

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Green Belt Village Study

Corrected Report

Reference: Draft for Issue

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

In March 2024, Ove Arup & Partners ('Arup') was commissioned by Newcastle-under-Lyme Council ('the Council') to prepare additional Green Belt evidence to accompany their emerging Local Plan (Regulation 19).

Arup has undertaken a number of Green Belt Reviews for the Council consisting of the following:

- Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Green Belt Assessment Part 1 (November 2017);¹
- Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Green Belt Assessment Part 2 (2019-20) consisting of a Green Belt Site Review,² Exceptional Circumstances Review³ and Green Belt Village Study⁴; and
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Green Belt Review Part 3 (2023) consisting of advice on safeguarded land, compensatory improvements, and exceptional circumstances, plus additional Green Belt site assessments.⁵

As a result of the Council's Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation, it has come to our attention that there was an error in the Green Belt Village Study (October 2019). This error relates to the wrong version of the Keele Village assessment proforma being included in Section 4.2 of the report. The version included was based on the initial desktop analysis. This was subsequently updated following the site visit however this updated version was not included. This document therefore represents a corrected version of the study which supersedes the previous version from October 2019. The correct assessment proforma for Keele which was undertaken in 2019 has been included in Section 4.2. A number of minor changes to reflect up-to-date circumstances have also been made (these are not corrections), as follows:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) references have been updated throughout to reflect the most recent version of the document published in December 2023.
- References to the Joint Local Plan have been removed as this is no longer relevant.
- The Runnymede Local Plan referenced in the comparative review at Section 2.3 has now been adopted and this has been reflected in the text.
- The case law on the definition of 'openness' has been reviewed and updated to reflect the most up-to-date position.

No other changes have been made to the study and the methodology remains robust and relevant against national policy, guidance and case law.

1.2 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this study is to independently and objectively assess the extent to which villages washed over by the Green Belt meet the NPPF requirements of paragraph 149:

"If it is necessary to restrict 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

¹ <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/900/green-belt-assessment-part-1-2017->

² <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/752/green-belt-part-2-assessment-study>

³ <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/753/exceptional-circumstances-review>

⁴ <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/754/green-belt-village-full-report>

⁵ <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/downloads/file/1843/green-belt-assessment-part-3->

should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.”

The previous guidance on Green Belt villages contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts (PPG2) was superseded by the adoption of the NPPF (March 2012), now superseded by the NPPF (December 2023). The current washed over and inset villages were considered in accordance with the former PPG2 (1995 to 2012). Paragraph 2.11 of PPG2 set out how development plans should treat existing villages in the Green Belt, this was in one of three ways:

- If no new building is allowed (other than for agriculture and forestry; essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purpose of including land in it; and for limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings), then the village should be included within the Green Belt. The Green Belt notation should be carried across (“washed over”) it.
- If infilling only is allowed, the village should either be “washed over” and listed in the development plan or should be inset (excluded) from the Green Belt. If washed over, the Local Plan may need to define infill boundaries to avoid dispute over whether particular sites are covered by infill policies.
- If limited development or limited expansion is proposed, the village should be inset from the Green Belt.

In light of the different policy position set out in the NPPF, the consideration of whether a village should be included (washed-over) or excluded (inset) from the Green Belt now relies on the contribution that the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, rather than the degree of restriction of development sought by the development plan (as per PPG2). It is therefore necessary to consider the status of the washed over and inset villages against this new policy position.

The Green Belt Assessment Part 1 (November 2017) prepared by Arup assessed the entirety of the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Green Belt against the five purposes of Green Belt set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF via a General Area and parcel approach. The Green Belt Assessment did not consider the specific advice set out in paragraph 149 on how villages within the Green Belt should be treated for planning purposes. As such this study is separate but complementary to the Green Belt Assessment. It adopts a different methodology relevant to the different policy requirements of paragraph 149.

The adopted Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy (2009) at paragraph 5.7 sets out the hierarchy of centres, as follows:

“Strategic Centres: City Centre of Stoke-on-Trent (as defined by the traditional core city centre bounded by the Potteries Way Ring Road) and Newcastle Town Centre.

Significant Urban Centres: Longton, Tunstall, Stoke, Burslem, Fenton, Meir, Kidsgrove, Wolstanton, Chesterton, Silverdale.

Local Urban Centres: These are listed at Appendix 5 of the Core Spatial Strategy.

Rural Service Centres: Madeley, Loggerheads, Audley Parish.

Villages: Betley, Mow Cop, Keele, Madeley Heath, Baldwins Gate, Ashley, Whitmore.”

Within the category of villages, all of the villages apart from Keele and Whitmore have inset boundaries and are therefore excluded from the Green Belt. As such, only the washed over villages of Keele and Whitmore will be considered as part of this study. This was agreed by officers at the Council.

The study will review the washed over villages against paragraph 149. It will consider whether the villages are open in character and whether they make a contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. On this basis, the study will provide recommendations as to whether they could remain in the Green Belt or could be excluded from it.

Where it is recommended that the villages are excluded from the Green Belt, the study will consider the potential future inset boundaries of the villages. Any alterations to Green Belt boundaries will require the

Council to develop an exceptional circumstances case in accordance with paragraph 145 of the NPPF and adopt this as part of the emerging Local Plan.

In relation to the recommendations set out in this study, it should be noted that:

- recommendations for removal from the Green Belt does not imply that the Council must accept these or that they will appear in an adopted Local Plan.
- recommendations for removal also do not imply villages will be suitable for development.
- Alterations to Green Belt boundaries require exceptional circumstances, which are fully evidenced and justified, in accordance with paragraph 145 of the NPPF. The Council will need to develop the exceptional circumstances case if alterations are proposed.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The Green Belt Village Study is structured as follows:

- Section 1 sets out the purposes of the study, the structure of the report and details of the study area.
- Section 2 reviews current national policy in relation to Green Belt villages and reviews the latest guidance on Green Belt village studies, including a comparative review of Green Belt Village studies from other authorities.
- Section 3 sets out the methodology used for the Green Belt village study taking into account the findings from the review of policy, guidance and comparative study review.
- Section 4 sets out the outcomes from Stages 1 and 2 involving the identification of village boundaries and the assessment of the villages against paragraph 149 of the NPPF. A summary of the recommendations is provided.
- Section 5 sets out the proposed new inset boundary for the village which was recommended to be inset within the Green Belt.
- Section 6 provides a summary of the study and sets out the conclusions.

2. Planning Policy Context

2.1 Overview

This section provides a review of the national planning policy context in relation to Green Belt villages. It reviews a number of other Green Belt Village studies undertaken by other authorities in order to understand the approach and definition used when determining whether a village should be washed over or inset, in accordance with paragraph 149 of the NPPF.

2.2 National Planning Policy

2.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

The NPPF represents the overarching framework governing planning policy in England and establishes the principles and policies against which plan-making and decision-taking should be made. This section summarises the relevant paragraphs in the NPPF with respect to Green Belt.

Green Belt

Paragraphs 133-134 of the NPPF set out the aim and purpose of the Green Belt in England, as follows:

“142. The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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 permanence.

143. Green Belt serves 5 purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”*

The NPPF stipulates that: *“Authorities may choose to review and alter Green Belt boundaries where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, in which case proposals for changes should be made only through the plan-making process.”* (paragraph 145).

When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 147 states that *“the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account”*.

Paragraph 148 states that when defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:

“(a) ensure consistency with the development plan’s strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;

(b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;

(c) where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;

(d) make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;

(e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and

(f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.”

Paragraph 149 of the NPPF focuses on whether a village should be included or excluded from the Green Belt based on its open character and the contribution this character makes to the openness of the Green Belt:

“If it is necessary to restrict 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.”

2.2.2 National Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (‘PPG’) provides an additional layer of interpretive clarification and guidance to the NPPF. The PPG does not provide any further guidance on the assessment of Green Belt villages however it emphasises the strength of Green Belt policy once established. It also provides some guidance on the definition of openness. Paragraph 001 on Green Belt states:

“...openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume...” [Reference ID: 64-001-20190722, published 22 July 2019]

2.3 Comparative Review of Green Belt Village studies

This section provides a review of other Green Belt Village studies undertaken by other authorities. The purpose of this review was to understand the approach and comparative definitions used for determining whether a village should be inset or washed over in accordance with both local circumstances and the requirements of paragraph 149 of the NPPF. This will help support the production of an appropriate methodology for this study that is robust and meets the requirements for a Local Plan evidence base.

The full review table is provided at Appendix A and the relevant components of paragraph 149 are considered in turn within this section. The following studies were reviewed: Guildford Council Green Belt and Countryside Study, Selby Council Status of Villages in the Green Belt, Vale of White Horse Council Green Belt Review, and Runnymede Council Green Belt Villages Review. The Vale of White Horse Review, the Guildford Green Belt and Countryside Study, and the Runnymede Council Green Belt Villages Review have all been through Examination. The Inspector for the Vale of White Horse Local Plan did not comment on the approach to the assessment of villages. The Inspector for the Guildford Local Plan commented that the study was *“comprehensive and well-founded”* (paragraph 101) whilst the Inspector for the Runnymede Local Plan commented that the wider Green Belt review (including the village review) was *“comprehensive, systematic and based on a robust, consistently applied methodology”* (paragraph 68). The Inspectors also commented on the exceptional circumstances case (this is discussed in Section 2.4 below).

2.3.1 Overall Approach

All of the studies included a staged approach consisting of some or all of these stages:

- Identify villages to be assessed;
- Identify development limits of village;
- Assessment of open character;
- Assessment of openness;
- Decision on inseting or washing over of village; and
- Review development limits/boundaries where village is to be inset.

The Vale of White Horse Council Green Belt Review included the village assessment as part of the wider Green Belt Assessment.

2.3.2 Open Character

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

- Density
- Settlement pattern
- Types of dwelling/property
- Distribution of properties
- Plot size
- Building heights
- Enclosures or barriers
- Scale and Form
- Extent of open space
- Vegetation
- Topography
- Views

Assessments were qualitative and often involved a variant of the High, Medium and Low ranking system based on definitions of these according to the above criteria.

