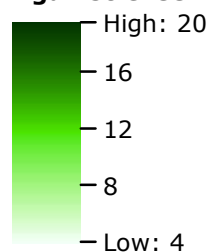


— Cannock Chase District Boundary

**Parcel Overall Performance Against Green Belt Purposes**



▨ Employment Sites (4)

★ Gypsy and Traveller Sites (6)

**Broad Area Overall Performance Against Green Belt Purposes - Number of 'High' Ratings**



**Cannock Chase Green Belt Study**

**Figure 4.2**

**Overall Parcel Performance Against Green Belt Purposes**

Source: Cannock Chase District Council, Ordnance Survey



Map Scale @ A3: 1:50,000

## Summary of findings: broad areas

- 4.7 The five broad areas represent the largely open and undeveloped countryside between the built-up areas within study area. As the 'main body' of the Green Belt (as opposed to the edges), they are considered to make a considerable contribution to Green Belt purposes; however, some make a more significant contribution than others.
- 4.8 The following paragraphs highlight the main contributions each broad area makes to the Green Belt purposes and thus the integrity of the wider West Midlands Green Belt.

### Broad area 1

- 4.9 Cannock Chase District Council agreed with Stafford District Council that the area directly to the north of Rugeley would be subjected to a broad descriptive assessment rather than a detailed parcel assessment. This area is defined as Broad Area 1.
- 4.10 Broad area 1 lies between Rugeley and the villages of Colwich and Little Haywood which are on the northern side of the River Trent.
- 4.11 The broad area predominantly comprises open agricultural fields on a north-east facing slope at the edge of woodland, limiting the scope for views in to the historic core of Rugeley to the south. The broad area contains a large sewage treatment works at its northern edge and Bower House in the south. The area is rated 'high' for its contribution to:
- Checking the northwards and westwards sprawl of Rugeley along the A51 and Stafford Brook Road, respectively, as well as the wider countryside.
  - Preventing the merging of Rugeley to the south east and Colwich/Little Haywood to the north on the other side of the Trent valley.
  - Safeguarding the countryside, notably the open agricultural fields within the broad area and the woodland that grows along its western edge part of which is designated as the Stafford Brook Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
  - Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

### Broad area 2

- 4.12 Lying between the large built-up areas of Cannock to the south west and Rugeley to the north east, broad area 2 is the largest expanse of undeveloped and open land within the District. It largely comprises Cannock Chase Country Park, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 4.13 As a result of these constraints, the area contains little development. Any development within the area is rural in character. The leisure and tourism developments along Penkridge Bank Road and Kingsley Wood Road have an urbanising influence on the countryside within their immediate vicinity; however, they are all located in dense woodland which screens them from views from the wider countryside.
- 4.14 Broad area 2 does not lie immediately adjacent to a built-up area (by virtue of other separate parcels of Green Belt land lying in between the urban area and this broad area) and therefore does not significantly contribute to checking sprawl; however, the broad area does make a considerable contribution to the other purposes of Green Belt:
- Preventing the merging of the urban areas of Cannock, Rugeley, Stafford, Prospect Village and Cannock Wood.
  - Safeguarding the countryside (although the Country Park and AONB, SSSI and SAC designations also play this role).
  - Preserving the setting and special character of the historic town of Rugeley. Panoramic views of the historic core of Rugeley can be seen from a number of locations within the broad area.

- Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

### Broad area 3

- 4.15 Broad area 3 is relatively small. It sits in between Prospect Village to the west, Cannock Wood to the east and Burntwood to the south and represents the southernmost portion of the Cannock Chase AONB. While the Broad Area has a strong sense of openness with good views of the high ground within its immediate vicinity, it is a significant distance from the historic towns of Rugeley to the north and Cannock to the west and is not in direct view of either town's historic core. Therefore, the broad area is not considered to make a significant contribution to the setting or special character of either historic town.
- 4.16 In addition, broad area 3 does not lie immediately adjacent to a built-up area and therefore does not significantly contribute to checking sprawl; however, the broad area does make a considerable contribution to three of the purposes of Green Belt:
- Preventing the merging of the neighbouring urban areas of Prospect Village, Cannock Wood and Burntwood.
  - Safeguarding the countryside, notably the Cannock Chase AONB.
  - Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

