

**Land north of Impington Lane, Histon,
Cambridge**

Landscape capacity and Green Belt
review

Hill Residential
March 2025

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Appendix A: Extract from the LUC Green Belt Assessment

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Hill Residential is promoting land at north of Impington Lane, Histon, Cambridge (refer to Figure 1), within the administrative areas of the Greater Cambridge Partnership for residential development including significant areas of new open space.
- 1.2 The site lies within the designated Green Belt. The Greater Cambridge Partnership commissioned a Green Belt Assessment to inform the Local Plan Review, with the purpose of considering how well each parcel of Green Belt meets its statutory purposes.
- 1.3 It is understood that the councils will use this study as part of a series of evidence base documents to identify opportunities to plan positively and meet the objective assessment of housing need in the districts as required by national policy, specifically the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The councils may decide to actively consider the release of Green Belt land to help meet housing need in the two authorities. Furthermore, the Green Belt Assessment, dated September 2021, will inform and will be a key part of the evidence base to the emerging local plan.
- 1.4 This note provides a summary of landscape and visual and green belt appraisal work carried out to date which sought to identify the potential capacity of the site for built development and suitability for Green Belt release.

2.0 The Site

- 2.1 The site is located to the north of housing development off both Hunters Close and Merrington Place, themselves located off Impington Lane. The site is located to the north of Impington village and consists of two small fields which contain rough grassland and are likely to have been used as paddocks in the past. The site is unconstrained by any local or national landscape or heritage designation (refer to Figure 2).
- 2.2 The two fields are bounded along their northern, eastern and western boundaries by wide belts of woodland and scrub. The southern boundary is formed by either the rear garden fences to properties along Merrington Place or by a post and rail fence and new hedgerow planting adjacent to Hunters Close. A small gap of approximately 10m exists within the tree belt on the northern boundary of the larger of the two fields.
- 2.3 The villages of Impington and Histon have, over the years, coalesced to form one conurbation although each retains its own identity to some degree. The main historic core of Histon, which is now designated as a conservation area, lies to the west of the site and contains a large number of listed buildings mainly concentrated around The Green, Histon Manor and around the Station Road / Water Lane junction. Impington's historic core, also designated as a conservation area, has only one listed building; St Andrew's Church. While there are isolated older buildings around Clay Close Lane and Burgoynes Road they are not listed and sit amongst largely modern residential development.
- 2.4 There are a number of public rights of way, (PROW), within Histon and Impington itself. The nearest PROW is the Mere Way that follows the line of a

Roman road, located approximately 1.6km to the east of the site's eastern boundary. A permissive footpath is located approximately 1.75km to the north (refer to figure 4, PROW).

3.0 Visual Amenity

- 3.1 The site is well contained with dense hedgerows, hedgerow trees and scrub forming a dense visual screen. In terms, therefore of site visibility and due to the lack of public access, the site is largely screened from view and visible only from the new housing development along Hunters / rear gardens to properties along Merrington Place. It is possible that there is very limited inter-visibility with rear gardens to properties along Mill Lane, Ambrose Way and Paddock Close in the west and from rear of properties along Clay Close Lane. Almost all the rear gardens to these properties are backed with lines of trees and scrub or pockets of woodland. This vegetation and the numerous juxtaposed hedgerows, tree belts and woodland/scrub, that form the boundaries to the numerous small fields and paddocks mean visibility of the site is highly unlikely and will be glimpsed at most, even in the winter.
- 3.2 The same combination of woodland tree belts and scrub to the rear of properties and the juxtaposed hedgerows, tree belts and woodland/scrub mean that inter-visibility with the landscape surrounding the site is very limited.
- 3.3 In these terms, the site is very closely associated with the existing settlement edge with a clear and defined vegetative boundary which separates the site both physically and visually from the wider open landscape.
- 3.4 Visual effects of development up to and comparable in height with the existing settlement edge will carry very limited visual effects, experienced by visual receptors which are adjacent to the site only. No medium to long distance visual effects would occur.

