

January 2026

GREEN BELT STUDY

LAND AT GIRTON ROAD, GIRTON

Quality Assurance

Site name: Land at Girton Road, Girton

Client name: Wain Estates

Type of report: Green Belt and Landscape Initial Survey

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01. INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared on behalf of Wain Estates in relation to Land at Girton Road, Girton which is being promoted by Wain Estates for residential allocation in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

On Tuesday 20th of January 2026, a site visit was undertaken to assess the landscape and visual qualities of the Green Belt land within the site and its immediate context.

This document summarises the findings of the site visit and presents a brief desk based study providing an analysis of the contribution of the site to the Green Belt purposes that relate to the grey belt definition. This document informs the consideration of the site for allocation in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

This study does not provide a detailed assessment of the landscape and visual impact of a specific development proposal, rather it considers the overall capacity of the site to accommodate a residential development within the landscape matters of the Green Belt policy.

THE SITE

The site is located to the east of Girton (Figure 2) and is in agricultural use, specifically as a horse paddock.

The rural use of the site determines its landscape character and built form typology, functional to the paddock. A cluster of small scale buildings (Figure 1) to host the horses and ancillary activities is located

to the south-west of the site at the end of the access track. There is no other built form besides these agricultural buildings (equine facilities).

The field is separated into two paddocks by an electric fence. The whole site's perimeter is defined by a tree belt of various densities. This allows visual permeability towards the countryside to the north and east, while it filters views of the edge of settlement (Girton) to the west. The A14 infrastructure is also visible and audible from within the site.



Figure 1; Cluster of agricultural buildings (equine facilities) within the site



Figure 2; Site location

02. LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

Despite the lack of statutory landscape designations within the site and its immediate context the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment (CBA, February 2021) identifies key landscape characteristics and distinctive components that define the overall quality of the local Green Belt area.

According to the Assessment the site is located in the Fen Edge Claylands Landscape Character Type (LCT 2), and in the Landscape Character Area of Cottenham Fen Edge Claylands (LCA 2B), see Figure 3.

The Assessment describes the landscape in **LCT 2** of moderate condition due to the limited ecological value but presence of intact historic features (such as the hierarchy of drainage channels and tracks). The landscape strength is also considered moderate as this peaceful rural landscape includes few distinguishing features, some in decline (i.e. traditional orchard). The historical linear village's form is generally retained, and where modern estates have altered the settlement form these are well integrated by hedgerows, copses and shelterbelts.

LCT 2 is a transitional landscape of predominantly arable use where villages are built on 'islands' of high ground, in fact the development guidelines for LCT 2 includes: *'Ensure any village extensions are located on the high ground of the Fen Islands, avoiding incremental development on the flat, low-lying fen.'* Key features of the LCT 2 include:

- *'Low-lying, gently undulating landscape with extensive vistas and large skies*
- *Gradually rising landform, south from the edge of The Fens, which adds a prominence to the Fen Edge villages in places*
- *Large-scale, open field system defined by a hierarchy of drains, ditches and lodes*
- *Predominantly arable farmland supplemented with small scale pastoral field patterns around settlement edges*
- *Little vegetation cover, limited to dispersed fragments of deciduous woodland, scattered traditional orchards and gappy hedgerows*
- *Hedgerows, shelterbelts and small clumps of trees create a distinctive, localised vegetation pattern in proximity to villages*
- *Orchards are a distinctive feature, particularly around the settlements*
- *Dispersed settlement pattern of villages on raised landform at the edge of The Fens and individual farms and cottages.'*

The forces for change for LCT 2 mention the loss of small-scale fields in proximity to traditional settlements and the pressure of development that would change the character of villages through expansion and densification. Ad hoc woodland and shelterbelt planting is also considered a risk as it would alter the open character of the landscape.

The *'peaceful, rural open character of the landscape'* and *'hedgerows, shelterbelts and small clumps of trees forming a distinctive, localised vegetation*

pattern in proximity to villages' are considered key landscape sensitivities of LCT 2.

This LCT is described as a *'peaceful, rural open'* landscape, where pressure for development could change the character and setting of the Fen Edge villages. It is considered to have a *'moderate strength of character'* with few distinguish features.

The proposed guidelines suggest to enhance the rural character and important features of the LCT, including the retention of distinctive open views.

The site is then located on the southern boundary of **LCA 2B**. Key characteristics of this LCA are:

- *'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 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 which are discordant with the otherwise rural character.'*

This predominantly arable landscape includes small scale pastoral fields and paddocks on the edge of settlements. These also have a enclosed character, contrasting the surrounding rural openness, created by boundary hedges, shelterbelts and trees close to the villages.

