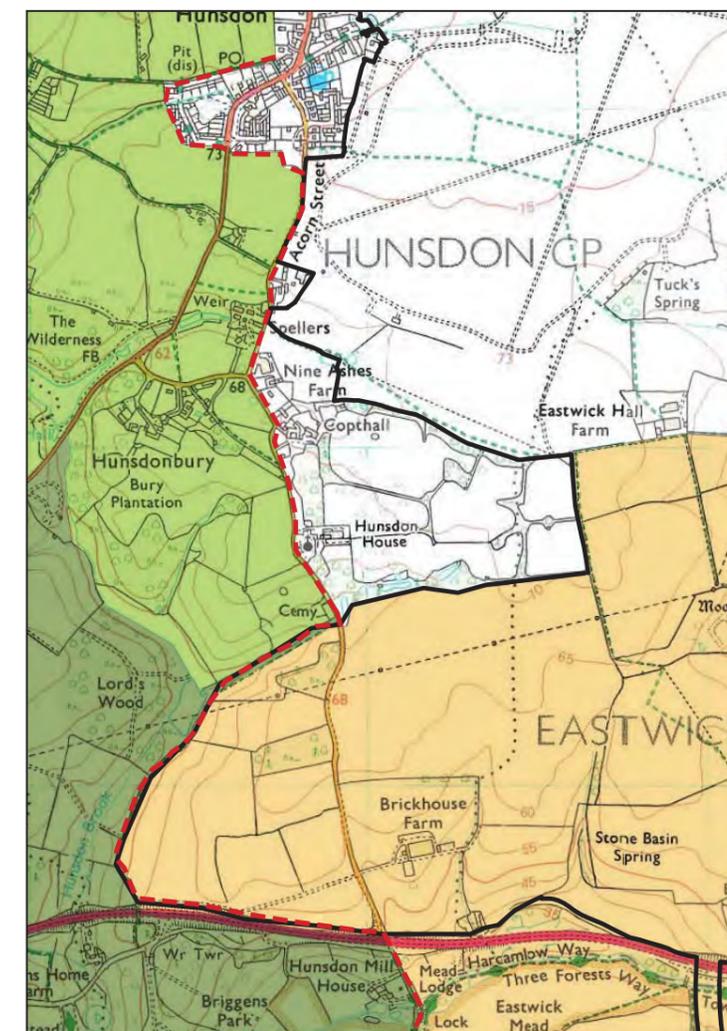


Figure 11: Proposed inner Green Belt boundary between Hunsdon and the A414

4.2.30 On meeting the A414, the line cuts across the floodplain (south) at Hunsdon Mill House. Initially the boundary follows the track to the River Stort, before following the river for approximately half a kilometre in a south-westerly direction. At Oak Pollard, the boundary then turns southwards to follow a series of minor watercourses and robust field boundaries, before reaching the edge of Canons Brook Golf Club. On reaching this, the line then follows the boundary of the golf course towards Harlow Road.

4.2.31 The key NPPF test in this location is the separation from Roydon, to the west, and the avoidance of coalescence and the protection of its historic fabric. The offset created through the positioning of this line is considered defensible in terms of these tests.

### 4.3 Outer Green Belt boundary

4.3.1 The main factor in establishing the proposed outer Green Belt boundary below is the width of the Green Belt in the area. Revisions would be necessary to the outer boundary to maintain a Green Belt which is sufficient in width to ensure Green Belt purposes are fulfilled.

4.3.2 As part of this, exercise, it is also necessary to consider integration with the existing outer boundaries in adjacent areas.

#### A - Key constraints mapping

4.3.3 As noted in section 2 of this Strategy the NPPF does not contain any specific advice on the width of Green Belts. In the absence of any such advice it is instructive to consider PPG2 (para 2.9) which states that *'Wherever practicable a Green Belt should be several miles wide, so as to ensure an appreciable open zone all round the built-up area concerned'*. This definition ensures that appropriate protection is afforded to sensitive settlements and historic areas.