4.0 Landscape Character

- 4.1 The site sits within a landscape character area referred to as the '*Cottenham Fen Edge Claylands*' (Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, February 2021). This area is characterised by a gently undulating and well settled rural landscape comprising a number of large villages with historic linear cores located on elevated '*islands*'. Pockets of remnant parkland alongside orchards, hedgerows and shelterbelts are evident and create a distinctive, localised vegetation pattern in proximity to the villages. Urban influences associated with the urban edge of Cambridge and major road network in the south are discordant with the otherwise rural character.
- 4.2 The site is distinct from the wider character area due to its highly enclosed nature and due, due to the fact that it is also closely associated and influenced by the adjoining post war settlement edge, it is peri-urban in character rather than rural.
- 4.3 The existing character of built form is modern in form and layout. A development on this site would relate directly in terms of the existing settlement pattern and density. Furthermore, extension of built form on this axis would also act to reinforce the relatively nucleated form of the existing settlement.

- 4.4 While the introduction of built development on the southernmost field will alter the character of the site itself, the degree of site containment will limit perceptual and physical effects to the site only.

5.0 Contribution to Green Belt

- 5.1 Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are working together to create a joint Local Plan, referred to as the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. As part of the evidence base for this plan, LUC were commissioned to undertake a strategic Green Belt assessment in 2021. Unlike previous Green Belt assessments undertaken by both authorities, this assessment covers the entire Cambridge Green Belt rather than just the inner Green Belt, more closely associated with the edge of Cambridge.
- 5.2 In December 2024, the government published revisions to the NPPF including policies relating to Green Belt. Importantly, the requirement for LPAs to review Green Belt boundaries if they cannot meet their identified housing need has been restored. This need must be met 'in full', unless there is clear evidence that such alterations would fundamentally undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan 'as a whole'.
- 5.3 The revised NPPF also introduces the principle of 'Grey Belt' whereby 'land in the green belt comprising previously developed land and any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes (but excluding those areas or assets with particular importance).'
- 5.4 'Grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. The three of the five purposes of green belt mentioned within the definition are:
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- 5.5 The Green Belt PPG published in February 2025 provides additional guidance on how contribution to Green Belt purposes should be assessed. This has been adopted in the following appraisal.
- 5.6 A review of the LUC study methodology for the site was carried out with the aim of identifying where alterations should be made to ensure the report constitutes a fully robust and transparent piece of evidence. A review of the assessment conclusions for the site has also been carried out to identify where omissions have been made or where factors have not been given enough weighting where they would otherwise yield different results.
- 5.7 This note does not provide a summary of the methodology critique but does outline the key conclusions of the assessment review, by purpose.
- 5.8 The site is a small area of a much wider parcel, parcel HI8 (refer to Appendix A). This is particularly relevant as those areas more distinct and distant from the settlement edge will make a very different contribution to Green Belt purposes

than those which lie immediately adjacent. The assessment of HI8 is therefore very broad and averages the parcels categorisation. The site, as it is proportionately small and very closely associated with the existing settlement, therefore makes a very different contribution to the broader HI8 parcel. We have provided a summary where there is a clear distinction at this finer grain.

Openness

- 5.9 The LUC assessment considers the HI8 parcel to be open. The assessment only considers the volumetric aspect of openness (in that there is an absence of built development) but fails to consider the visual aspect of openness, which by precedent laid down by recent inquiry case law, it is required to do. As summarised above, the Impington site is visually very enclosed and is more associated with the residential edge of Impington than with the countryside beyond.
- 5.10 Furthermore, due to a lack of PROW, views of the site from the surrounding landscape cannot be experienced apart from on a short length of Clay Close Lane, from where looking west the site may be visible through the vegetation that forms the site's eastern boundary. Otherwise the only impact on visual openness will be experienced from people / receptors / residents along Hunters Close and possibly residents within rear gardens to properties along part of Merrington Place.

Distinction

- 5.11 The site is bounded by back gardens to houses along Merrington Place and houses fronting Hunters Road forming its southern boundary, which create little separation between the parcel and Impington. As stated above, the site is also very contained although urbanising influences from residential development adjacent to its southern boundary and the paddocks themselves do not create any additional distinction from Impington. It therefore is assessed as having a weak distinction to Impington.

