3 Methodology

3.1 There is no definitive national guidance on undertaking Green Belt studies. Documents prepared by the Planning Officers Society (POS) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) provide a useful discussion of some of the key issues associated with assessing Green Belt and reviewing/revising Green Belt boundaries.

3.2 The key points from these documents and from Inspectors' decisions were reflected in the methodology employed here. **Figure 3.1** provides a summary of the overall method of approach, which is described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Figure 3.1 – Methodology
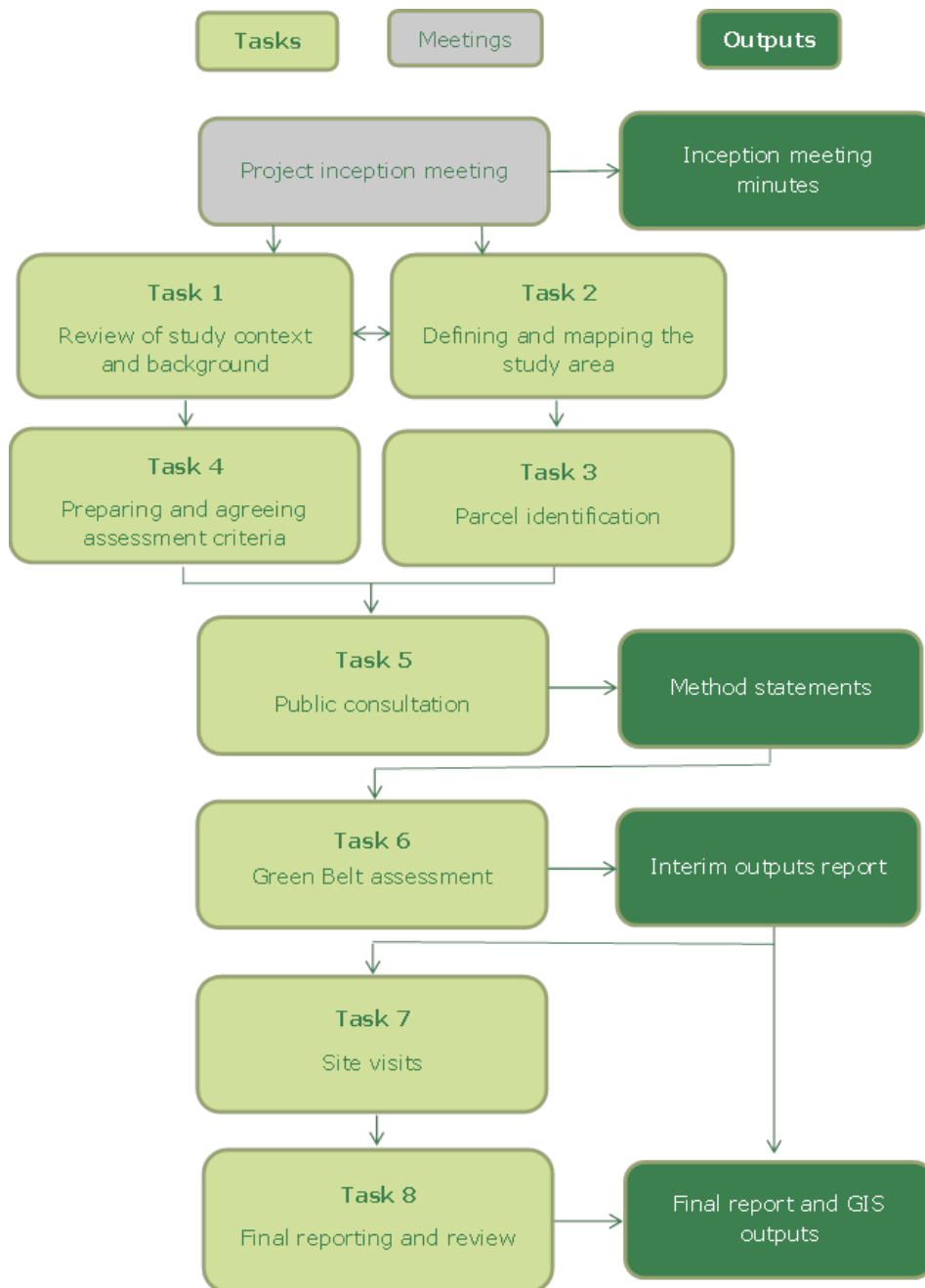
3.3   At the project inception stage, LUC met with the Council's Steering Group to finalise the project scope, objectives and work plan, including agreeing key meeting and reporting dates. Discussions began on the methodology for identifying the land parcels and broad areas and on the detailed criteria and GIS data required for assessment.