2.3.3 Important Contribution to Openness

There was some overlap between the studies on the assessment of open character and openness with similar criteria applied to both assessments.

Where the assessment of openness was different, it was emphasised that openness focused on the physical and/or perceptual connection between the openness of the village and the openness of the Green Belt. The following criteria were considered:

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

Assessments were qualitative and often involved a variant of the High, Medium and Low ranking system based on definitions of these according to the above criteria.

The NPPF does not explicitly define openness, leaving it open to interpretation. Only Selby Council and Runnymede Council included a definition of openness, referencing case law or creating their own definitions:

- Selby Council: the *'extent to which Green Belt land could be considered open from an absence of built form and urbanising influences, rather than from a landscape character sense.'*
- Runnymede Council: openness is *'epitomised by land that is not built upon and does not include buildings which are unobtrusive, camouflaged or screened in some way.'* - Heath & Hampstead Society

2.3.4 Identification of Villages to be Assessed

Most of the studies determined the villages to be assessed based on an established settlement hierarchy. In the case of Runnymede Council, where an established settlement hierarchy did not exist the study applied definitions of a ‘village’ from established sources.

Given that there is an established hierarchy of centres set out within the Joint Core Strategy (2009) this has been used to determine the villages to be assessed as part of this study.

2.3.5 Identification of Village Boundaries

Both villages to be considered as part of this study have an existing infill boundary set out in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011. These existing boundaries will be used as a starting point and will be reviewed to ensure they logically follow the built curtilage of the village.

It is noted that both villages have Conservation Areas however given that the Conservation Area boundaries have been defined according to historic elements for the purposes of heritage conservation, they are not relevant for the purposes of this study.

Where other studies identified a need for new village boundaries, these were defined according to durable, visible and permanent features, for example:

- Natural landscape features such as woodlands, hedgerows, rivers, or protected woodland.
- Manmade features, including roads, railway infrastructure or existing developments.
- A combination of durable features, such as A-roads, and less durable physical features, such as tree lines and garden boundaries.

2.4 Exceptional Circumstances

As set out in paragraph 145 of the NPPF, local authorities must demonstrate exceptional circumstances in order to amend Green Belt boundaries. The change in policy position from PPG2 to the current paragraph 149 of the NPPF relating to whether a Green Belt village should be washed over or inset represents the basis for an exceptional circumstances case to be developed. Having reviewed examples from elsewhere it appears that on its own, the change in policy position is unlikely to be sufficient given that it needs to be backed up by evidence. Thus, it is likely that the change in policy position combined with evidence of a robust and clearly justified assessment of the Green Belt villages based on a consistent methodology could provide the exceptional circumstances case required to amend Green Belt boundaries.

This has been demonstrated by Guildford Council. The Council’s Green Belt and Countryside Topic Paper (2017) at paragraph 4.8 states: *“Insofar as exceptional circumstances are required in order to amend Green Belt boundaries, the change in policy approach, as set out above, together with the detailed consideration of each village, provides the justification for amending Green Belt boundaries to inset selected villages.”* The detailed evidence on this is provided in the Council’s Green Belt and Countryside Study (2014). The Local Plan Inspector for the Guildford Local Plan at paragraph 101 of the Inspector’s Report (March 2019) concluded that there were exceptional circumstances to inset the villages from the Green Belt. He states: *“In previous plans, all the villages except for Ash Green were washed over by the Green Belt, but the NPPF states that only those villages whose open character makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt should be included within it. The submitted Plan therefore insets 14 villages from the Green Belt based on the comprehensive and well-founded work of the Green Belt and Countryside Study. The villages concerned do not have an open character that contributes to the openness of the Green Belt, and the Plan establishes the new Green Belt boundary around them.”*

The Inspector for the Runnymede Local Plan at paragraph 49 of the Inspector’s Report (May 2020) acknowledged the change in policy position in relation to Green Belt villages stating: *“Thirdly, the detailed*

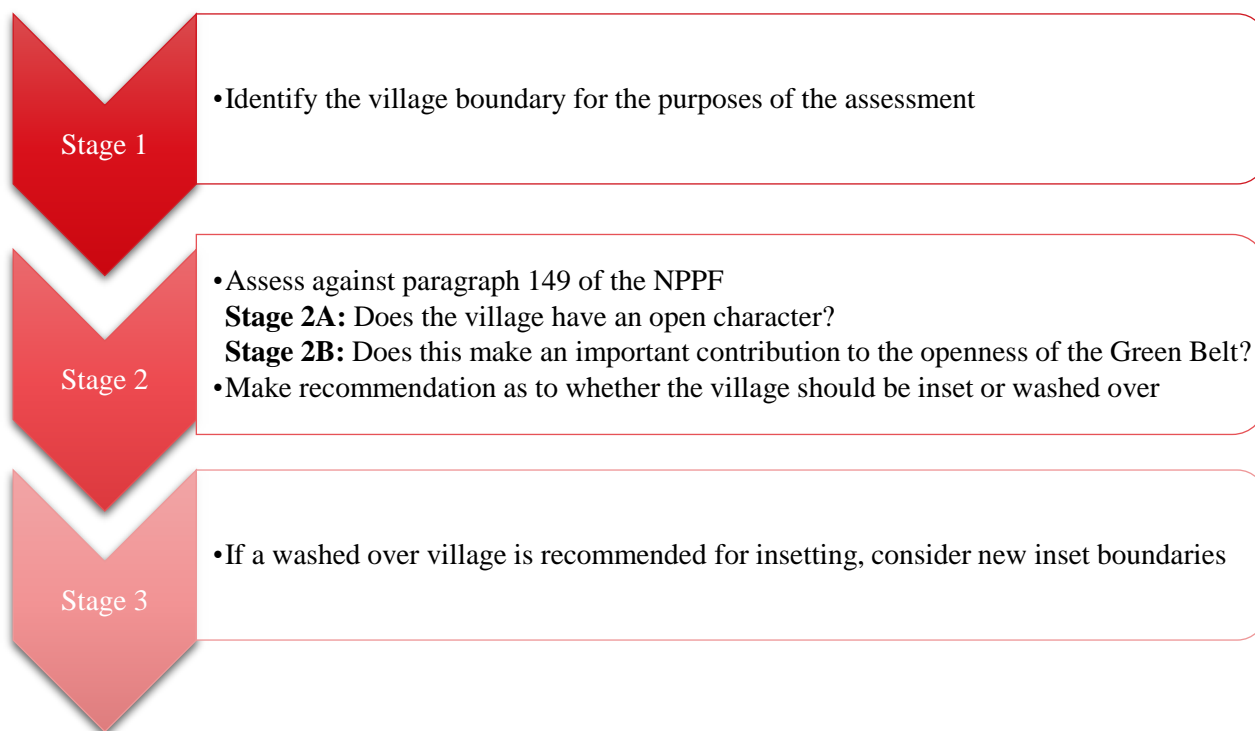
boundary of the Green Belt was established in 1986. Since then, development has rendered some parts of the boundary illogical or indefensible, and discrepancies have come to light that need to be corrected. Furthermore, national planning policy on villages that are 'washed over' by the Green Belt has altered since 1986, and it is necessary to review whether the policy framework for the borough's Green Belt villages remains sound." The Inspector concluded that based on the review of Green Belt villages, there were exceptional circumstances to inset the village of Thorpe. At paragraph 205, the Inspector states: *"On the balance of the evidence about the limited contribution that the village makes to the physical and visual openness of the Green Belt, it is justified and consistent with national planning policy to exclude Thorpe Village from the Green Belt. The Plan's definition of the new Green Belt boundary around village, as shown on the policies map, has been informed by Stage 2 of the Green Belt Villages Review and I am satisfied that it is justified, positively prepared, effective and consistent with NPPF, including that exceptional circumstances exist for the alteration of the Green Belt boundary."*

In contrast, the Local Plan Inspector for the Vale of White Horse Local Plan at paragraph 95 of the Inspector's Report (November 2016) concluded that the exceptional circumstances necessary to remove the washed over village of Farmoor from the Green Belt did not exist as he had seen *'no specific evidence to justify this particular change'*. Whilst the Vale of White Horse Green Belt Review (2014) did include a brief section which assessed whether currently washed over villages should be inset from the Green Belt taking into account paragraph 86 [of the NPPF 2012], this did not have a clear methodology or a clear basis and explanation for the recommendations made.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

Given that national policy and guidance does not provide a methodology for assessing Green Belt villages against paragraph 149 of the NPPF, the following methodology has been developed taking into account the comparative studies reviewed in the previous section and relevant national policy, guidance and case law. The methodology utilises an element of professional judgement however it is deliberately detailed and prescriptive in order to ensure a consistent and justified approach. The methodology follows a three stage approach:



An example of the assessment proforma which encompasses Stages 1-2 is included at Appendix B. This includes a row to reference the outcomes from the original Green Belt Assessment. Where the village has been assessed as part of a General Area or as a parcel in the Green Belt Assessment, the level of contribution against the five Green Belt purposes is noted in order to ensure consistency across the studies. *In some instances, the assessment outcomes from the Green Belt Assessment and from this study may not be aligned however this has been cross checked to ensure it is a result of this study adopting a slightly different methodology with different definitions to the Green Belt Assessment.*

The following section explains each stage of the approach in turn.

3.2 Stage 1: Identification of Village Boundary

Once the washed over villages have been defined, Stage 1 will require the identification of a boundary around the village for the purposes of the assessment. Both villages have an existing infill boundary set out in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011. These existing boundaries will be used as a starting point and will be reviewed to ensure they logically follow the built curtilage of the village. A desktop exercise using OS mapping will be used to complete this stage.

3.3 Stage 2: Assessment against Paragraph 149 of the NPPF

Paragraph 149 of the NPPF consists of two clear component parts: the assessment of open character and the assessment of openness. The comparative studies each assessed these components applying different criteria

as detailed in Section 2 above however all of them used a qualitative scoring system. The proforma at Appendix B sets out the criteria to be applied for each component and the definitions according to the high, medium and low assessment scale. The criteria in the proforma has been developed from the comparative review of other Green Belt Village studies and the descriptions noted in these assessments. The assessment scale does not include a ‘no’ category for ‘no open character’ or ‘no degree of openness’ as such situations will be encompassed within the ‘low’ category however will be noted in the explanatory text.

