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Cannock Chase Green Belt Study

Final Report for Cannock Chase District Council

Prepared by LUC
March 2016



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1 Introduction

Purpose of the study

- 1.1 LUC was appointed by Cannock Chase District Council ('the Council') to undertake a comprehensive assessment of Green Belt land within the district. The study was overseen by a Steering Group comprising CCDC officers.
- 1.2 The overall aim of the Study was to assess the extent to which the land within the Cannock Chase Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green Belts, as set out in paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):
 - 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.
- 1.3 The NPPF attaches great importance to Green Belts and stresses that their essential characteristics are 'openness and permanence'.
- 1.4 This study meets this commitment by providing evidence on the relative performance of land parcels against the Green Belt purposes set out in the NPPF. It also identifies minor anomalies in the current Green Belt boundaries.

How the Green Belt study will be used

- 1.5 The NPPF advises that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of a local plan. While the assessment of performance against the Green Belt purposes could contribute to a case for 'de-designating' parcels of land in the Green Belt, this is not in itself an exceptional circumstance that would justify release. Indeed, exceptional circumstances for release may even exist in areas that are shown to perform strongly against the Green Belt purposes where the District can present other evidence, such as that contained in the District's SHLAA, Employment Land Review and service and infrastructure needs assessments, to demonstrate that needs cannot be met on alternative, non-Green Belt sites.
- 1.6 Following completion of this review, the Council will gather additional evidence, such as landscape character, ecology, heritage and flooding constraints and deliverability. The District will use this information alongside the results of the Green Belt study to determine whether it might be appropriate to release Green Belt and safeguard that land for potential future development beyond 2028. The Local Plan (Part 1) policies and supporting evidence currently identify sufficient land to accommodate the required level of development up to 2028, however a key driver behind further evidence base work is the need to potentially accommodate further development within, and beyond the plan period e.g. potentially assisting in addressing the Greater Birmingham housing market area shortfall and the District's own growth needs beyond 2028.
- 1.7 The Green Belt review will also map some of the key environmental constraints in the District to aid decision-making on which Green Belt land to release for development, should exceptional circumstances warrant this.
- 1.8 Should the District conclude that there are exceptional circumstances for making alterations to the existing Green Belt boundaries, these changes, including any allocations of land for development, will be taken forward through the Local Plan process.

Background

- 1.9 The Local Plan (Part 1) adopted June 2014 identifies the need for the Local Plan (Part 2) to undertake a Green Belt review in order to inform the safeguarding of land for potential development beyond the plan period to help meet future District needs. It also identifies that safeguarding may be required to help address Birmingham's housing needs. The Greater Birmingham Housing Market Assessment Study (Stages 1, 2 and 3) 2014-2015 identifies a significant shortfall in housing supply of just over 37,000, mainly arising from Birmingham for the plan period of 2011-2031. The Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part 1) adopted in June 2014 states the Cannock Chase *'Local Plan (Part 2) will...help address Birmingham's housing needs should this be necessary following further evidence gathering, either by identifying further capacity within the plan period or safeguarding land for development beyond the plan period...to help meet future District needs. Part 2 will be informed by a review of the Green Belt to be undertaken in full consultation with stakeholders'*.
- 1.10 Accommodating further housing will be the key challenge for CCDC's Local Plan (Part 2). This Green Belt Review will form an important part of the evidence base and similar reviews are being undertaken by other authorities in the Housing Market Area. There will, however, also be a need to consider other development requirements particularly employment land growth.
- 1.11 A study of the District's 'environmental capacity' to accommodate further development¹ noted that: 'Although not technically an environmental capacity issue, virtually all the District that is not already developed is designated as Green Belt, so additional development outside of existing urban areas would require the release of Green Belt land. The loss of Green Belt to development could have an impact on landscape character'.
- 1.12 The District's identified supply of brownfield land and other land outside the Green Belt (identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - SHLAA) is currently maximised as far as possible. Whilst there may be further brownfield supply coming forward via windfalls, unless these are large in scale the District will most likely have to look to the Green Belt for any further significant supply beyond 2028.
- 1.13 CCDC is also preparing other supporting evidence, including a Call for Sites, an updated Retail Study, an updated Landscape Character Assessment and updated housing and employment land assessments (SHLAA and ELAA). CCDC anticipates that Local Plan Issues and Options will be published in 2016 and that examination and adoption of the Local Plan will be in 2017/18.