4.3.4 Several constraints have been important in defining parts of the proposed new outer Green Belt boundary. These constraints, and their importance relative to assigning the new boundary are explained below.

#### Widford

4.3.5 The village of Widford lies to the north of the development site. When defining new Green Belt boundaries in the context of existing villages, Paragraph 86 of the NPPF advises:

*"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 in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt."*

4.3.6 For the purposes of this Strategy, the village is proposed to be included within the Green Belt. This is not a fixed proposal and the Local Planning Authority would assess and consult on any proposed change.

#### Hunsdon

4.3.7 It is suggested that Hunsdon be excluded from the proposed Green Belt area as the character of the village can be protected via its Conservation Area status and other 'white land' policies.

#### B - Key landscape features

4.3.8 Key landscape features within the area have influenced the redefinition of the proposed outer Green Belt boundary as explained below.

#### Woodland blocks

4.3.9 Woodland blocks are prevalent within the area considered for the outer Green Belt boundary, although there is no location where they are the key characteristic. However, they do contribute to defining the boundary line in some locations to the west of Widford.

4.3.10 The woodland blocks of Blakes Bushes and Nimney Wood provide landscape features which help define the boundary to the west of Widford. In creating the outer boundary in these areas, the woodland blocks help reduce visibility from

the surrounding areas towards the inner Green Belt and the development site, contributing to and helping maintain the feeling of openness that the Green Belt is aiming to achieve. These woodland blocks lie to the north of where the redefined boundary meets the existing outer boundary,

#### Minor Roads

4.3.11 The minor road linking Hadham Mill with South-end provides the proposed Outer boundary for approximately 1km. In this location the road runs along the edge of a woodland belt surrounding the Bourne stream, and at the base of a distinctive slope running down from Owlett's Corner. The combination in this area of a topographic low point, a stream and a minor road make this a natural choice for a new Green Belt boundary.

4.3.12 The boundary follows a minor road to the south west of Perry Green for approximately 0.5km. This road is a prominent feature in this location, there being a general lack of other landscape features owing to the sparse population in this area, and the large scale agricultural operations and associated pattern of large fields. As such, the minor road, and the small amount of vegetation along it in this location, would provide an effective outer Green Belt boundary in the context of the surrounding location. Looking further to the north-east, towards Sacombs Ash, the landscape becomes very open and exposed, with little defining character suitable for use as a new boundary. Looking further to the south, the requirements for a minimum width to the Green Belt preclude this area from being appropriate to contain a Green Belt boundary.

#### Streams

4.3.13 The valley of the Nimney Bourne provides a distinctive feature within this part of the landscape, and provides the proposed Outer boundary of the redefined Green Belt for approximately 2km. Vegetation along this watercourse, including the woodland at Nimney Wood, further accentuates the physical and visual presence of this feature, and further suggests its appropriateness for use as the redefined boundary in this location.

4.3.14 The Bourne near South-end provides the proposed Outer boundary for approximately 0.6km on it's own, and also approximately 1km where the watercourse is associated with the woodland and the minor road to the north of Owlett's Corner. When utilised as the sole feature upon which the boundary is predicated, the watercourse has a strong vegetation strip associated with it, strengthening it's qualities as a Green Belt boundary.

4.3.15 As noted above, the landscape to the north of the site is exposed and largely void of specific landscape features able to provide effective Green Belt boundaries. As such, in the area around Dukes farm, a number of features can be used, including the Fiddler's Brook, Covey's Lane and existing, vegetated, hedgerow boundaries, all of which are readily identifiable and robust landscape features.

### *Disused Railway Line*

4.3.16 A disused railway line is located to the west of Widford, and provides the proposed outer boundary for approximately 2km near to Wareside between the B1004 and Hall Farm. The benefit of utilising the disused railway line is that it provides a level, continuous and readily distinguishable feature within the landscape feature.