A combination of desktop research combined with site visits to each village will be used to complete Stage 2. The assessors will be fully briefed on the approach and methodology prior to undertaking the site visits.

Stage 2A: Does the village have an open character?

As shown in the proforma, the assessment of open character is focused on the following criteria:

- General pattern of development and density; and
- Scale and form (dwelling type, building height, extent of gaps/open spaces).

These criteria focus on the village itself. The intention is that open character will be assessed from within the village, either at the centre point of the village or where appropriate, from a number of key locations within the village (this will only be required if the village is large and/or has variations in character). The ‘Conclusion and Justification’ column of the proforma is provided for the assessor to explain the high/medium/low category chosen and how differences across the village have been accounted for (if relevant).

In determining whether the village has an open character, a majority based approach will be applied whereby if the majority of the criteria are assessed as high or medium, then the village is considered to have an open character. If the majority of the criteria are assessed as low, then the village is not considered to have an open character. Given that there are four criteria, if there is an equal split between them professional judgement should be applied in determining whether the village has an open character.

Stage 2B: Does this open character make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt?

Given that paragraph 149 specifically refers to ‘openness’, it is necessary to define openness for the purposes of this study. The Green Belt Assessment Part 1 (November 2016) on p36 provides a definition of openness based on the case of *Turner v SSCLG* [2016] EWCA Civ 466. This case established the principle that openness has both a spatial and a visual dimension. The Judge stated that the concept of ‘openness’ is not “narrowly limited to [a] volumetric approach...visual impact is implicitly part of the concept of ‘openness of the Green Belt.’”

More recently, the Supreme Court case of *R (on the application of Samuel Smith Old Brewery) v North Yorkshire County Council* [2020] UKSC 3 considered the concept of openness. The Judge concluded:

“[Openness] is a matter not of legal principle but of planning judgement for the planning authority or the inspector” [Paragraph 25] ... “...There was no error of law on the face of the report. Paragraph 90 [now NPPF146] does not expressly refer to visual impact as a necessary part of the analysis, nor in my view is it made so by implication. As explained in my discussion of the authorities, the matters relevant to openness in any particular case are a matter of planning judgement, not law.” [Paragraph 39]

The Supreme Court did not dispute the approach in *Turner* but acknowledged that *Turner* did not specify how visual effects may or may not be taken into account. The Supreme Court judgement clarifies that it is not an implicit requirement to consider the visual effects on Green Belt openness, however it does not imply that this is not relevant, it just wasn’t in this case. Ultimately, it is a matter of planning judgement for the planning authority or the Inspector.

The *Turner* case therefore continues to represent the correct understanding of the concept of openness which has also been formalised in PPG (see Section 2.2.2 above). Whilst spatial and visual openness is not explicitly defined, it is understood that spatial openness relates to the level of built form and visual openness relates to the perception of openness, for example, the impact topography, long views and vegetation have on the openness of the Green Belt.

This component of paragraph 149 is therefore focused on the relationship between the village and the wider Green Belt. This is primarily from the perspective of the views into and out of the village from the surrounding Green Belt as well as the relationship of open areas within the village to the surrounding Green Belt. The intention is that this will be assessed from the village envelope on the edge of the village as well as outside of the village (for example on key approaches into the village), and where appropriate from locations within the village where views are present. As shown in the proforma, the assessment of Stage 2B is focused on the following criteria:

- Definition of the village;
- Built form, topography and vegetation (focusing on how these enable or obstruct views); and
- Whether open areas within the village appear continuous with the surrounding Green Belt.

In determining whether the open character of the village makes an ‘important contribution’ to openness, a majority based approach will be applied whereby if the majority of the criteria are assessed as high or medium, then the village is considered to make an important contribution. If the majority of the criteria are assessed as low, then the village is not considered to make an important contribution.

Determining Whether a Village should be ‘Washed Over’ or ‘Inset’

In determining whether a village should be included (washed over) or excluded (inset) from the Green Belt against paragraph 149, both components of the assessment should be taken into account, however, Stage 2A should act as the initial filter. If it is concluded from Stage 2A that the village does not have an open character then there is no need to undertake Stage 2B and it should be concluded that the village should be excluded from the Green Belt. This is because paragraph 149 specifically refers to the contribution that the open character makes to the openness of the Green Belt thus if the village does not have an open character, consequently it cannot make an important contribution.

It is recognised that in some cases the recommendation will be clear cut however in other cases it may not be. The table below sets out the assessment outcomes from Stage 2A and 2B and how these may impact upon the recommendation. It is recognised that in some instances professional judgment will be required to determine the recommendation on the status of the village, particularly where the assessment is borderline and/or the characteristics are not uniform across the village. Where the village is recommended to be inset and there are significant differences in character across it, consideration could be given as to whether the whole of the village should be inset or instead whether certain areas should remain washed over.

Stage 2A	Stage 2B	Recommendation
Village has an open character	The open character of the village makes an important contribution to openness	Village should be washed over
Village does not have an open character	No need to undertake this stage	Village should be inset

Stage 2A	Stage 2B	Recommendation
Village has an open character (where Stage 2A was borderline and the criteria was split 2 / 2)	The open character of the village does not make an important contribution to openness	Village should be inset. This only applies where Stage 2A was borderline (e.g. the criteria was a 2 / 2 split) and professional judgement was taken to apply Stage 2B.
Village has an open character (where Stage 2A was borderline and the criteria was split 2 / 2)	The open character of the village makes an important contribution to openness	Village should be washed over

3.4 Stage 3: Definition of New Inset Boundaries

If a recommendation has been made to exclude a village (or parts of a village) from the Green Belt, then it will be necessary to define a new inset boundary taking into account paragraphs 145, 147 and 148 of the NPPF. Where it is recommended that a village with existing inset boundaries is to remain inset, these existing boundaries will remain and would not be redefined.

Paragraphs 145, 147 and 148 of the NPPF state the following:

“145. ...Authorities may choose to review and alter Green Belt boundaries where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, in which case proposals for changes should be made only through the plan-making process. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period...

...147. When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary...

148. When defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:

- (a) ensure consistency with the development plan’s strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- (b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- (c) where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- (d) make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;*
- (e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and*
- (f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.”*

Any alterations to Green Belt boundaries will require the Council to develop an exceptional circumstances case in accordance with paragraph 145 of the NPPF. The above factors would need to be taken into account when defining new Green Belt boundaries for the villages proposed to be inset. Paragraph 148, parts (b) and (e) will be the most relevant for the current study.

Where it is recommended through this study that the washed over villages be inset, it will be necessary to ensure that boundaries would endure beyond the plan period, as per paragraph 145 and paragraph 148(e) of the NPPF.

The following criteria will therefore be relevant in determining the new inset boundaries:

- Does the inset village include all land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?
- Is the boundary based on physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?

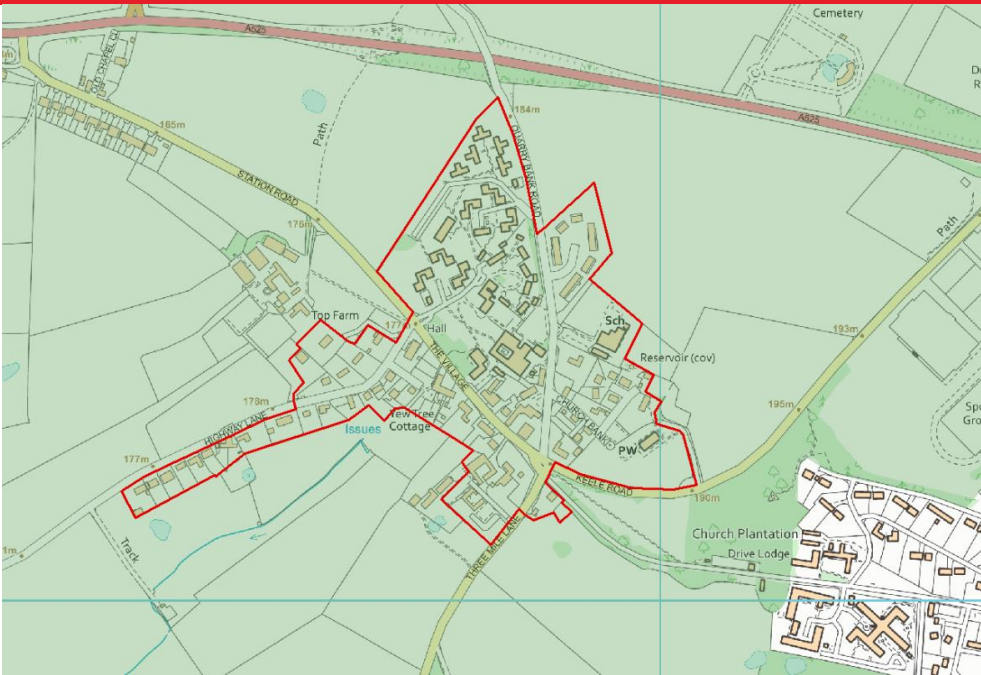
4. Village Assessments

4.1 Overview

This section sets out the findings from Stages 1 and 2. Stage 1 involved the definition of the village boundaries for the purposes of the assessment. The detailed assessment proformas explain how the village boundary has been defined. As set out in Section 3.2, the existing infill boundary has been used as a starting point and reviewed to ensure it logically follow the built curtilage of the village.

In undertaking Stage 2 and assessing the villages against paragraph 149 of the NPPF, the criteria set out in the proformas and the qualitative scoring system was applied. The justification for the chosen assessment scale is provided in the proformas. Stage 2 was completed via a site visit to each village combined with desktop research. Multiple points within the villages were visited by the assessor to enable them to form a balanced judgement.