Task 1: Review of study context and background

3.4   To inform the development of the assessment methodology, most notably the detailed criteria for assessment of the parcels and broad areas against the Green Belt purposes, a review of relevant contextual information relating to the history and evolution of the West Midlands Green Belt was undertaken. A summary of this context and background to the study is provided in **Chapter 2** of this report.

Task 2: Defining and mapping the study area

3.5   At the project inception it was agreed that the study would cover all Green Belt in the District. The Council also identified two other categories of land for inclusion in the study:

- Selected areas of land outside the Green Belt for possible future inclusion in the Green Belt.

- Selected areas of land straddling the boundary between Cannock Chase District and neighbouring districts.

3.6   These areas, alongside the Green Belt boundary and other key designations, such as the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were mapped using GIS data and base maps supplied by the Council. This map provided the spatial context for the assessment.

Task 3: Land parcel identification

3.7   Given the overall size of the Green Belt, it was necessary to divide it into appropriate parcels for assessment against the Green Belt purposes. Parcels were defined using the maps compiled from the Council's GIS data and base maps (based on Ordnance Survey and Mastermap) and aerial images. No maximum or minimum sizes were used for the land parcels. The aim was to define parcels that contain land of the same or very similar land use or character, bounded by recognisable features including:

- Natural features; for example, substantial watercourses and water bodies.

- Man-made features; for example, motorways, A and B roads and railway lines, and established infrastructure and utilities such as sewage treatment works.

- Woodland, hedgerows and tree lines were considered to be recognisable but less permanent boundaries; streams and ditches are considered to be both recognisable and permanent but less significant boundaries than those above. However, where appropriate, both were used to define land parcel boundaries.

3.8   Two distinct types of parcel were identified.

Smaller parcels

3.9   Smaller parcels were identified adjacent to the large built-up areas of the District, as well as settlements (towns and villages), strategic employment sites and gypsy and traveller sites, because these locations are likely to offer the most sustainable locations for new development, in line with the spatial strategy set out in the Council's Core Strategy.

- The Council assisted LUC in identifying additional areas for detailed assessment, including areas that are known by the Council to be the subject of developer interest (e.g. from the 'call for sites' exercise).

Broad areas

3.10 Following the definition of parcels of land adjacent to the District's large built up areas and inset settlements, the remaining areas of Green Belt were divided into broad areas. The broad areas represent the main 'body' of the Green Belt, including largely open and undeveloped countryside.[8]

3.11 By their very nature, broad areas are likely to make a considerable contribution to Green Belt purposes. For this reason, and because there is no current development strategy that focuses growth in these areas, it was not deemed necessary to divide the broad areas into small parcels for detailed assessment. Instead, a broader, more descriptive approach to assessment was used to judge whether each Broad Area met each of the purposes of Green Belt and conclude whether the broad area made a high, medium or low contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

> 1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
>
> - Does the Broad Area protect open land from sprawl from large built-up areas, i.e. have significant areas/route ways within of the Broad Area been developed?
>
> 2. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
>
> - Does the Broad Area prevent the merging of settlements?
>
> 3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
>
> - Does the Broad Area have the characteristics of countryside or has it been significantly affected by encroachment of urbanised built development?
>
> 4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
>
> - Does the Broad Area contribute to the setting and special character of Cannock or Rugeley?