Meeting the duty to cooperate

- 1.14 Section 110 of the Localism Act (2011) describes English Local Authorities' 'duty to cooperate'. The duty:
- Relates to sustainable development or use of land that would have a significant impact on at least two local planning areas.
 - Requires that councils and public bodies *'engage constructively, actively and on an on-going basis'* to develop strategic policies to address such issues.
 - Requires councils to consider joint approaches to plan making.
- 1.15 Green Belt is clearly a strategic issue and CCDC has therefore consulted its duty to cooperate partners (and the wider public) on the Green Belt Review method. Further information is provided in **Appendix 5**.

¹ Environmental Capacity in Cannock Chase District, Final Report, Prepared by LUC, January 2013

Report structure

1.16 The remainder of this report is structured in the following Chapters:

- **Chapter 2** sets out the context to the Study, in terms of planning policy and the evolution and character of the Green Belt in Cannock Chase, as part of the wider West Midlands Green Belt.
- **Chapter 3** describes the study methodology, including the criteria used to assess the Green Belt.
- **Chapter 4** reports the findings of the study.
- **Chapter 5** sets out the conclusions of the study and recommended next steps.

2 Context

National Green Belt policy

- 2.1 The principle of maintaining a ring of open country around cities can be traced back to the 16th century when Elizabeth I forbade any building on new sites within three miles of the city gates of London. This was motivated by public health reasons, to prevent the spread of the plague, and to ensure a constant supply of food for the metropolis.
- 2.2 The importance of these considerations was later recognised by Ebenezer Howard, a pioneer of British town planning, in his book of 1898 *Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in which he referred to '*an attractive setting within the town could develop and which would maintain, close at hand, the fresh delights of the countryside- field, hedgerow and woodland*'.
- 2.3 The only mechanism available at the time to realise this vision, however, was the acquisition of land by public authorities. In 1935 the London County Council Regional Planning Committee therefore put forward a scheme '*to provide a reserve supply of public open spaces and of recreational areas and to establish a Green Belt or girdle of open space lands, not necessarily continuous, but as readily accessible from the completely urbanised area of London as practicable*'.
- 2.4 In 1955, Government Circular 42/55 codified Green Belt provisions and extended the principle beyond London. This was replaced by Planning Policy Guidance 2 in 1988 and in 2012, the Government replaced PPG2 with paragraphs 79–92 of a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This has since been supplemented by relevant National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).
- 2.5 Paragraph 79 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'. This is elaborated in NPPF paragraph 80, which states that Green Belts should serve five purposes, as set out below. The NPPF does not infer that any differential weighting should be applied to the five purposes.

The purposes of Green Belt

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

- 2.6 The NPPF emphasises in paragraph 83 that local planning authorities should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. It goes on to state that '*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period*'.
- 2.7 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF suggests that Local Planning Authorities may wish to identify areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt to accommodate long-term development needs well beyond the plan period. New boundaries must have regard for the permanence of the designation by redefining boundaries which endure beyond the Local Plan

period. New boundaries should be defined clearly, using readily recognisable, permanent physical features.

- 2.8 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF indicates that, if proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:
- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
 - set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
 - show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
 - demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
 - show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.
- 2.9 Current guidance therefore makes it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning tool designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas. To this end, land should be designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use. However, the NPPF states "*local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land*" (Paragraph 81).

Lessons from planning practice

- 2.10 As well as taking account of planning policy guidance, this study acknowledges the key relevant points from recent planning practice. These include:
- Green Belt studies should be "fair, comprehensive and consistent with the Core Strategy's aim of directing development to the most sustainable locations". Green Belt reviews should be 'comprehensive' rather than 'selective'.²
 - 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.³ Such assessments against the purpose should form the basis of any justification for releasing land from the Green Belt.⁴
 - In reviewing land against the purposes, Green Belt studies should consider the reasons for a Green Belt's designation as they are related to the purposes.⁵
 - Green Belt studies should "take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, as required by paragraph 85 of the NPPF [even if] such an exercise would be carried out through the SEA/SA process."⁶

The West Midlands Green Belt

- 2.11 Sixty per cent of Cannock Chase District is designated Green Belt; 30% of the District is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Green Belt forms part of the larger West Midlands Green Belt. Although local authorities in the West Midlands first put forward proposals for a West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt in 1955, it was not formally approved by the Secretary of State until 1975. Today the Green Belt covers almost 1500 square kilometres, surrounding the Black Country, Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull.