4.2 Assessment Proformas

KEELE	
	
Context	
Current status of village	Washed over
Notes from Green Belt Assessment (November 2017)	<p>The village is located within General Area 13. General Area 13 made an overall moderate contribution to the Green Belt. It made a strong contribution to preventing towns from merging (purpose 2) due to it forming an essential gap between Newcastle-under-Lyme, Madeley and Madeley Heath. It made a moderate contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (purpose 3), preserving the setting and special character of historic towns (purpose 4) and assisting in urban regeneration (purpose 5). It should be noted that purpose 3 refers to Keele as an inset settlement in error. The General Area made a weak contribution to checking unrestricted sprawl (purpose 1).</p> <p>There were no parcels assessed which covered any areas of the village.</p>
Stage 1: Village Boundary	

Area to be assessed	The village had existing infill boundaries from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011. These boundaries have been used for the purposes of this assessment however they have been extended to include the full extent of the built curtilage of the village including all of the residential properties along Highway Lane, The Keele Centre on Three Mile Lane, Keele Lodge on Keele Drive, and St John the Baptist Keele Church and cemetery given thick vegetation marks a boundary around it. The agricultural buildings adjacent to The Keele Centre have been excluded given their use. As per the existing infill boundary, Top Farm to the north of the village has been excluded from the boundary given it is set back from the roads.				
Stage 2: Assessment against Paragraph 149 NPPF					
Stage 2A: Assessment of ‘open character’ of the village					
Criteria	Assessment Scale (Degree of open character)			Conclusion and Justification	
	High	Medium	Low		
General Pattern of Existing Development and Density	<i>Sparsely distributed or dispersed, low density</i>	<i>Linear or small clusters across the village, medium density</i>	<i>Clustered, high density</i>	Development in the village consists of a single cluster with linear development extending along Highway Lane. Density varies across the village with higher densities in the centre of the village and lower densities towards the edges of the village.	
Scale and Form	Types of dwelling	<i>Detached /semi-detached (large gardens)</i>	<i>semi-detached / terraced (multiple rows, medium sized gardens)</i>	<i>Flatted / terraced (limited or no gardens)</i>	The type of dwelling varies across the village. Within the Hawthorns, there is a mix of semi-detached and detached dwellings with medium-large sized gardens. Whilst to the west along Highway Lane the dwellings are detached with large gardens. To the north east of the village along Knights Croft and also in the centre of the village along Quarry Bank Road and The Village, there are a number of terraced properties.
	Building heights	<i>1-2 storeys</i>	<i>2-3 storeys</i>	<i>3+ storeys</i>	The buildings are mostly 2 storeys high interspersed with some 2.5 storey dwellings, including in the Hawthorns. There are also some terraced bungalows located along Knights Croft to the north east of the village.
	Extent of gaps / open spaces	<i>Gaps in frontages and/or areas of open space form prominent features within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is closely linked</i>	<i>Some gaps in frontages and/or some areas of open space within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is linked in parts across the village</i>	<i>Limited gaps in frontages and/or limited open space within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is not linked across the village</i>	The main cluster of the village located around the Hawthorns, Quarry Bank Road, and The Village has limited gaps in frontages which prevents the Green Belt linking across this cluster. In comparison, the linear development extending along Highway Lane allows for gaps in frontages and linkages across the Green Belt. There are some areas of open space within the village however these are not prominent features.

	<i>across the village</i>			
Does the village have an open character?	The village scored ‘medium’ for two criteria and ‘low’ for two. The assessment is therefore split 2 / 2 and professional judgement should be applied. The village consists of a single large cluster with linear development extending along Highway Lane. The building heights are mostly 2 storeys and dwelling types range from terraced to semi-detached and detached dwellings. The main cluster of the village has limited gaps in frontages. It has been deemed necessary to undertake Stage 3B to determine whether the open character of the village makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt.			
Stage 2B: Relationship of the village with the ‘openness’ of the Green Belt				
Criteria	Assessment Scale (Level of contribution)			Conclusion and Justification
	High	Medium	Low	
Views into and out of village from surrounding Green Belt				
Perceived definition of the village (visual perception)	<i>Village boundary is undefined</i>	<i>Part of village boundary is clearly defined but other parts unclear</i>	<i>Majority of village boundary is clearly defined</i>	The majority of the village boundary is clearly defined by roads and tree/hedgerow planting or boundary fences. The northern and western sections of the village are particularly clearly defined due to the building and garden lines. The south eastern corner of the village has the least definition however thick vegetation marks a boundary around the church.
Built form⁶	<i>Built form is sparse and/or building/frontages contain gaps allowing for views</i>	<i>Views are partially restricted by built form in places although gap in building/frontages allow for views in places</i>	<i>Views are largely restricted by built form and building/frontages are solid without gaps</i>	Views into and out of the main cluster of the village are largely restricted by built form. Whilst building frontages are not solid, the clustered nature of the built form restricts views. Some views out into the Green Belt are available on the edges of the cluster, such as along Knights Croft. The linear development along Highway Lane has gaps in frontages which allows for views.
Topography⁷	<i>Flat topography allowing views / rising enabling views</i>	<i>Mixed topography allowing some views</i>	<i>Steep and/or rising obstructing views</i>	The topography of the village has minor sloping with flat areas providing some views into the Green Belt.

⁶ This refers to any form of built development including residential properties, employment uses, warehouses, schools, and sports facilities.

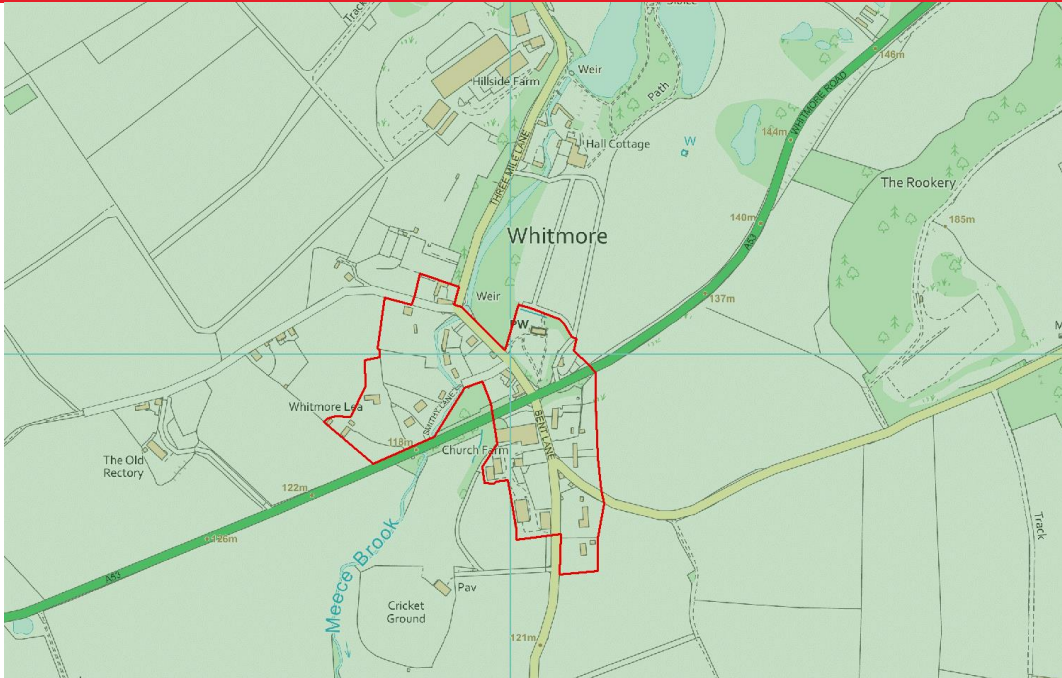
⁷ This refers to the configuration of the natural and artificial physical features which make up the surface of the land.

Vegetation⁸	<i>Low lying and/or sparse allowing views</i>	<i>Partially dense allowing for views in places</i>	<i>Tall and/or dense obstructing views</i>	Due to the clustered nature of the village, there are high levels of trees lining the majority of the roads which combined with the built form obstruct views.
Do open areas⁹ within the village appear continuous with the surrounding Green Belt	<i>Open areas continue into surrounding Green Belt</i>	<i>Few open areas continue into the surrounding Green Belt</i>	<i>No continuance of open areas into surrounding Green Belt</i>	Large residential gardens appear to continue into the Green Belt with minimal fencing and vegetation, particularly in the southern and western part of the village along Highway Lane and The Village. To the north east of the village, the gardens along Knights Croft also appear to continue into the Green Belt with low hedges. The northern part of the village around the Hawthorns is more defined by fenced boundaries.
Does the open character of the village make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt	The village scored ‘medium’ for two criteria and ‘low’ for three criteria. Its open character is therefore judged not to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt.			
Summary and Recommendations				
Summary	At Stage 3A the village scored ‘medium’ for two criteria and ‘low’ for two. The assessment was therefore split 2 / 2 and professional judgement was applied. Due to the single large cluster of development with varied dwelling types and limited gaps in frontages, it was deemed necessary to undertake Stage 3B in order to determine whether the open character of the village makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. At Stage 3B the village scored ‘medium’ for two criteria and ‘low’ for three. The majority of the village boundary is clearly defined and views into and out of the village are mostly restricted by built form, with the exception of Highway Lane. Whilst the topography is mostly flat allowing for some views, views are predominantly obstructed by built form and vegetation. The open character was therefore not judged to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. Thus it does not accord with paragraph 149 and should be inset within the Green Belt.			
Recommendation	Village should be changed from washed over to inset			

⁸ This refers to the assemblage of plants, trees or shrubs.

⁹ This refers to gardens, village greens, parks, roadside verges and embankments, and other incidental spaces within the village.

WHITMORE



Context

Current status of village Washed over

Notes from Green Belt Assessment (November 2017) The village is located in between General Areas 14 and 15. General Area 14 made an overall moderate contribution to the Green Belt whilst General Area 15 made an overall strong contribution. Both General Areas made a strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (purpose 3) and referred to including the washed over village of Whitmore. General Area 14 made a moderate contribution to preventing neighbouring towns from merging (purpose 2) and preserving the setting and special character of historic towns (purpose 4). General Area 15 made no contribution to purpose 2 and 4. Both General Areas made a moderate contribution to assisting in urban regeneration (purpose 5).