The Assessment also notes that *'this is a settled rural landscape, with several small to medium sized villages including Cottenham, Waterbeach, Histon Milton and Girton, located on low 'islands' that rise from The Fens... Settlement generally sits low in the landscape and is well screened by mature trees, shelterbelts and hedgerows, but glimpses of built form can often be seen, maintaining a settled rural character between villages'*.

In addition to the LCT 2 landscape sensitivities, the Assessment notes that *'framed, long views between vegetation from villages across open, arable fields'* is a specific sensitivity for LCA 2B. Consequentially the landscape guidelines includes: *'Ensure new development is integrated into the landscape sympathetically, is in keeping with the open, rural character, and does not affect long, framed views.'*

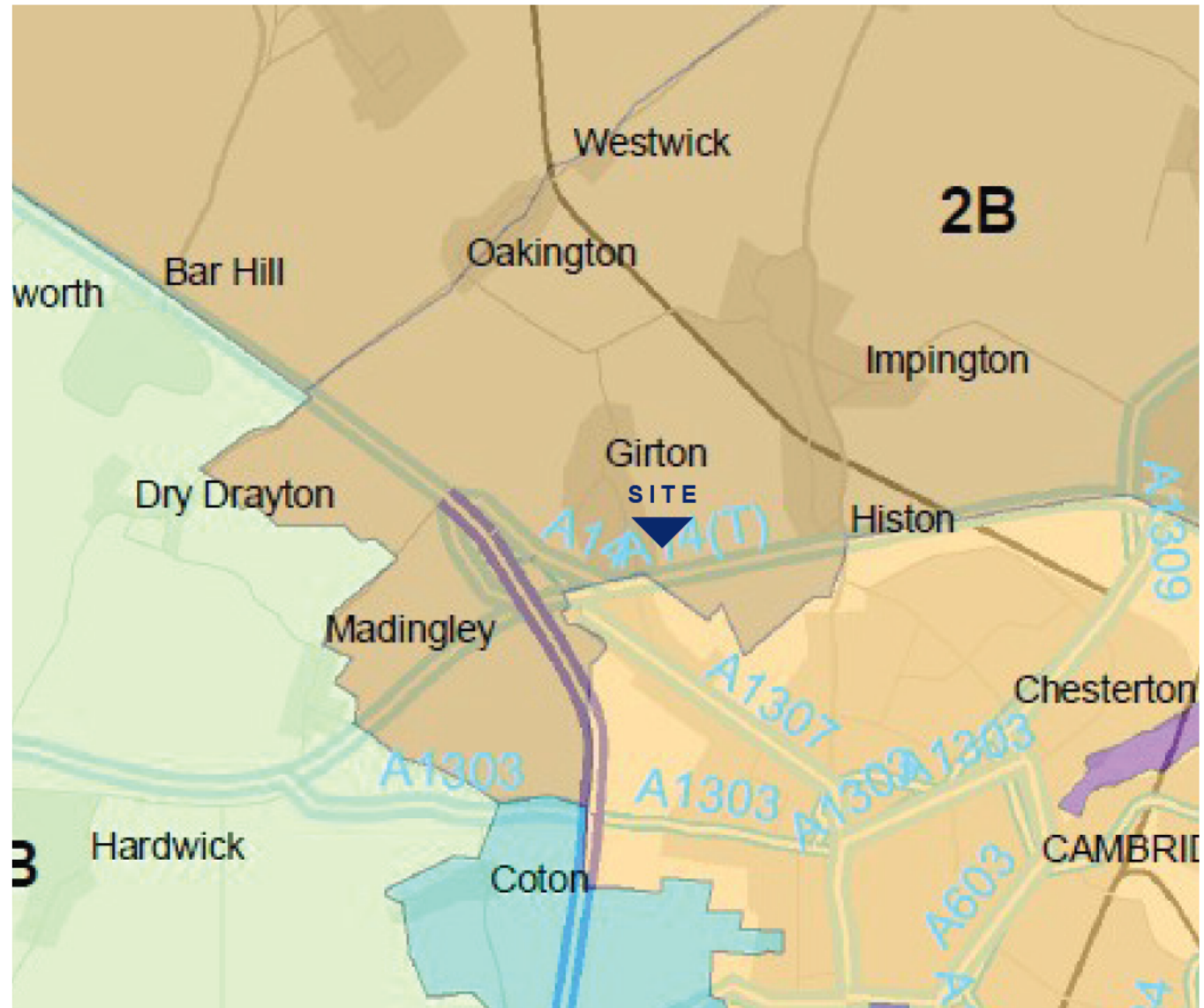


Figure 3 - Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, February 2021)

03. GREEN BELT STUDY

CAMBRIDGE GREEN BELT

The site is located in parcel GI18 identified in the Greater Cambridge Green Belt Review (LUC, 2021), Figure 4.