² *Inspector's report (A Thickett) to Leeds City Council (September 2014)*

³ *Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015)*

⁴ *Inspector's interim findings (H Stephens) to Durham City Council (November 2014)*

⁵ *Inspector's interim findings (H Stephens) to Durham City Council (November 2014)*

⁶ *Inspectors' Letter (L Graham) to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils (May 2015)*

- 2.12 Generally, the West Midlands Green Belt has prevented the sprawl of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry, the merging of surrounding towns and encroachment into the surrounding countryside. It has also helped to preserve the setting and special character the main urban areas, as well as smaller settlements. At a strategic level, the Green Belt, tightly drawn around settlements, has helped to encourage regeneration by directing development to brownfield sites within the major urban areas.
- 2.13 The study area and the current extent of the West Midlands Green Belt are shown in **Figure 2.1**.

Cannock Chase Local Plan

- 2.14 The Council is preparing a new Local Plan for the District for the period 2006-2028. The plan is being prepared in two parts. Part 1 includes the Core Strategy, which sets out the strategic policies, and a Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan. Part 1 was adopted in June 2014 and has replaced the Cannock Chase Local Plan adopted in 1997. Part 2 is currently being prepared and will include site specific allocations, site safeguarding and any land requirement to help Birmingham in meeting its housing needs, as established through Part 1.
- 2.15 The Core Strategy focuses development in the District's settlements, broadly in proportion to their existing scale (Rugeley and Brereton 26%, Norton Canes 6% and Cannock, Hednesford and Heath Hayes 68%). It also seeks to develop service provision to meet the distribution of housing across the District. Suitable development in villages identified on the Policies Map will be limited to infill sites only. The extent of the urban areas will be constrained by the Green Belt Boundary as defined on the Policies Map.
- 2.16 Cannock Chase District is building its evidence base for Part 2 of the Plan. In addition to this Green Belt study, a Call for Sites has been issued and the Council's housing, retail and employment land assessments are being updated. An updated Landscape Character Assessment is also being prepared

Housing

- 2.17 Cannock Chase published a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in September 2015. The local housing requirement for Cannock Chase is 5,300 dwellings for the plan period 2006- 2028. Taking into account completions from 2006/07 to 2014/15 (2,313 dwellings), the requirement stands at 2,987 dwellings which equates to 230 dwellings per annum to the end of the plan period. This gives an initial five-year target of 1,150. In line with the NPPF a 5% buffer is applied to the five year requirement to assess, giving a five year target of 1,208 which equates to 242 dwellings per annum. Cannock has a total of 1,609 deliverable sites to meet its 5 year requirement.
- 2.18 The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Black Country Local Authorities commissioned a Joint Strategic Housing Needs Study in 2013 to assess future housing needs across the area and to set out options on where those needs could be met. The Stage 2 report (November 2014) for the study assesses the housing need (demand) across that area over the plan period 2011-33. The Stage 2 report projections for Cannock Chase District are 299 dwellings per annum. The Stage 3 study (August 2015) identifies an under provision of 37, 572 dwellings across the area over the plan period and considers spatial options (scenarios) for distributing this shortfall between local authority areas. Comparing the projected need of individual authorities with their supply, the Stage 3 study identified an under provision of 1,785 in Cannock Chase over the plan period (89 dwellings per annum). Birmingham has the greatest projected shortfall at 38,424 dwellings over the plan period. Cannock Chase District is found to have no or limited potential across all the scenarios tested in the Stage 3 study.

Gypsy and travellers

- 2.19 Cannock Chase published a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in January 2013 which demonstrated a need for an additional 45 pitches/plots over the plan period.
- 2.20 Core Policy CP7 plans for an additional 41 residential pitches and four Travelling Showpeople plots over the plan period. A broad area of search for these additional pitches and plots has been identified along the A5 road corridor.