4.3.17 The disused line runs along the base of a steep slope in proximity to the River Ash, incorporating a well defined tree lined boundary. In defining the line in this location, there are also benefits derived from the topography of the landscape between the inner and outer lines, and specifically the steep slope immediately to the west of Widford which runs down to the River Ash.

4.3.18 This diverse topography would restrict views from outwith the Green Belt, as would the built form within Widford, and help create both a visual and perceptible barrier between the land outwith and the land within the Green Belt, enhancing the sense of openness required in this area.

### **C - Remaining boundaries**

4.3.19 As discussed above, a number of boundaries to the proposed outer Green Belt have been defined in response to the key NPPF Green Belt aim of maintaining a sense of openness, primarily utilising existing landscape features, and other features of note within the landscape. The positions of these features, relative to their proposed use as the new outer Green Belt boundary, have been influenced by the need for Green Belts to be wide enough to enable the purposes to be met.

4.3.20 In locations where landscape features are more modest in scale (e.g. hedgerows and lanes) consideration is given to the overall context of the landscape and a judgement made on this and where the outer Green Belt boundary should be located.

### *Nobland Green to Hadham Mill*

4.3.21 As with much of the landscape on the opposite side of the River Ash valley, and as mentioned above, the landscape in this part of the area (north-west) is the subject of relatively large scale agriculture, and thus field patterns. There are occasional woodland blocks, such as those at Blakes Bushes and Sheepcote plantation, and these are used where appropriate. The boundary shown utilises one of the many mature hedgerows (with hedgerow trees) within the area.

4.3.22 To the east, and downslope, mature woodland associated with Wynches and Barrowfield House provides a robust Green Belt boundary before the boundary meets the disused railway line near to Widford Road.



Figure 12: Disused Railway Line

## 5 Summary and Conclusions

### 5.1 Existing Green Belt

- 5.1.1 The existing Green Belt to the north of Harlow has achieved some purposes more successfully than others.
- 5.1.2 In terms of preventing urban sprawl, the Green Belt has assisted in meeting this objective, though the River Stort and its floodplain has prevented the northward expansion of Harlow, irrespective of the Green Belt designation.
- 5.1.3 With regard to preventing coalescence the Green Belt has to some extent played a role in preventing settlements from merging in the area, though it has not been particularly successful in meeting this purpose in light of the southern expansion of Sawbridgeworth.
- 5.1.4 The Green Belt designation has generally been influential in safeguarding the countryside to the north of Harlow, with the exception of the area south of Sawbridgeworth where there has been notable encroachment.
- 5.1.5 In terms of preserving the special character and setting of historic towns, the Green Belt has played a limited role in achieving this purpose.
- 5.1.6 With regard to assisting urban regeneration the Green Belt is likely to have played a part in limiting rather than encouraging the regeneration of Harlow by preventing development to the north of the town. It is therefore not considered to have contributed to this purpose.

### 5.2 Proposed Green Belt

- 5.2.1 In light of the need to meet housing demand in the district and the strategic objective of effecting the regeneration of Harlow, the Strategy has identified new robust inner and outer Green Belt boundaries to the north of Harlow which have been defined to ensure they are defensible and appropriate in the long term.
- 5.2.2 The proposed boundaries take into account various constraints noted in the purposes of the Green Belt such as Conservation Areas.