3.12 It was considered that the Green Belt makes a strategic contribution to Purpose 5 *'assisting in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land'.* It was therefore not considered appropriate to distinguish between the contributions of individual parcels to this purpose. This is further explained in **Table 3.1** below.

3.13 **Figure 3.2** illustrates the parcels and broad areas defined for assessment.
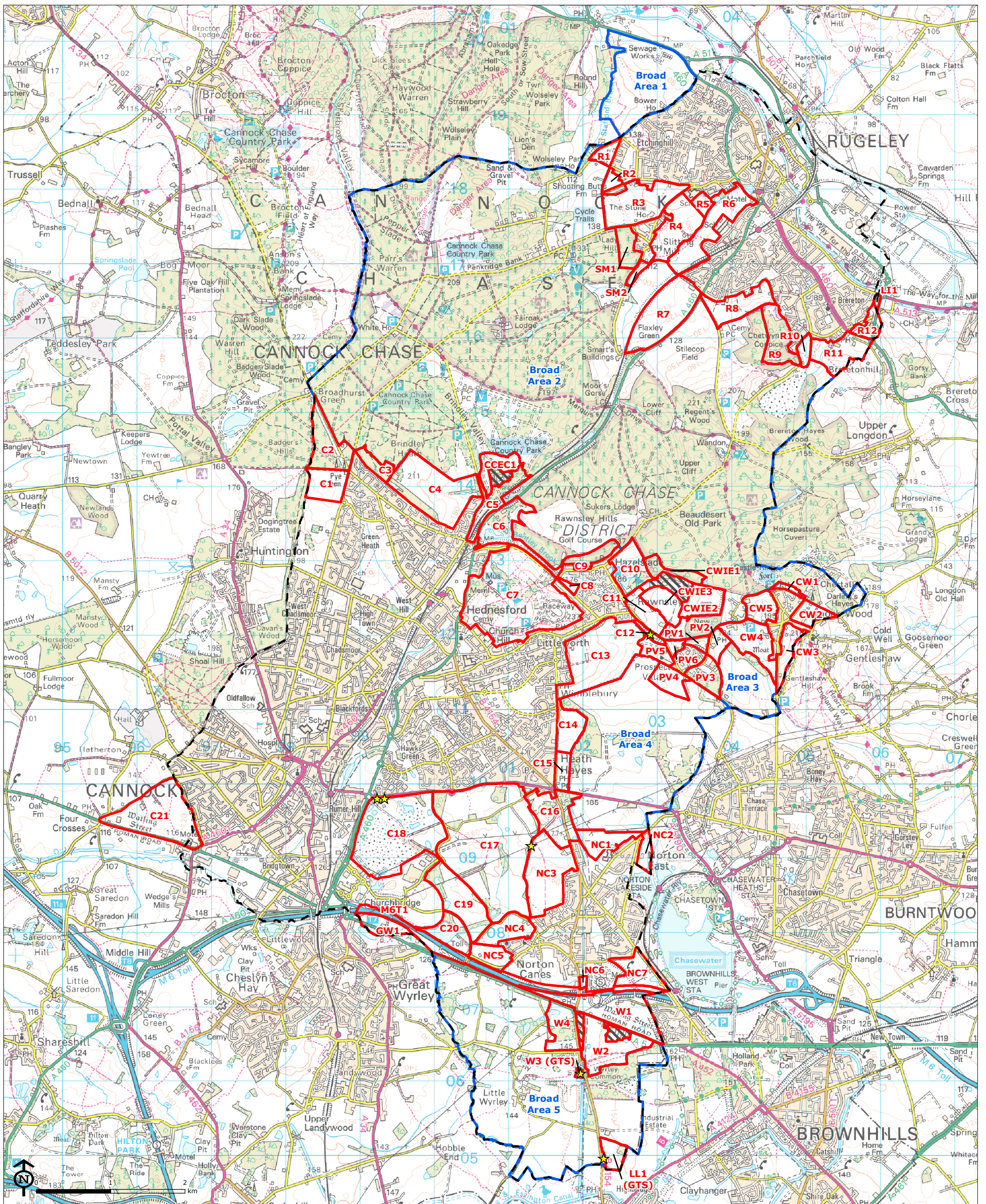
Task 4: Preparing and agreeing the assessment criteria