### Broad area 4

- 4.17 The broad area sits in between Cannock to the north west, Burntwood to the south east and Norton Canes to the south. With the exception of a few lines of pylons running in its southern part, the broad area contains no development and is very open with good views of the surrounding countryside. The south eastern half of the parcel is designated as the Chasewater and Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.
- 4.18 The historic core of Cannock can be seen from the high ground within the area.
- 4.19 Broad area 4 does not lie adjacent to a built-up area and therefore does not significantly contribute to checking sprawl; however, the broad area does make a considerable contribution to four of the purposes of Green Belt:
- Preventing the merging of the neighbouring built-up areas of Cannock, Burntwood and Norton Canes.
  - Safeguarding the countryside, including the Chasewater and Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.
  - Preserving the setting and special character of the historic town of Cannock to the west.
  - Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

### Broad area 5

- 4.20 Broad area 5 lies between Norton Canes to the north, Great Wyrley to the west, Brownhills to the east and Walsall (within the West Midlands conurbation) to the south.
- 4.21 The broad area is very open with excellent views of the surrounding countryside. The Cannock Extension Canal, which cuts north-south through the area, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 4.22 As there is no intervisibility between the countryside within the broad area and the historic cores of the historic towns within the District, it is not considered that the broad area plays a role in preserving their setting and special character.
- 4.23 In addition, broad area 5 does not lie adjacent to a built-up area and therefore does not significantly contribute to checking sprawl; however, the broad area does make a considerable contribution to three of the purposes of Green Belt:
- Prevents the merging of Norton Canes, Great Wyrley, Brownhills and Walsall.

- Safeguards the countryside, including the Cannock Extension Canal SAC.
- Assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land across the West Midlands.

## Summary of findings: smaller parcels adjacent to large built-up areas

- 4.24 The majority of the parcels within the study area make a considerable contribution to the purposes of Green Belt, rather than a more limited contribution.

### Higher-performing Green Belt parcels

- 4.25 Parcels of Green Belt land that contribute to maintaining gaps between Cannock and neighbouring Norton Canes and Prospect Village generally perform well against the Green Belt purposes; for example parcels C11, C16, C19, C20, NC1, NC4, PV4 and PV5. Similarly, the parcels in between Rugeley and Slitting Mill also perform well; for example, R3, R4 and R6.
- 4.26 The vast majority of these parcels also have no significant boundaries protecting the countryside from encroachment, which would limit the role that the Green Belt designation plays in this regard; they are very open and largely free from dense development and urbanising influences.
- 4.27 Only parcel R6 is close enough to the historic core of a historic town to make an individual and meaningful contribution the setting and special character of Rugeley. The other parcels are either too far away or obscured to contribute to this purpose.
- 4.28 With the exception of R6, these parcels also contain or border roads which would be at risk from ribbon development. Without the Green Belt designation, the land within the parcels would be vulnerable to encroachment/sprawl.

### Mid-performing Green Belt parcels

- 4.29 The majority of the parcels within the study area are 'mid-performing', meaning that they score moderately well across all the Green Belt purposes or have a mixture of high and low scores across the five purposes. There is no identifiable spatial pattern to these mid-performing parcels, as their weaker performance is attributable to a range of factors, including: the presence of significant boundaries helping to protect the wider countryside from encroachment and reducing the need for the Green Belt to perform this purpose; developments which compromise the openness of the Green Belt and urbanise the countryside; and the fact that the majority of the parcels do not contribute to the setting and special character of the historic towns of Cannock and Rugeley – their historic cores being relatively small and enclosed. Finally, in some instances, the parcels form part of large gaps between towns, so that the risk of merging of neighbouring towns is more limited.