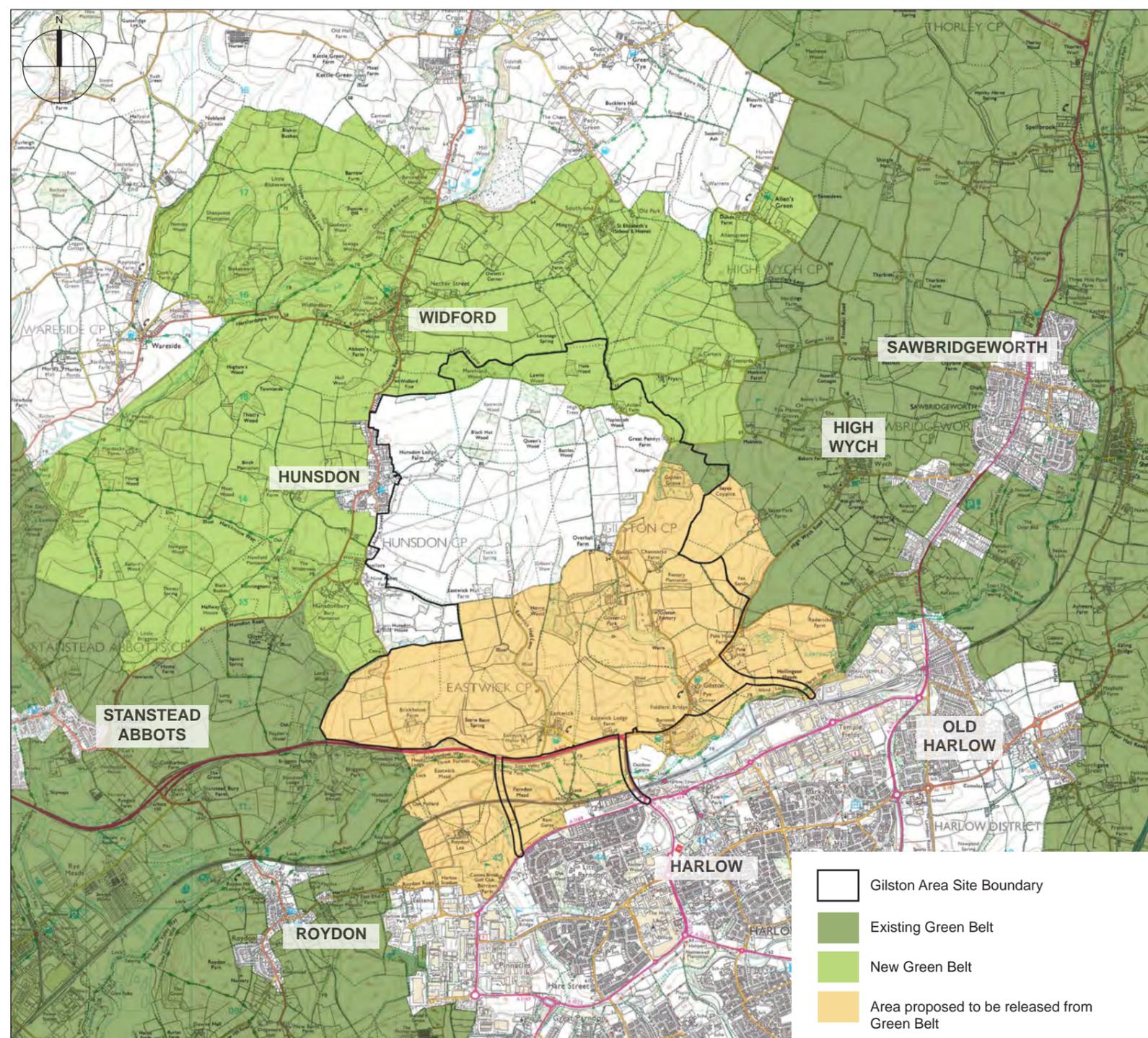


Figure 13: Proposed Green Belt in the Gilston Area

- 5.2.3 Major landscape elements within the Gilston Area have been identified and mapped to enable the structure of the landscape to be understood and to inform which features, can contribute towards redefining a new inner and outer Green Belt boundary.
- 5.2.4 Where boundaries are based on landscape features which aren't as prominent as roads or blocks of woodland, the opportunity exists to strengthen such boundaries, for instance by introducing additional planting.