The parcel is described as open land as *'there is no development of a scale, character or form that has a significant impact on the Green Belt openness.'* It is comprised of agricultural land with some agricultural buildings in the west area of the parcel, indeed located within the site (Figure 5 and viewpoint 1-west).

The Review states that there is a *'strong distinction between the parcel and the inset area'* (Girton village). It notes that there is a mature hedgerow to the west of the parcel that provides a *'moderate degree of boundary separation from Girton and also minimise urban visual influence within the parcel.'* It also highlights that the parcel is not contained by the village and the *'sloping landform down from the settlement is relatively prominent providing some distinction from the inset area'.*

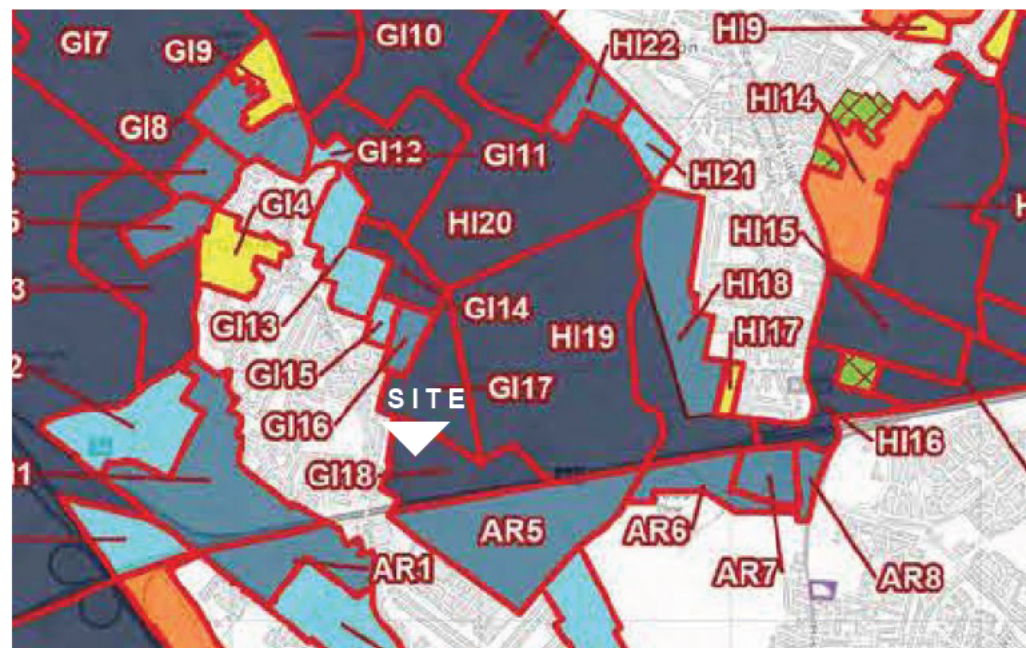


Figure 4 - Very High harm rating in the Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment (LUC, August 2021) for parcel GI18

CAMBRIDGE PURPOSE	NPPF PURPOSE
1. Preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre.	a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
2. Maintain and enhance the quality of its settings.	c) To assist in the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment. d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
3. Prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city.	b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

Table 1 - Cambridge Green Belt purposes against the equivalent the NPPF purposes.

GREEN BELT PURPOSES

The Review continues with a detailed analysis of the parcel against the three purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt, which relate to the NPPF Green Belt purposes as per Table 1.

The NPPF definition of grey belt focuses on purposes a), b) and d) of the Green Belt which corresponds to the three Cambridge Green Belt purposes.

The Review provides a score to the contribution of the parcel to three purposes. This study assumes that “significant” corresponds to a “strong contribution” in accordance with Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225 of the Government Green Belt Guidance (published 22 July 2019, updated 27 February 2025).



Figure 5 - Site location within parcel GI18

PURPOSE A) / 1

The Review identifies that the parcel GI18 has a “relatively significant” contribution, not “significant” hence **not strong**, to NPPF Purpose a) of the Green Belt (Cambridge Green Belt purpose 1). This level of contribution relates to the risk that development within Parcel GI18 could diminish the sense of Cambridge as a compact city as the parcel is adjacent to Girton, which is nearly continuous to Cambridge. However it also recognises that some distinction from the main City would be preserved if it was developed.