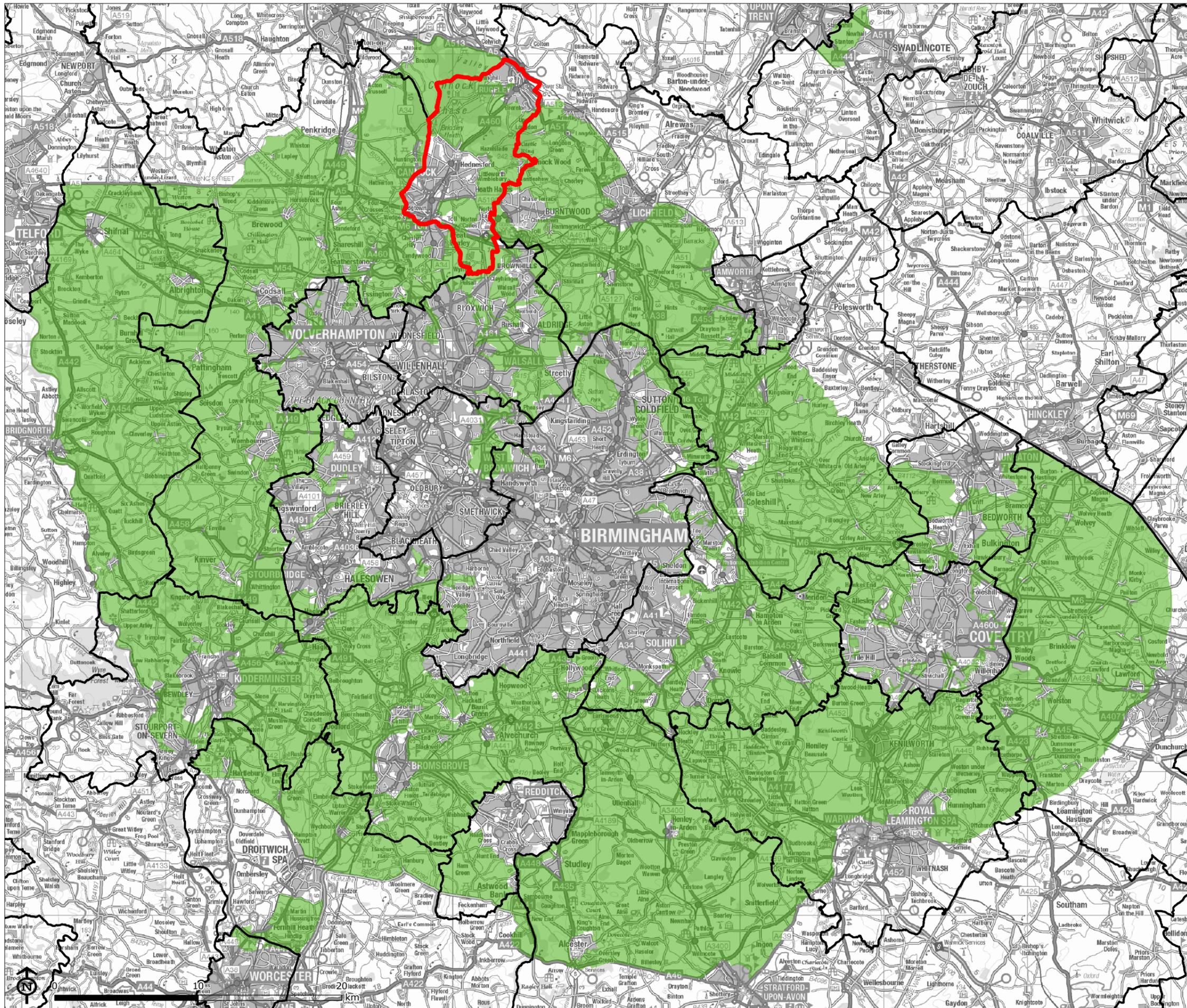
Employment land delivery

- 2.21 The Core Strategy identifies 91 ha of employment land being available: 62 ha (68%) in Cannock/ Hednesford/ Heath Hayes; 26 ha (29%) in Rugeley and Brereton and 3 ha (3%) in Norton Canes⁷. 34 ha of this available employment land had already been developed by 1 April 2012.
- 2.22 Cannock Chase published an Employment Land Availability Assessment (ELAA) in September 2015 which reaffirmed that there is currently sufficient supply of available employment land to meet the Core Strategy targets over the plan period – a minimum of 88ha of new/redeveloped employment land.

Safeguarding land beyond the plan period

- 2.23 The Core Strategy can be delivered without any further development within the Green Belt; however, the provision of adequate amounts of safeguarded land suitable for longer term housing, gypsy and traveller and employment development beyond the plan period is likely to require release of Green Belt land. This will be addressed within the Local Plan Part 2.

⁷ Cannock Chase Local Plan Part 1, proposed submission (2013).



Cannock Chase Green Belt Study

Figure 2.1
Study Context

- Cannock Chase District Boundary
- District Boundary
- Green Belt

Map Scale @ A3: 1:260,000