There were no parcels assessed which covered any areas of the village.

Stage 1: Village Boundary

Area to be assessed The village had no existing boundaries. The village boundary used here consists of the built curtilage of the village including the large grounds and gardens which accompany a number of the residential properties. This includes properties along Smithy Lane, Three Mile Lane and Bent Lane. The Parish Church of St Mary and All Saints Whitmore has been included.

The cricket ground to the south of the village has not been included given that there is a clear separation and it is set back from the road. The residential properties further to the west of Three Mile Lane have also been excluded as they are clearly separated from the rest of the village. Further to the north, Whitmore Hall, Hall Cottage and Hillside Farm have been excluded given the separation between them and the rest of the village.

Stage 2: Assessment against Paragraph 149 NPPF

Stage 2A: Assessment of 'open character' of the village

Criteria	Assessment Scale (Degree of open character)			Conclusion and Justification
	High	Medium	Low	

General Pattern of Existing Development and Density		<i>Sparsely distributed or dispersed, low density</i>	<i>Linear or small clusters across the village, medium density</i>	<i>Clustered, high density</i>	Development in the village is low density and dispersed across Whitmore Road, Bent Lane and Three Mile Lane.
Scale and Form	Types of dwelling	<i>Detached /semi-detached (large gardens)</i>	<i>semi-detached / terraced (multiple rows, medium sized gardens)</i>	<i>Flatted / terraced (limited or no gardens)</i>	Housing is predominately large detached dwellings which are set back from the road, with some terraced housing.
	Building heights	<i>1-2 storeys</i>	<i>2-3 storeys</i>	<i>3+ storeys</i>	Buildings are mostly 2 storeys, with some 3-storey buildings.
	Extent of gaps / open spaces	<i>Gaps in frontages and/or areas of open space form prominent features within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is closely linked across the village</i>	<i>Some gaps in frontages and/or some areas of open space within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is linked in parts across the village</i>	<i>Limited gaps in frontages and/or limited open space within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is not linked across the village</i>	There are significant gaps within the frontages of the village, with clear views linking the Green Belt across the village.
Does the village have an open character?	The village scored 'high' for three out of the four criteria, with the fourth scoring 'medium'. The score is overall 'high' due to the majority 'high' scores. Therefore, the village has an open character.				
Stage 2B: Relationship of the village with the 'openness' of the Green Belt					
Criteria	Assessment Scale (Level of contribution)			Conclusion and Justification	
	High	Medium	Low		
Views into and out of village from surrounding Green Belt					
Perceived definition of the village (visual perception)	<i>Village boundary is undefined</i>	<i>Part of village boundary is clearly defined but other parts unclear</i>	<i>Majority of village boundary is clearly defined</i>	The majority of the village boundary is undefined due to dispersed development and large residential gardens.	
Built form¹⁰	<i>Built form is sparse and/or building/fro</i>	<i>Views are partially restricted by built form in</i>	<i>Views are largely restricted by built form and</i>	There are substantial gaps in the village frontage's providing views	

¹⁰ This refers to any form of built development including residential properties, employment uses, warehouses, schools, and sports facilities.

	<i>ntages contain gaps allowing for views</i>	<i>places although gap in building/front ages allow for views in places</i>	<i>building/front ages are solid without gaps</i>	into the Green Belt with sparse built form across the village.
Topography¹¹	<i>Flat topography allowing views / rising enabling views</i>	Mixed topography allowing some views	<i>Steep and/or rising obstructing views</i>	The village topography has a gentle slope towards the South of the village mixed with a flatter topography in the North of the village.
Vegetation¹²	<i>Low lying and/or sparse allowing views</i>	Partially dense allowing for views in places	<i>Tall and/or dense obstructing views</i>	The vegetation at the crossroads in the centre of the village is substantial, which can obstruct views. Elsewhere in the village there is low lying vegetation allowing views.
Do open areas¹³ within the village appear continuous with the surrounding Green Belt	Open areas continue into surrounding Green Belt	<i>Few open areas continue into the surrounding Green Belt</i>	<i>No continuance of open areas into surrounding Green Belt</i>	The village appears to be continuous with the Green Belt through large, open residential gardens and gaps within frontages enabling views.
Does the open character of the village make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt	<p><i>The village scored 'high' in three out of the five criteria and 'medium' in the two other criteria. The score is overall 'high' due to the majority 'high' scores.</i></p> <p><i>The village is therefore considered to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt.</i></p>			
Summary and Recommendations				
Summary	The village is assessed as having an open character and is considered to be making an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, due to the majority of 'high' scores across the criteria. The village's low density, predominately detached housing with large open gardens provide gaps in frontages for clear views and an undefined boundary between the village and the Green Belt.			
Recommendation	Retain as washed over			

4.3 Summary

As set out in the proformas above it is recommended the Keele is considered for inseting (a case for exceptional circumstances would need to be developed) and Whitmore remains as a washed over village.

¹¹ This refers to the configuration of the natural and artificial physical features which make up the surface of the land.

¹² This refers to the assemblage of plants, trees or shrubs.

¹³ This refers to gardens, village greens, parks, roadside verges and embankments, and other incidental spaces within the village.

5. Stage 3: New Inset Boundaries

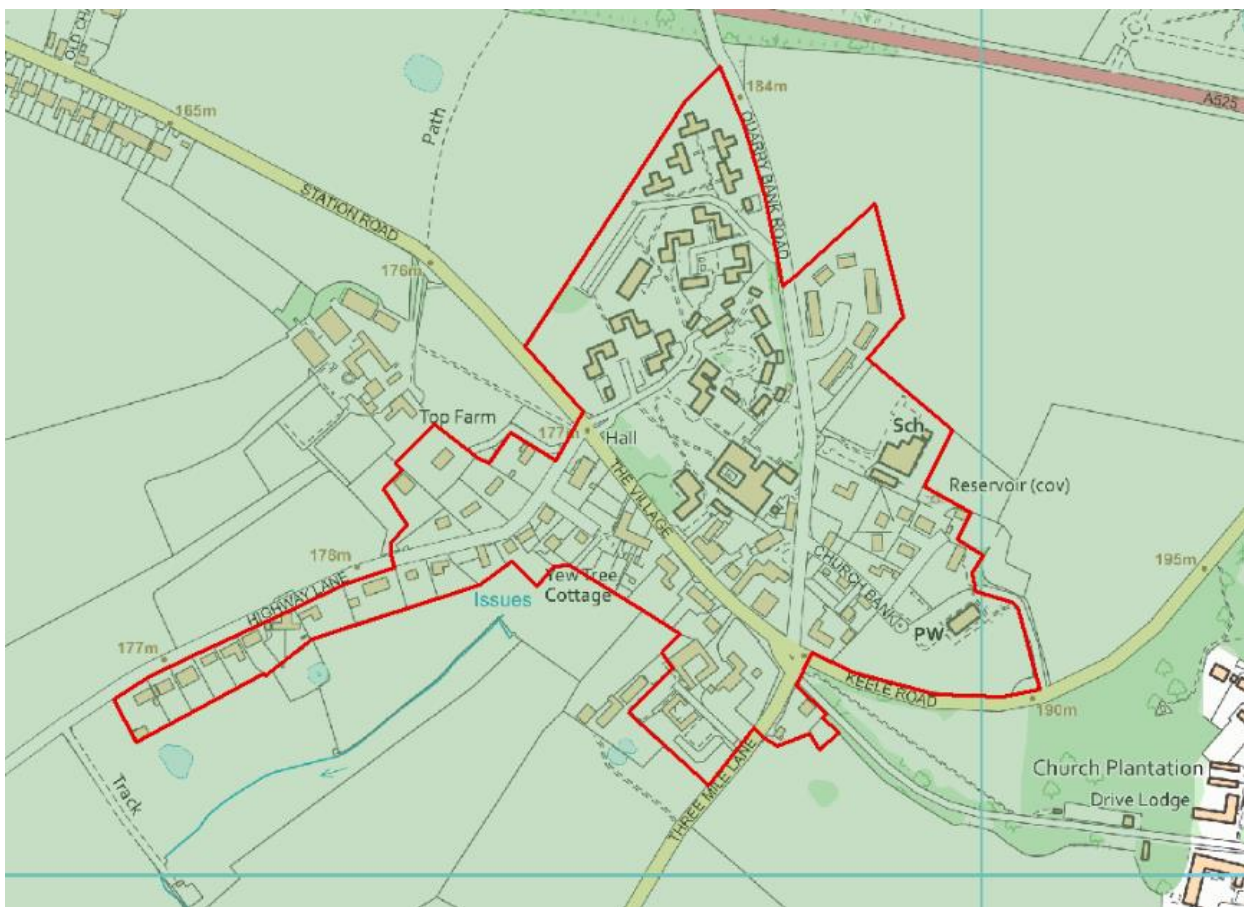
5.1 Overview

Stage 3 involved defining a new inset boundary for the village recommended to be inset within the Green Belt – Keele. The methodology set out in Section 3.4 identifies the following criteria based on paragraph 145, 147 and 148 of the NPPF which was used to determine the proposed new inset boundary:

- Does the inset village include all land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?
- Is the boundary based on physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?

The proposed new inset boundary for Keele is shown below along with the reasoning and justification for the boundary used, against the criteria. This is the same boundary used for Stage 2 (as shown in the assessment proformas).

5.2 Keele



Boundary Criteria	Justification
<p>Does the inset village include all land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?</p>	<p>Yes, the boundary includes the main cluster of development and the ribbon development along Highway Lane. It retains much of the existing infill boundaries from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011 however has been extended to include the full extent of the built curtilage of the village including all of the residential properties along Highway Lane, The Keele Centre on Three Mile Lane, Keele Lodge on Keele Drive, and St John the</p>

Baptist Keele Church and cemetery given thick vegetation marks a boundary around it.