Contribution to purpose 1 – preserving the unique character of Cambridge as a compact city

- 5.12 We consider that even where '*necklace*' villages are within relatively close proximity to Cambridge or are tentatively 'linked' to Cambridge via a single line of linear development, parcels located on the far side of these settlements should not have been included in the assessment of this purpose, as we do not feel they are so visually or physically associated with Cambridge to have any bearing on preserving its character.
- 5.13 The site is not '*nearly contiguous with Cambridge*' but has no relationship with the edge of Cambridge city, instead the land is more closely associated only with the settlements of Histon and Impington.
- 5.14 The site therefore makes a relatively limited contribution to purpose 1.

Purpose 2 – to maintain and enhance the quality of Cambridge's setting

- 5.15 LUC consider that the closeness of the Histon and Impington conservation areas to parcel HI8 creates a relationship with features / designations that

contribute positively to the character and setting of the city. They state that the two conservation areas:

'allows for some appreciation of the rural character and setting of the more intact and historic parts of Impington (Including Burgoynes Road), which in turn contribute to the wider rural setting of Cambridge...'

- 5.16 There is however very limited intervisibility with the Impington conservation area and none whatsoever with the Histon conservation area. To contribute to the setting of a heritage asset, a site or landscape feature needs to be physically experienced and visible either directly or indirectly via sequential journeys along roads or footpaths. However, only a short length of Clay Close Lane affords views of the parcel. There is no inter-visibility, particularly with the site itself, between the parcel and wider road or footpath network. By extension, it can not therefore contribute to the setting of Cambridge.
- 5.17 The site therefore makes a relatively limited contribution to purpose 1.

Purpose 3 – to prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city

- 5.18 The LUC assessment concludes that parcel HI8 is within a wide gap between Impington and Landbeach. As LUC assess the full parcel as having a moderate distinction from Impington, it is therefore assessed as making a relatively limited contribution to purpose 3. The site itself is a proportionately small area of parcel HI8 and the gap between Impington and Landbeach and so its contribution to the purpose is further reduced.

6.0 Development Strategy and Conclusion

- 6.1 A preliminary landscape and visual appraisal has found that the site is very well contained and that any development of the southernmost field would result in very limited visual effects restricted to those moderately sensitive receptors adjacent to the site boundary only. There are no medium or long distance visual effects associated with the development.
- 6.2 The study also found that effects on the character of the landscape are restricted to the site only, due again to the degree of the site's visual containment.
- 6.3 Furthermore, it was also found that the site, a small area of a much wider parcel HI8, was found to make a weak or no contribution to all local Green Belt purposes assessed (equivalent to national purposes b and d). Due to its level of containment and degree which it is associated with the existing settlement, we also consider that parcel HI8 makes a weak or no contribution to Green Belt Purpose A of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 143), *to check unrestricted sprawl*. In these terms, we believe that parcel 13 fulfils all national 'greybelt' criteria.
- 6.4 In terms of encroachment (national purpose c), we would point to PAS guidance which states under purpose 3 that, *'Presumably all Green Belt does this, making the purpose difficult to use to distinguish the contribution of different areas. The most useful approach is to look at the difference between urban fringe – land under the influence of the urban area – and open countryside, and*

to favour the latter in determining which land to try and keep open, taking into account the types of edges and boundaries that can be achieved.'

- 6.5 The site, although open agricultural fields, is very strongly related to the existing settlement and only weakly with the wider open countryside. While there is no built development within the site, it has considerable capacity for built development that is well integrated with the existing settlement and contained by a sufficiently robust defensible boundary. Consideration should be given to the types of edges and boundaries that can be achieved should any development come forward, as reinforced by PAS guidance, referenced above.
- 6.6 The concept of Green Belt 'defensibility' refers to the creation of boundaries that meet Green Belt policy's requirement for permanence, as referenced in the NPPF. The NPPF paragraph 149 identifies a need, '... when defining boundaries...' to use '...physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent'.
- 6.7 In these terms, and with the appropriate retention and enhancement to the existing landscape structure outlined above, a strong defensible boundary, mitigating any future potential of encroachment into the remaining Green Belt will be retained. It will serve to contain the settlement, forming an appropriate and gradual transition to the wider countryside. The appraisals carried out to date have also established that development of the site would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan (para. 155 a of NPPF).

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