3.14 A key part of the method involved the development of an assessment framework based on the five purposes of Green Belts set out in the NPPF. A draft set of assessment criteria was drawn-up based on LUC's extensive experience of undertaking Green Belt reviews, information collated on the context and background of the West Midlands Green Belt (see **Chapter 2**) and good practice elsewhere.

3.15 Through discussion with the Steering Group, the criteria were refined to ensure that the judgements reflected the context and priorities for Cannock Chase, whilst remaining true to the five purposes of the Green Belt. Green Belt studies should be clear "*how the assessment of 'importance to Green Belt' has been derived*" from assessments against the individual purposes of Green Belt.[9]

3.16 **Table 3.1** sets out the Green Belt purposes, the issues for consideration and criteria used to assess the relative performance of the Green Belt parcels. It then sets out the scores assigned to land parcels when a particular criterion is met, along with some notes which provide further detail about how each criterion / score will be interpreted.

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[8] Within these broad areas there are small developed areas – villages, gypsy and traveller sites and strategic employment sites – that have been washed over by the Green Belt and which may have been the subject of landowner representations. Where the Council identified such developed areas as requiring more detailed assessment, the same approach as described above for Green Belt parcels adjoining settlements was used.

[9] Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015).

3.17 The NPPF makes clear that all Green Belt purposes carry the same weight. In order to avoid the weighting of individual purposes it is important to ensure that each parcel has the opportunity to score the same against all of the Green Belt purposes. All parcels have the potential to score between 0 and 4 for purposes 1–4[10]. All parcels score 4 for purpose 5.

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[10] Purposes 1 and 3 have two criteria; Purposes 2 and 4 have one criterion; all Purposes (1-5) have the potential to score 4.

Cannock Chase Green Belt Study

Figure 3.2

Green Belt Parcels

Source: Cannock Chase District Council, Ordnance Survey

LUC

Map Scale @ A3: 1:50,000

Legend:

- - - Cannock Chase District Boundary

Employment Sites (4)

★ Gypsy and Traveller Sites (6)

Parcels defined for detailed assessment

Broad areas of Green Belt defined for descriptive assessment

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Table 3.1: Assessment criteria

NPPF Green Belt Purposes		Issues for consideration		Criteria	Score /Value	Assessment method notes
1	To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	a	Ribbon development.	Does the parcel play a role in preventing ribbon development and/or has the Green Belt within the parcel already been compromised by ribbon development?	If strong role (parcel inhibiting development along two or more sides of a road corridor), **2** If some role (parcel inhibiting development along one road side of a corridor), **1** If no role (parcel not inhibiting development along a road corridor), **0**	Sprawl = the spread of an urban area into neighbouring countryside. Ribbon development= linear development along roads. Does the parcel adjoin a road corridor? Any road excluding very minor roads, e.g. green lanes, and Motorways and major A roads where direct access from a development to the road wouldn't be possible. The following are considered large built-up areas in the assessment of ribbon development: • Brownhills • Cannock • Cannock Chase Enterprise Centre • Cannock Wood • Cannock Wood Industrial Estate • Great Wyrley • Lime Lane Business Area • Norton Canes • Prospect Village • Rugeley • Slitting Mill • Watling Street Business Park • Gypsy and traveller sites
		b	Openness.	Is the parcel free from development? Does the parcel have a sense of openness?	If land parcel contains no development and has a strong sense of openness, **2** If land parcel contains limited development and has a relatively strong sense of openness, **1** If land parcel already contains development, compromising the sense of openness, **0**	Development means any built structure.