The agricultural buildings adjacent to The Keele Centre have been excluded given their use therefore it is necessary to keep this land permanently open to prevent harm to the Green Belt. As per the existing infill boundary, Top Farm to the north of the village has been excluded from the boundary given it is set back from the roads and is slightly separated therefore it is necessary to keep this area permanently open to prevent harm to the surrounding Green Belt.

Is the boundary based on physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?

Yes, the boundaries consist of roads and the limits of development which are readily recognisable as they consist of garden, fence, hedge and tree line boundaries. Such boundaries are likely to be permanent.

6. Summary and Conclusion

This study provides an independent and objective assessment of the extent to which villages washed over by the Green Belt meet the requirements of paragraph 149 NPPF.

Given that national policy and guidance does not provide a methodology for assessing Green Belt villages against paragraph 149 of the NPPF, a methodology was developed taking into account comparative studies, national policy, guidance and case law. The three stage methodology utilises an element of professional judgement however it is deliberately detailed and prescriptive in order to ensure a consistent and justified approach.

Within the settlement hierarchy set out in the adopted Joint Core Spatial Strategy (2009), all of the villages apart from Keele and Whitmore have inset boundaries and are therefore excluded from the Green Belt. As such, only the washed over villages of Keele and Whitmore were considered as part of this study.

Stage 1 of the methodology involved defining the village boundary for the purposes of the assessment. Both villages have an existing infill boundary set out in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011. These existing boundaries were used as a starting point and reviewed further.

In order to assess the village against paragraph 149 a number of qualitative scoring criteria were developed. These criteria are shown on the assessment proformas. Stages 1 and 2 are set out in the completed assessment proformas for each village. A site visit of each village was undertaken in order to complete the proformas. A recommendation was made as to whether the village should remain washed over or be inset within the Green Belt. It was recommended the Keele is considered for inset and Whitmore remains as a washed over village. As stated in Section 1, the recommendations for removal from the Green Belt does not imply that the Council must accept these or that they will appear in an adopted Local Plan.

Stage 3 of the methodology involved proposing new inset boundaries for the village recommended to be inset. The criteria for this was based on paragraphs 145, 147 and 148 of the NPPF. If the Council wish to take forward the recommendation to alter Green Belt boundaries, an exceptional circumstances case will need to be developed.

Appendix A

Green Belt Village Studies from Other Local Authorities

A.1 Green Belt Village Studies from Other Local Authorities

Guildford Borough Council: Green Belt and Countryside Study (2014) Volume IV – Insetting of Villages and Defining New Green Belt boundaries within Guildford Council in accordance with the NPPF

Undertaken by Pegasus Planning – The Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (2015-2034) was adopted in April 2019.

The Local Plan Inspector’s Report (March 2019) at paragraph 101 states: *“In previous plans, all the villages except for Ash Green were washed over by the Green Belt, but the NPPF states that only those villages whose open character makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt should be included within it. The submitted Plan therefore insets 14 villages from the Green Belt based on the comprehensive and well-founded work of the Green Belt and Countryside Study. The villages concerned do not have an open character that contributes to the openness of the Green Belt, and the Plan establishes the new Green Belt boundary around them...Having regard to the NPPF, there are exceptional circumstances to inset these villages from the Green Belt.”*

What is the approach to reviewing Green Belt villages?

In Volume IV of the Guildford Borough Green Belt and Countryside Study, the Council assess the insetting of villages and the defining of new Green Belt boundaries using a three stage approach:

Stage 1: Assessing the degree of openness within each village through analysis of village form, density and extent of existing developed land

Stage 2: Assessing the village surrounds and locations of potential Green Belt defensible boundaries surrounding each village across Guildford Borough

Stage 3: Assessing the suitability of each village for insetting within the Green Belt and defining new Green Belt boundaries

How is open character assessed?

Areas of high, medium and low development density were identified within the village area.

Built development is the dominant characteristic in high development density areas, while visible open areas are the dominant characteristic for low development density areas.

Highly developed settlements with little sense of openness within the built form were classed as making no important contribution to the Green Belt, and therefore would be appropriate to be excluded and form inset land.

The areas were defined as follows:

- High Development Density – generally includes areas of flats, terrace, detached, semi-detached or singular buildings within densely distributed clusters with enclosed street frontages, small scale garden plots enclosed by fencelines, hedgerows and other buildings. Built development forms the dominant characteristic;
- Medium Development Density – generally includes areas of detached, semidetached or singular buildings within closely distributed clusters within medium scale garden plots, small holdings, open spaces or small fields. Built development is the prevalent characteristic interspersed with visible open areas; and

- Low Development Density – generally includes singular detached buildings that are sparsely distributed within large garden plots, country estates or open farmland. Open areas form the dominant characteristic interspersed with infrequent buildings.

How is openness assessed? The locations of developed and open areas were mapped to determine their relation to the openness of the surrounding Green Belt. A judgement on their openness was based on professional discretion, using aerial imagery, base mapping and site surveys to support the decision.

Does the assessment include a definition for openness? There is not a definition of openness however the study explains how ‘important contribution to openness’ is assessed, as follows:

“13.16 NPPF paragraph 86 [replaced by paragraph 140] notes that if the open character of the village makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should remain washed over by the Green Belt. It is recognised that the absence of built development and presence of trees can contribute to openness in Green Belt terms. In this instance however, paragraph 86 requires the contribution to the openness to be important i.e. significant or considerable in other words. For this to occur, a high degree of perception of this openness contribution is required i.e. it is readily apparent that the role that the village environment serves to contribute to openness of the wider Green Belt.

13.17 Where a settlement is highly developed and has little sense of openness within the built form, there would be no important contribution to be secured and therefore it would be unnecessary to include such land and it would be appropriate for it to be excluded and form ‘inset’ land within the Green Belt. Additionally, if such land is then physically enclosed to a significant degree by topography and/or vegetation there would be little opportunity to observe the land in question, and little opportunity to perceive how such land could significantly contribute to openness in Green Belt terms, thus limiting its opportunity to contribute to the openness of the area to any significant degree or attach any sense of importance. In these circumstances i.e. a combination of a strong sense of development with little sense of openness, coupled with a well contained village (physically and/or visually), the land will be unable to make an important contribution either literally or perceptually, and therefore can be argued as unnecessary in designation terms and could justifiably be excluded from the Green Belt in accordance with the NPPF guidance. Such an arrangement would result in a village being inset in the Green Belt.”

How is the assessment scored? Each village is subject to 3 criteria:

- Does the majority of the village exhibit an open character?
- Do open areas within the village appear continuous with surrounding open land beyond the village – from within and/or outside of the village?
- Does the majority of the village exhibit incomplete, indistinguishable boundaries that would not permit the provision of new Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the requirements of NPPF paragraph 85 (last point)?

Each of these questions is given either a + or -. Villages that scored 2 +’s or more were classed as making an important contribution to the Green Belt and inseting was not considered appropriate.

Villages that scored 2 -’s or more were classed as making no important contribution to the Green Belt and should be inset.

Villages that exhibited a combination of + and – were either determined with justification or subject to further discussion with the adjoining authority.

How does the study determine what constitutes a village?

Villages are determined by settlement hierarchy, given a number between based on factors including:

- Population
- Defined settlement
- Shops
- Schools
- Other community facilities
- Public transport
- Employment

How are new village boundaries defined?

The boundaries of each land parcel are clearly demarcated by visible landscape features such as woodlands, hedgerows, roads or railway infrastructure. This ensures that if a village is deemed suitable for development, it would be physically and visually contained, and not need altering at the end of the plan period.

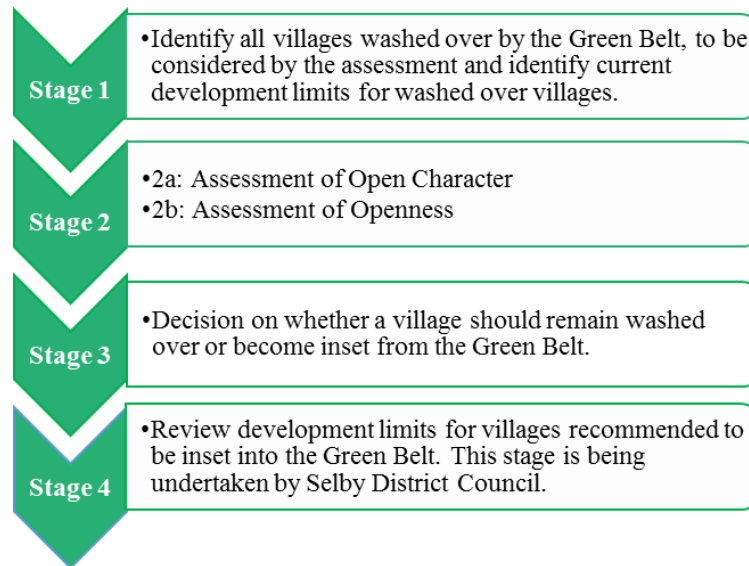
The detailed locations of defensible Green Belt boundaries were identified from site surveys, aerial imagery and detailed OS mapping between 1:5,000 and 1:12,000 scale. The detailed locations of woodlands, hedgerows, treebelts, highways and railway infrastructure surrounding each village were also mapped.

Recommended boundaries do include treebelts, woodlands and hedgerows. Whilst they consist of plants, such features are clearly recognisable, and with regards permanence will often be in place as long as, if not longer than, much built development. Such features are therefore considered to adhere to the boundary definition requirements, as set out in paragraph 85 of the NPPF.

Undertaken by Arup – not been through Examination

What is the approach to reviewing Green Belt villages?

The method assesses whether the villages currently washed over by Green Belt should remain washed over:



How is open character assessed?

Open character is assessed throughout each village, as well as from the edges and centre of the settlement looking outwards and views looking towards the village, according to the following qualitative scoring:

High: The village has an open character with infrequent buildings, e.g. sparsely distributed detached dwellings set in large plots. There is inconsistent or dispersed built form. There are open areas throughout the village development limits contributing to a sense of openness. There are low levels of vegetation or low lying vegetation which allow open views. There is a lack of separation between the Green Belt and the village Development Limits.