Notably the site, which is a small portion of parcel GI18, is the area of the parcel closest to Girton and further away from the City, therefore has more affinity with the inset village rather than the large Cambridge settlement, which remains at some distance from the site.

Furthermore the design of an appropriate development would avoid the creation of an incongruous pattern such that it would create a “finger” of development into the Green Belt.

Overall the site is considered to make a moderate contribution to NPPF purpose A) of the Green Belt, or purpose 1 of Cambridge Green Belt.

Therefore, in accordance with the Council evidence, the site does not strongly contribute to NPPF purpose a) of the Green Belt.

PURPOSE B) / 3

The Review identifies that parcel GI18 has a “significant” contribution, hence **strong**, to NPPF Purpose b) of the Green Belt (Cambridge Green Belt purpose 3) due to the risk that development in the parcel will be perceived as narrowing the gap between Girton and Histon.

While GI18 extends along the A14 corridor considerably closer to Histon, the site is adjacent to Girton and it is contained in a relatively compact piece of land (i.e. not of linear shape). Appropriate development design will strengthen the relationship with Girton and preserve this compact form which preserves a meaningful rural gap with Histon. However, even if the whole of the site was developed a considerable area of Green Belt would be maintained between the two settlements (circa 1km distance between the 2).

The site contribution to purpose b) of the Green Belt, or purpose 3 of the Cambridge Green Belt, is moderate. Therefore, while the whole parcel performs strongly towards purpose b) of the Green Belt, the site doesn't.

PURPOSE D) / 2

The Review identifies that parcel GI18 has a “relatively limited” contribution, not “significant” hence **not strong**, to NPPF Purpose d) of the Green Belt (Cambridge Green Belt purpose 2). This contribution is explained with the parcel’s moderate distinction from the edge of Girton, meaning that it has some relationship with the inset area, while acknowledging that open farmland contributes somewhat to the rural character of Cambridge’s setting.

The site is not within nor immediately adjacent to an historic town (i.e. Cambridge) and, as identified by the Review, is not completely segregated from the inset village in fact the visual study (see following section 4) illustrates that glimpses of the urban environments are available within the site.

It is also noted that while the agricultural use of the site is contributing, albeit in small scale, to the distinctive rural setting of Cambridge, there isn't an evident visual connection with Cambridge historic area and the A14 creates a strong, interfering visual barrier.

Overall the site is considered to make a weak contribution to NPPF purpose d) of the Green Belt, or purpose 1 of Cambridge Green Belt.

Therefore, in accordance with the Council evidence, the site does not strongly contribute to NPPF purpose d) of the Green Belt.

HARM ON WIDER GREEN BELT

The Review states that the release of the land in parcel GI18 as an expansion of Girton will have a minor-moderate harm on the adjacent Green Belt. Although the gap between Girton and Histon will be narrowed, the existing planting enclosure around the parcel would prevent urbanising visual impact.

The site itself is contained by a treed boundary, with opportunities to be reinforced by an appropriate planting strategy. Therefore the site is capable to hold development that would not cause visual impact and increase urban influence on the surrounding Green Belt, which would continue to perform the key purposes of the NPPF and Cambridge Green Belt policies.

THE SITE QUALIFIES AS GREY BELT

- It does not contribute strongly to Purpose a) as Cambridge preserves its compact city character.
- It does not contribute strongly to Purpose b) as a considerable landscape gap between Girton and Histon is preserved.
- It does not contribute strongly to Purpose d) as it is not immediately adjacent to an historic town nor it affords clear visual connection with Cambridge historic area.
- Urbanisation of the site will not hinder the purposes of the adjacent Green Belt area.

04. VISUAL STUDY

The following photographs were taken during the site visit, see Figure 6 for the location of the viewpoints. The views are representative of the local visual experience and are aimed to establish the visibility of the site, the relationship with Girton settlement and any likely visibility of potential residential development.

The photographs demonstrate that the site affords some visual enclosure, thanks to the tree belts around the whole perimeter (viewpoints 1), which depending on the density allows more or less glimpses of the contextual countryside, settlement and A14 corridor. The existing boundary definition presents an opportunity for proposed development to strengthen the existing planting structure to reinforce visual screening and separation from the adjacent Green Belt land.

It was also noted during the site visit that there is no visibility of the site from Girton (viewpoint 3) and that any proposed residential development of appropriate scale will be likely screened by the intervening built form and vegetation in views from the west.