### Low-performing Green Belt parcels

- 4.30 The parcels considered to make a more limited contribution to the Green Belt purposes include C7 (Hednesford Hill) and R5, non-Green Belt parcels within Cannock and Rugeley, respectively.<sup>15</sup>
- 4.31 Green Belt parcels NC6 and W3 are considered to make the least contribution to the Green Belt purposes in Cannock Chase District.
- 4.32 Parcel NC6<sup>16</sup> is a small area of land at the southern urban edge of Norton Canes. Retained by the M6 Toll Motorway at the southern edge, the parcel plays no role preventing sprawling ribbon development, preventing neighbouring towns from merging or safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The parcel straddles Walsall Road (B4154) and contains the grass verges of the road and a small area of woodland adjacent to a motorway service station to the east. There are

<sup>15</sup> See section on non-Green Belt parcels below.

<sup>16</sup> It is recommended in Appendix 4 that the Green Belt within parcel NC6 be removed and the Green Belt boundary be realigned along the northern edge of the M6 Toll slope, as part of a minor boundary adjustment.

no buildings within the parcel; however it is retained by the M6 Toll motorway and surrounded by significant infrastructure and urban development, the parcel has lost a wider sense of openness and is considered to be urbanised. It also doesn't play a strong role as part of the historic setting of the town.

- 4.33 Parcel W3 comprises a gypsy and traveller site next to the Cannock Extension Canal and does not form part of a town. Therefore, while the wider Green Belt contributes to preventing neighbouring towns from merging, in isolation, this parcel does not. The southern and eastern edges of the parcel border the canal, the north west and west sides border an area of steep-sided high ground with wooded slopes. Together these significant boundaries retain development within the immediate area, limiting the potential for encroachment of the wider Green Belt. Roughly 70% of the land within the parcel has been cleared and covered in hardstanding which is now used to store vehicles and containers. In addition, there are few small buildings on site. Together the stored containers and vehicles, the buildings and the areas of hardstanding significantly urbanise what remains of the countryside within the parcel and compromises openness.
- 4.34 Parcel M6T1, which follows the M6 Toll Motorway, makes no contribution to three of the Green Belt purposes, making it a relatively low scoring Green Belt parcel. The earthworks and infrastructure associated with the M6 Toll Road significantly compromise the openness of the Green Belt and urbanise the countryside within the parcel and the immediate vicinity. The road is a significant barrier to the encroachment of the countryside either side of the motorway, and is too large to facilitate sprawling ribbon development along it, limiting its role in checking sprawl. Furthermore, the parcel does not have direct views into a historic town's historic core. However, the M6 Toll Motorway follows the existing urban edges of Cannock to the north and Great Wyrley to the south. The earthworks and infrastructure of the motorway separate the towns at the western end of the parcel. At its narrowest point the distance between the two settlements is roughly the width of M6 Toll Road (less than 200m). Therefore, the western end of the parcel makes a considerable contribution to preventing these two towns from merging. The rest of the parcel makes no contribution to this purpose of Green Belts.

#### **Non-Green Belt parcels**

- 4.35 With the exception of parcel C1 in northern Cannock, the parcels of non-Green Belt land assessed against the Green Belt purposes (C7, C8 and R5) make a more limited contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
- 4.36 Parcel C7 contains Hednesford Hills which lie outside the Green Belt. Urbanising development borders the settlement on all sides, limiting its role in preventing sprawling ribbon development from Cannock and limiting its role in preventing the merging of Cannock with neighbouring towns. There are panoramic views of Cannock and the surrounding countryside from the Hills' sides and summit creating a strong sense of openness; however, the town's small historic core does not make a strong visual impression. Therefore, the parcel is not considered to form part of the setting and special character of Cannock. Hednesford Hills Raceway sits on the summit and a heritage centre sits on the northern slopes of the Hills. Together these two significant developments compromise the openness and urbanise a significant proportion of the land within the parcel.
- 4.37 Like parcel C7, parcel C8 is surrounded by urbanising development within Cannock, limiting its role in preventing sprawling ribbon development from Cannock and the merging of Cannock with neighbouring towns. The historic core of Cannock is not visible from within the parcel. However, the majority of the parcel is open scrubland with views of the countryside directly to the north, and there is no development within the parcel which compromises its openness or represents an urbanising influence on the countryside within it.
- 4.38 Parcel R5 is not considered to play a significant role in preventing sprawl: there are no route ways within or adjacent with the capacity to facilitate sprawling ribbon development; the parcel contains the sports fields of the Fair Oak Academy at the north eastern border of the parcel. As development has already occurred along the north western edge of the parcel, any development within the parcel would not contribute to narrowing the gap between Rugeley and Slitting Mill to the south west. Therefore, it is considered that the parcel plays a limited role in maintaining separation between settlements. While the majority of the parcel is undeveloped and open, a building sits within it compromising the openness of land within the immediate vicinity of the