Medium: The village has a built character with clustered detached or semi-detached properties set in medium plots. There may be areas of open space within the development limits, but some areas are enclosed due to built form, rising topography or dense vegetation. There are partially obscured views into and out of the village due to built form, topography or dense vegetation. There is some sense of separation between the Green Belt and the village Development Limits

Low: The village is dominated by built form with terraced properties with yards, closely spaced detached or semi-detached properties set in small plots. There is a lack of open space within the development limits and a perception of enclosure due to built form, dense vegetation or steep or rising topography. Views into and out of the village are predominantly restricted by built form, topography or dense vegetation. There is clear separation between the Green Belt and the village Development Limits.

Criteria	Strength Scale		
	High	Medium	Low
Density of development	Low density	Medium density	High density
Spacing of built form	Open	Partially open	Narrow
Vegetation	Low lying and/or sparse	Partially dense	Tall and/or dense
Topography	Flat allowing views	Mixed allowing some views	Steep and/or rising obstructing views
Open Space	Space forms prominent feature	Some open space	Limited open space
	If the majority of the criteria scores a combination of high and medium, then the village is considered to be open in character.		If the majority of the criteria score a combination of low and medium, then the village is considered to not have an open character.

How is openness assessed?

Through a physical and/or perceptual connection between the openness of the village and the openness of the Green Belt. A perceptual connection is one that relates to the ability to interpret or become aware of something through the senses including experiencing views. This does not require direct access to open space and green infrastructure, but can be perceived.

Criteria	Strength Scale		
	High	Medium	Low
Relationship between Green Belt and built form	Continuous perception	Continuous perception exists in parts	Broken perception
Views into and out of the village	Open	Partial views	Obstructed/Restricted
	If the majority of the criteria score a combination of high and medium, then the village is considered continuous with the Green Belt.		If the majority of the criteria score a combination of low and medium, then the village is considered not be continuous with the Green Belt.

Where the majority of criteria score medium, professional judgement informed by site work has been used to identify whether the village is considered to have an open character. The criteria to be used in this methodology are defined as:

- **Relationship with the surrounding Green Belt** which is concerned with the physical and/or perceptual connectivity of the openness of a village with the surrounding open countryside, for example a village surrounded by dense trees is not visually connected to the surrounding open countryside.
- **Views into and out of the village** which relates to the visual permeability of a village, is heavily influenced by the factors which inform the assessment of openness. The presence of open views into and out of a village contribute to the physical and/or perceived continuation of the open character of the Green Belt into the village.

Does the assessment include a definition for openness?

In the Selby Stage 1 Green Belt Study, openness is defined as the ‘extent to which Green Belt land could be considered open from an absence of built form and urbanising influences, rather than from a landscape character sense’.

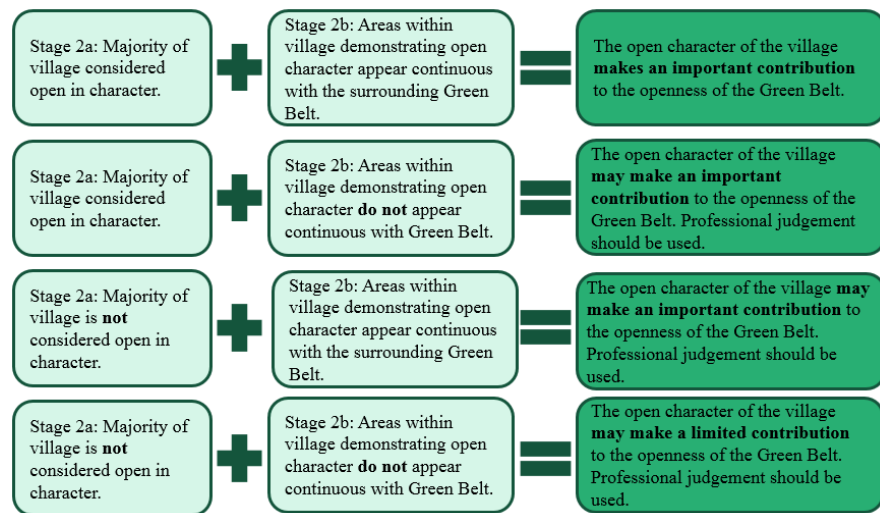
How is the assessment scored?

Qualitative – The degree of open character and degree of openness are qualitatively assessed on a scale of High, Medium and Low as shown above.

The overall scoring in determining whether a village should be inset or washed over firstly defined ‘important contribution’ in terms of the qualitative scoring system. For the open character of a village to make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt a high or medium-high degree of open character was required based on the criteria assessed in Stage 2.

For a village to exhibit a limited contribution, a low or low-medium degree of open character was required based on these criteria. If the village exhibits a limited contribution to the openness of the Green Belt then it would be appropriate to inset the village within the Green Belt. Villages that are recommended to be inset will then be considered in Stage 4 to determine whether the ‘*character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons*’ such as by a conservation area or planning policy.

Combining the outcomes from Stages 2a and 2b determines whether the village makes an important contribution or may make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt.



How does the study determine what constitutes a village?

Villages are defined by settlement hierarchy as of the Selby Core Strategy 2013.

Settlements are ranking in the following order:

- Principal Town
- Local Service Centres
- Designated Service Villages
- Secondary Villages with defined Development Limits

All villages investigated within this study are identified as Secondary Villages with defined Development Limits. The Core Strategy emphasises that growth in these areas would be inappropriate with the exception of some housing development within Development Limits such as conversions or replacement dwellings.

How are new village boundaries defined?

Boundaries are defined by their durability. Durable features are both natural and manmade, including rivers, protected woodland, motorways or existing developments. Less durable features include field, tree lines, or unmade roads. Therefore, new village boundaries are defined along durable borders which preserve

the openness of the Green Belt without the need to be altered at the end of the plan period.

Vale of White Horse District Council: Green Belt Review Phase 1&2 (2014)

Undertaken by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd / Terra Firma Consultancy – Local Plan Part 1 adopted in December 2016 following Examination in 2015-16.

The Local Plan Inspector did not specifically comment on the Green Belt Village assessment methodology however the village study had recommended that the washed over village of Farmoor should be inset from the Green Belt. The Inspector stated at paragraph 95 of the Inspectors Report (November 2016): *‘I have seen no specific evidence to justify this particular change. Moreover, it is unclear to me why Farmoor should be an “inset” village when other smaller villages (as defined by policy CP3), including Dry Sanford, Shippon, South Hinksey, Sunningwell and Wytham would remain “washed-over” by the Green Belt. If and when a subsequent review of the Green Belt takes place it would make sense to consider, as part of this, the appropriateness of each of these villages as being either “inset” or “washed-over” by the Green Belt. However, at the current time I conclude that the exceptional circumstances necessary to remove Farmoor from the Green Belt do not exist.’*

What is the approach to reviewing Green Belt villages?

The Green Belt Village Assessment forms a part of the wider Green Belt Assessment. Section 12 of the document contains the assessment which consists of a simple table of the washed over villages being assessed against paragraph 86 according to open character and contribution to openness, from which a recommendation is made. There does not appear to be a clearly defined methodology for the assessment against paragraph 86 [now paragraph 140].

Stage 1: subdivide green belt into land parcels.

Stage 2: assessment of edge of settlement within land parcels against five green belt purposes and recommendations.

Stage 3: assessment of whole land parcels against five green belt purposes and recommendations.

Stage 4: assessment of additional land for inclusion in an extension to the green belt and recommendations.

Stage 5: assessment of small villages within the green belt and their potential for inclusion as inset settlements within the green belt and recommendations.

How is open character assessed?

There does not appear to be any set criteria which has been applied. Example of the description as follows ‘Small linear rural hamlet broken up by tree lines, very small fields and large gardens’.

How is openness assessed?

There does not appear to be any clear criteria which are to be used. The assessment is related to the landscape which the village forms part of, for example: ‘Part of the vale landscape south of Wootton.’

Does the assessment include a definition for openness?

There is no definition for openness as part of the village assessment.

How is the assessment scored?

There is no scoring system used. It is unclear how the descriptions in the open character and openness columns relate to the recommendation.

How does the study determine what constitutes a village?

There is no definition for villages, or what constitutes a village, but under the Core Strategy villages are ranked according to settlement hierarchy.

How are new village boundaries defined?

Study notes that precise boundaries will need to be assessed however does not set out how this will be done.

Runnymede Borough Council: Green Belt Villages Review (February 2016)

Undertaken by Runnymede Council – The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan was adopted in July 2020 following examination in 2018/19.

The Local Plan Inspector’s Report (May 2020) at paragraph 67-68 considers the wider Green Belt Review (which included the Green Belt villages review). The Inspector states:

“67. The Green Belt review was undertaken as a series of complementary studies and carried out in stages that examined it first at a strategic level, and then at a more fine-grained level to assess the performance of smaller parcels of land against Green Belt purposes; the studies also included a Green Belt Villages review and a technical review of the Green Belt boundaries. The overall process took account of good practice advice from the Planning Advisory Service, comparator studies carried out by other local planning authorities whose plans were found sound, and Landscape Institute advice on landscape visual assessment.

68. I consider the robustness of the Green Belt review and the justification for the proposed release of land in more detail in Issues 3 and 4 below in relation to the Plan’s site allocations. In summary, I have concluded that the review was comprehensive, systematic and based on a robust, consistently applied methodology that properly reflected local circumstances and the unique characteristics of the borough in assessing how the Green Belt serves the purposes laid down in national planning policy.”

At paragraphs 204-205 of the Inspector’s Report, the Inspector considered the exceptional circumstances case for excluding Thorpe from the Green Belt:

“204. I have concluded in Issue 2 above that there are exceptional circumstances in principle for altering the Green Belt boundary in the Plan. In bringing forward the Plan, the Council carried out a review of the Green Belt villages, including Thorpe, taking account of the advice in paragraph 86 of NPPF. Particular attention was paid to the character of the edges of the village envelope and their relationship with the wider Green Belt.