The lack of public rights of way in the local landscape context also limit the visual receptors that will be affected by development. Notably visibility of the site from footpaths to the south of the A14 (viewpoint 4) is constrained by the distance, intervening layers of planting and road infrastructure.

Finally, viewpoints 2 and 1-west looking towards Girton within the site illustrates that the existing vegetation allows glimpses of the adjacent settlement. There is therefore some urban influence to the western side of the site and parcel G118, emphasising its association with Girton.



Figure 6 - Viewpoints location map



Viewpoint 1 north-east - View from within the site towards parcel GI17 of the Cambridge Green Belt; the tree belt around the site is less dense along the northern boundary allowing glimpses of the contextual countryside and adjacent Green Belt parcel.



Viewpoint 1 west - View from within the site towards Girton showing the existing agricultural buildings and glimpses of the edge of Girton settlement through the vegetation along the site's boundary,



Viewpoint 1 south-east - View from within the site towards the A14 corridor



Viewpoint 2 - View from within the site looking towards Girton settlement edge, glimpses of the building on Mayfield Road are available through the boundary vegetation.



Viewpoint 3 - View from Mayfield Road towards the site, screened by the intervening built form and vegetation



Viewpoint 4 - View from footpath 135/5 towards the site, screened by the intervening vegetation and built form.

05. CONCLUSIONS

GREY BELT

Although located within the Cambridge Green Belt, the site is not subject to any of the NPPF's footnote 7 designations and doesn't contribute strongly to purpose a), b) and d) of the Green Belt (purposes 1, 2 and 3 of the Cambridge Green Belt). Therefore, the site can be considered grey belt based on the NPPF definition.

The Council's Green Belt review for parcel GI18, where the site is located, already demonstrates that the site and surrounding land doesn't contribute strongly to purpose a) and d). While it is true that development on the whole of parcel GI18 will undermine the gap between Girton and Histon, the proposed site will not cause a considerable loss of Green Belt between the two settlements and therefore contribution of the site to purpose b) is also not strong.

It is also noted that the site, as well as parcel GI18, is not associated to any statutory landscape or heritage designations.

Therefore, following the process suggested by the government guidance (Figure 7), the site constitutes grey belt.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This study did not take into consideration the impact on the Green Belt landscape of a particular scheme. However, it has highlighted that there are key design principles that, applied to any future proposal, will ensure that the function of the adjacent Green Belt will be preserved and enhanced:

- The proposal scale and height should reflect the existing built form of Girton and sit comfortably within the existing tree belts that visually encloses the site.
- Tree belts around the site's perimeter should be reinforced to create a strong boundary, visual enclosure and a clear distinction from the adjacent Green Belt land.
- The proposed layout should preserve the compact nature of Girton settlement and include a layout that responds to the urban grain of Girton and avoid an undue incursion into the rural landscape.

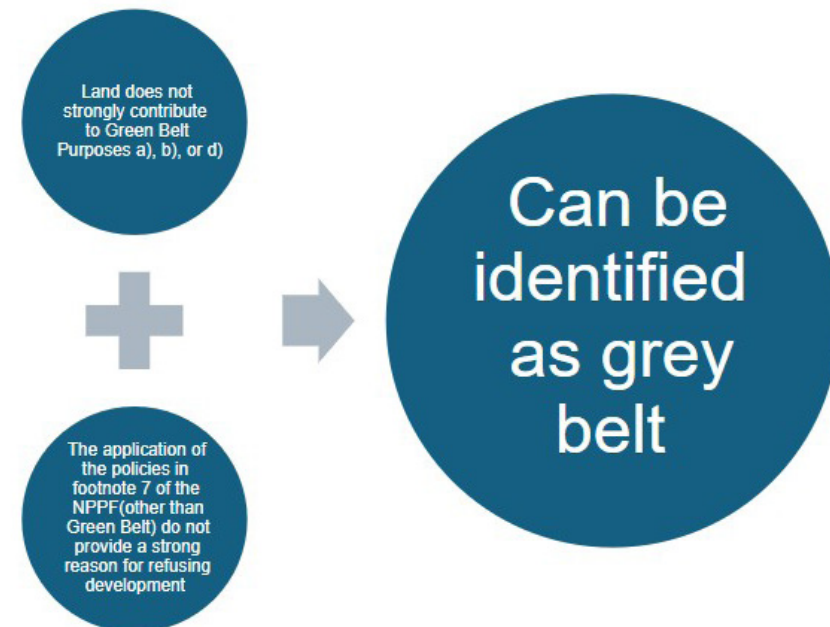


Figure 7 - Grey belt assessment process as per government guidance Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 64-007-20250225

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