parcel. Combined with the areas of hardstanding, the building has an urbanising influence on the countryside. From the high ground within the parcel it is possible to see in to Rugeley; however the town's historic core does not make a strong visual impression – so the parcel is not considered to form part of the setting and special character of Rugeley.

- 4.39 Parcel C1 comprises the northern portion of one large open field which borders Green Heath in Cannock and sits in a narrow gap between Cannock to the east and the village of Huntington in the District of South Staffordshire to the west. While a thick band of woodland separates the two settlements reducing visibility between the two, the distance between the two settlements is less than 1km. The parcel sits on high ground offering views of the surrounding countryside. There is no development within the parcel. There are no significant boundaries within or immediately adjacent to the parcel considered able to assist in safeguarding the wider countryside from encroachment. Therefore, overall, designating the parcel as Green Belt could make a significant contribution to protecting this piece of intact and open countryside.

### Interpretation and use of the study findings

- 4.40 The application of the agreed methodology results in a helpful and informative strategic overview of the performance of the Cannock Chase Green Belt, on a parcel by parcel or broad area basis, against the purposes defined in the NPPF. Variations in performance against particular criteria within individual parcels are noted in the assessment text (**Appendix 1**). This cannot be reflected in a single parcel rating, and will need to be considered when interpreting the study findings. The parcel boundaries used in this study are not intended to reflect potential development areas and the study cannot be used as a means of allocating development land. There are a number of considerations (alongside the Green Belt) that need to be taken into account in deciding on where new development should be allocated.
- 4.41 There are also 'bigger picture' considerations that the methodology does not address, such as how to review Green Belt boundaries (to accommodate development) whilst minimising harm to the Green Belt as a whole. Options may include Green Belt release at the edge of the 'large built up area', or at the edge of surrounding towns, or indeed within the broad areas. The evaluation of options for development will need to be the subject of further work, drawing on the findings of this study alongside other considerations (such as infrastructure, environmental sensitivity) and related studies. Further discussion on making changes to the Green Belt boundaries is provided in **Chapter 5**.

## 5 Conclusions and next steps

- 5.1 This final chapter draws overall conclusions from the study and suggests some next steps, in terms of how Cannock Chase District Council might use the findings in their respective Local Plan Part 2 preparation.

### Overall performance of the Green Belt

- 5.2 This study has demonstrated that the majority of the Green Belt in the District continues to serve its purposes very well. Alongside other national and international designations, it helps to maintain the identity of this part of the West Midlands and provides opportunities for residents to enjoy the countryside close at hand.
- 5.3 As set out in Chapter 4, there are variations in the contribution that different parts of the Green Belt make to the purposes 1, 2, 3 and 4. In terms of purpose 5 (encouraging the recycling of urban land), it can be concluded that the entire Green Belt has helped to meet this purpose historically and will continue to do so, noting that there remain some significant areas of previously used land in the urban areas.
- 5.4 There are also areas of Green Belt and non-Green Belt land within the study area where development would effectively be 'infill' and would be well contained by existing significant features and the landscape. These include:
- Portions of land within parcel C7 at Hednesford Hills.
  - Parcel R5, adjacent to Fair Oak Academy, Rugeley.
  - Parcel NC6 at the southern edge of Norton Canes<sup>17</sup>.
  - Parcel W3 next to the Cannock Extension Canal.
- 5.5 In defining precise areas for removal, however, the District Council should seek to minimise any harm to the remainder of the Green Belt by indicating the type of development (in terms of height and density) that would be acceptable in these location. The Council will also need to consider 'non Green Belt' factors which affect whether or not these sites are considered appropriate for development e.g. their current use.