205. On the balance of the evidence about the limited contribution that the village makes to the physical and visual openness of the Green Belt, it is justified and consistent with national planning policy to exclude Thorpe Village from the Green Belt. The Plan’s definition of the new Green Belt boundary around village, as shown on the policies map, has been informed by Stage 2 of the Green Belt Villages Review and I am satisfied that it is justified, positively prepared, effective and consistent with NPPF, including that exceptional circumstances exist for the alteration of the Green Belt boundary.”

What is the approach to reviewing Green Belt villages?

Stage 1 - Identify developed areas in Runnymede which are currently ‘washed over’ by (included within) the Green Belt and which could be considered ‘villages’ or ‘settlements which function as a village’.

Stage 2 – If an area is considered for review, identify a boundary around the village for the purposes of a working assessment.

Stage 3 - Consider whether the village has an open character.

Stage 4 - Consider the relationship that the village has with the openness of the surrounding Green Belt.

Stage 5 – Make a decision as to whether a village should be ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt or if it should be excluded;

Stage 6 - If a decision has been made to exclude a village (or parts of), consider detailed village boundaries.

How is open character assessed?

A detailed consideration of a village’s character will include the following:

- Density – Consider the density of built/residential development as a whole and how this differs (or not) across the village area;

- Scale & Form - Consider different development forms and how this changes (or not) across the village area taking into account:
- Type of dwelling – flatted, terraced, semi-detached, detached
- Plot size – small, medium, large
- Building heights – one, two or more storeys in height
- Enclosures or barriers - natural or man-made
- Extent of open space or gaps in frontages – Are there any open areas within the village boundary or gaps in frontages? Are views restricted or if gaps in frontages are evident are views through obscured and by what?
- Topography – flat, undulating, sloped, rolling. Significant stands of trees/hedgerows.

The degree of open character exhibited and whether this is low, medium or high should taken into account the above factors. The criteria was developed using comparative studies as a guide. The descriptions for low, medium and high are as follows:

Degree of Open Character	Definition
Low	Area dominated by built form with closely spaced two story or higher flats, terraces or semi-detached/detached properties set in modest/small plots in uniform patterns or blocks. Enclosures predominantly man-made. Open areas are few or incidental with limited gaps in frontages restricting or partially restricting short views through. Any longer views through gaps are obscured or partially obscured predominantly by built development. Limited stands of trees/copses or non-landscaped vegetation.
Medium	Area has a built character with clusters of detached/semi-detached single/two storey dwellings set in modest plots. Modest gaps in frontages with largely unrestricted short views through. Longer views partially obscured by built development or obscured/partially obscured by vegetation. Enclosures either natural or man-made. Modest amount of open areas within the village boundary.
High	Buildings are dispersed within the village boundary and are predominantly detached single/two storey set in large plots. Extensive gaps between development with short views predominantly unrestricted and long views unobscured or partially obscured by vegetation. Enclosures are either natural or if man made are low lying or obscured by vegetation. Open areas present throughout the village boundary.

How is openness assessed?

The relationship the village has with the openness of the surrounding Green Belt is based on:

- Views into and out of the village along its periphery and whether views in/out are restricted and/or obscured and if so, whether by natural, man-made or topographical features.
- Relationship between open or private amenity areas on the periphery of the village and the surrounding Green Belt and how these interact with any gap to an adjacent settlement or development.

Villages were qualitatively categorised based on the degree of openness within the surrounding green belt into high, medium, and low categories:

Degree of Definition of Openness	
Low	Views into and out of the village are largely restricted or partially restricted by built development or topography with any views through obscured predominantly by built development. No continuance of open areas into the surrounding Green Belt. Majority of village boundary clearly defined.
Medium	Views into and out of the village partially restricted by built development or topography or restricted by vegetation. Views through partially obscured by built development or vegetation. Few open areas continue into surrounding area. Part of village boundary clearly defined but other parts unclear.
High	Views into and out of the village are largely unrestricted by built development or topography and/or only partially be vegetation. Views through unobscured by built development or only partially by vegetation. Open areas continue into the surrounding Green Belt. No clearly defined village boundary.

Does the assessment include a definition for openness?

The assessment references court cases that state that openness is ‘epitomised by land that is not built upon and does not include buildings which are unobtrusive, camouflaged or screened in some way.’ - Heath & Hampstead Society v London Borough of Camden [2007] EWHC 977 (Admin) & Timmins/Lynn v Gedling Borough Council [2014] EWHC 654

In assessing the openness of the village of Thorpe, the review considers: density, open space, spacing, views, vegetation and topography.

How is the assessment scored?

Qualitative- the assessment is scored by High, Medium, or Low categories (these are defined separately according to the assessment of open character and separately for the assessment of openness – as above)

In terms of coming to an overall judgement, Stage 5 explains the approach:

“3.23 A decision will be made as to whether a village should be ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt or if it should be excluded based on the results from stages 3 and 4. It is likely that different areas of a village will exhibit different density and forms of development rather than exhibit a uniform pattern. Similarly views into or out of a village from different locations will exhibit different levels of restriction and boundaries are likely to be distinct/indistinct in different areas. Where this is the case, a view will be taken as to how different areas combine to produce an overall degree of open character or openness (or not).

3.24 As such, if the majority of the village is considered to have a high degree of open character and its impact on the openness of the Green Belt is high then the village should be ‘washed over’.

3.25 If the majority of the village exhibits a low open character with a low impact on the openness of the surrounding Green Belt, the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.

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

could be given to whether areas of a village should remain ‘washed over’ and others excluded.”

How does the study determine what constitutes a village?

The document notes that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a village is defined as ‘*a group of houses and associated buildings, larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, situated in a rural area*’.

The National Geographic website defines a village as ‘*A village is a small settlement usually found in a rural setting. It is generally larger than a hamlet, but smaller than a town. Some geographers specifically define a village as having between 500 and 2,500 inhabitants*’.

The definition of a hamlet is ‘*A small settlement, generally one smaller than a village and strictly (in Britain) one without a Church*’.

How are new village boundaries defined?

If the majority of the village exhibits a low open character with a low impact on the openness of the surrounding Green Belt, the village should be excluded from the Green Belt. In contentious villages with less clear definitions, the decision to wash over or exclude these villages will be down to professional judgement.

Appendix B

Green Belt Village Blank Assessment Proforma

B.1 Green Belt Village Blank Assessment Proforma

NAME OF VILLAGE				
INSERT MAP				
Context				
Current status of village	<i>Inset / Washed over</i>			
Notes from Green Belt Assessment (November 2017)	<i>Identify any relevant General Area or parcel assessments relating to the village</i>			
Stage 1: Village Boundary				
Area to be assessed	<i>What constitutes the village for the purposes of the assessment? Justification</i>			
Stage 2: Assessment against Paragraph 149 NPPF				
Stage 2A: Assessment of ‘open character’ of the village				
Criteria	Assessment Scale (Degree of open character)			Conclusion and Justification
	High	Medium	Low	
General Pattern of Existing Development and Density	<i>Sparsely distributed or dispersed, low density</i>	<i>Linear or small clusters across the village, medium density</i>	<i>Clustered, high density</i>	<i>Explanation of category taking into account differences across the village</i>
Scale and Form	Types of dwelling	<i>Detached /semi-detached (large gardens)</i>	<i>semi-detached / terraced (multiple rows, medium sized gardens)</i>	<i>Flatted / terraced (limited or no gardens)</i>
	Building heights	<i>1-2 storeys</i>	<i>2-3 storeys</i>	<i>3+ storeys</i>
	Extent of gaps / open spaces	<i>Gaps in frontages and/or areas of open space form prominent</i>	<i>Some gaps in frontages and/or some areas of open space within the village</i>	<i>Limited gaps in frontages and/or limited open space within the village</i>

	<i>features within the village boundary and/or the Green Belt is closely linked across the village</i>	<i>boundary and/or the Green Belt is linked in parts across the village</i>	<i>boundary and/or the Green Belt is not linked across the village</i>	
Does the village have an open character?	<i>If the majority of the criteria score either high/medium then the village is considered to have an open character</i>	<i>If the majority of the criteria score low then the village is considered to not have an open character and there is no need to undertake the second stage of the assessment.</i>		
Stage 2B: Relationship of the village with the ‘openness’ of the Green Belt				
Criteria	Assessment Scale (Level of contribution)			Conclusion and Justification
	High	Medium	Low	
Views into and out of village from surrounding Green Belt				
Perceived definition of the village (visual perception)	<i>Village boundary is undefined</i>	<i>Part of village boundary is clearly defined but other parts unclear</i>	<i>Majority of village boundary is clearly defined</i>	<i>Explanation of category taking into account differences across the village</i>
Built form¹⁴	<i>Built form is sparse and/or building/frontages contain gaps allowing for views</i>	<i>Views are partially restricted by built form in places although gap in building/frontages allow for views in places</i>	<i>Views are largely restricted by built form and building/frontages are solid without gaps</i>	
Topography¹⁵	<i>Flat topography allowing views / rising enabling views</i>	<i>Mixed topography allowing some views</i>	<i>Steep and/or rising obstructing views</i>	
Vegetation¹⁶	<i>Low lying and/or sparse allowing views</i>	<i>Partially dense allowing for views in places</i>	<i>Tall and/or dense obstructing views</i>	

¹⁴ This refers to any form of built development including residential properties, employment uses, warehouses, schools, and sports facilities.

¹⁵ This refers to the configuration of the natural and artificial physical features which make up the surface of the land.

¹⁶ This refers to the assemblage of plants, trees or shrubs.

Do open areas¹⁷ within the village appear continuous with the surrounding Green Belt	<i>Open areas continue into surrounding Green Belt</i>	<i>Few open areas continue into the surrounding Green Belt</i>	<i>No continuance of open areas into surrounding Green Belt</i>	
Does the open character of the village make an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt	<i>If the majority of the criteria score either high/medium then the village is considered to make an important contribution</i>		<i>If the majority of the criteria score low then the village is considered to not make an important contribution</i>	
Summary and Recommendations				
Summary	<i>Summary of the above</i>			
Recommendation	<i>Retain as washed over / Retain as inset / Village should be changed from washed over to inset</i>			

¹⁷ This refers to gardens, village greens, parks, roadside verges and embankments, and other incidental spaces within the village.