### Making changes to the Green Belt

#### Helping to meet development requirements

- 5.6 As noted in Chapter 2, the NPPF requires changes to the Green Belt to be made through the Local Plan process. This should include:
- i. demonstration of exceptional circumstances, such as unmet housing or employment land needs, that cannot be met elsewhere; and
  - ii. consideration of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, considering a range of local, regional and national issues such as economic growth, health and wellbeing, accessibility and biodiversity, cultural heritage and climate change resilience, as well as an assessment against Green Belt purposes.
- 5.7 A common interpretation of the policy position is that, where necessitated by development requirements, plans should identify the most sustainable locations, unless outweighed by adverse

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<sup>17</sup> It is recommended in Appendix 4 that the Green Belt within parcel NC6 be removed and the Green Belt boundary be realigned along the northern edge of the M6 Toll slope, as part of a minor boundary adjustment.

effects on the overall integrity of the Green Belt according to an assessment of the whole of the Green Belt based around the five purposes<sup>18</sup>. In other words, the relatively poor performance of the land against Green Belt purposes is not, of itself, an exceptional circumstance that would justify release of the land from the Green Belt.

- 5.8 We therefore encourage the District Council to continue to cooperate with its duty to cooperate partners in considering points i) and ii) above as part of their Local Plan Part 2 preparation process. Subject to this, we recommend that the lower performing parcels of Green Belt, or parts of them, could be considered for removal from the Green Belt and 'safeguarded'<sup>19</sup> for future development beyond the plan period.

## Positive use of land in the Green Belt

- 5.9 Although the positive use of Green Belt land is not directly related to the purposes of Green Belt, the NPPF encourages local planning authorities to secure positive use of land in Green Belts, once defined.
- 5.10 The Study did not include a detailed assessment of existing positive uses of land in the Green Belt. As noted in **Chapter 2**, over 30% of the District is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the Cannock Chase Green Belt is under agricultural use, and the courses of Rising Brook in the north of the District and Wash Brook in the south are at significant risk of flooding, being located in Flood Zones 2 and 3 (which is itself a positive use).
- 5.11 Despite this, there remains considerable scope to enhance the positive use of the Green Belt - particularly in terms of providing for informal recreation close to the main settlements of Cannock, Norton Canes and Rugeley.
- 5.12 It is recommended that, as part of the District's ongoing dialogue with its duty to cooperate partners, following an agreed spatial strategy across the Housing Market Area, the Councils should cooperate on a strategy for securing greater positive use of the Green Belt.

## Designation of Local Green Space

- 5.13 While parcel C7 at Hednesford Hills makes a more limited contribution to the Green Belt purposes, the hills play an important role as open space and green infrastructure. Designated as part of the Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI, the hills increase the sustainability of the town, promoting health and wellbeing, biodiversity and resilience to climate change.
- 5.14 We therefore recommend that the District Council explores the designation of Hednesford Hills as a 'Local Green Space'. Local Green Spaces are described as land of particular '*beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife*' (NPPF para. 77). This describes the Hednesford Hills very well and, through an appropriate Local Plan policy framework, could protect the hill as strongly as Green Belt.

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<sup>18</sup> Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt, Planning Advisor Service (PAS), 2015: <http://www.pas.gov.uk/documents/332612/1099309/Planning+on+Your+Doorstep+++The+Big+Issues+Green+Belt.pdf/bb5fcd90-fa29-42a0-9dd9-82b27a43f72f>

<sup>19</sup> 'Safeguarded Land' is land taken out of the Green Belt in this plan period for potential development in the next plan period and protected from development proposals arising in the meantime by policies with similar force to Green Belt (NPPF, Paragraph 85).