



Bolton Green Belt Assessment

Assessment of Proposed Allocations Addendum

EVS04

Prepared for Bolton Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Study Aim and Scope

1.1 LUC was commissioned by Bolton Council to undertake an independent, robust, and transparent assessment of the potential impact on the Green Belt that could result from release of land within the development allocations proposed in the Draft Bolton Local Plan. Its intention is to inform the finalisation of the proposed Allocations.

1.2 Bolton Council is preparing a new Local Plan to 2042. Following the Issues & Options consultation (Aug-Oct 2025) and the Direction of Travel Regulation 18 consultation (Nov 2025-Jan 2026), the Council is expected to publish the Regulation 19 Draft (Publication) Bolton Local Plan for consultation during Summer 2026 with full submission by December 2026. The Draft Local Plan identifies four development allocations that lie within the Bolton Green Belt.

1.3 The assessment has been undertaken with reference to the 2021 NPPF and the Green Belt policy framework contained within it. This provides the appropriate policy basis for the assessment in the context of the emerging Local Plan and the transitional arrangements applicable to its preparation.

1.4 The assessment adopts the established methodology previously used for the Green Belt Studies undertaken across Greater Manchester to inform the preparation of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan. This provides a consistent and established approach to assessing the relative contribution of Green Belt land to the five purposes of Green Belt and enables the findings to be considered alongside the existing Greater Manchester evidence base.

1.5 The earlier evidence of relevance included:

- Stage 1: Assessment of the contribution of Green Belt land within the ten Greater Manchester authorities (2016). This study assessed the whole of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester, providing a comprehensive analysis of variations in contribution of land to the Green Belt purposes as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). [\[See reference 1\]](#).
- Stage 2: Detailed assessment of the 'harm' to the Green Belt purposes that would result from the proposed development allocations in the Revised Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) (2020). A further Stage 2 was

prepared in 2021 updating the Green Belt assessment of the finalised Allocations.

1.6 Specifically, this Green Belt study applies the methodology of the Stage 2 Site assessment work to determine the potential harm that the proposed release of the four development allocations within Bolton on the Green Belt purposes. The allocations lie entirely, or in part within the Bolton Green Belt (see below).

Use of Study Main Outputs

1.7 The assessment provides guidance on:

- the contribution individual Allocations make to the NPPF Green Belt purposes;
- the harm that would result from the release of each allocated site, considering not just what contribution the land itself makes to the Green Belt purposes but also the potential impact on the integrity of adjacent Green Belt land (e.g. resulting from changes into the Green Belt boundary, and/or increased containment of open land);
- variations in harm within potential allocations down to 1 hectare, identifying areas that may be more or less suitable for development from a Green Belt perspective, with retention of the latter offering some potential to minimise harm.

1.8 The outputs, alongside assessments relating to other planning considerations, such as sustainability, transport, and viability will inform decisions regarding the relative merits of the proposed allocations.

Report Structure

1.9 The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: Green Belt Policy and Context
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Assessment findings
- Appendix A: A glossary of key terms used within this report

Chapter 2

Green Belt Policy and Context

2.1 This chapter provides a summary of national Green Belt policy, as well as the context of the Manchester Green Belt and previous Green Belt review work carried out. As noted in Chapter 1, in line with the transitional arrangements for the preparation of the emerging Local Plan, the 2021 NPPF forms the relevant policy context for the preparation of this report.

National Planning Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

2.2 Government policy on the Green Belt was set out in Chapter 13 of the NPPF (updated on the 20th of July 2021) 'Protecting Green Belt land'. Paragraph 137 of the NPPF stated that *"the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"*.

2.3 This was elaborated in NPPF Paragraph 134, which stated that Green Belts should serve five purposes, as set out below.

The purposes of Green Belt

- 1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- 2) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- 3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- 4) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- 5) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2.4 The NPPF emphasised in Paragraphs 139 and 140 that local planning authorities should establish and, if justified, only alter Green Belt boundaries through the preparation of their Local Plans. It went on to state that:

“Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. 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.”

2.5 When defining Green Belt boundaries NPPF paragraph 143 stated Local Plans should:

- demonstrate consistency with Local Plan strategy, most notably achieving sustainable development;
- not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
- where necessary, safeguard enough non-Green Belt land to meet development needs beyond the plan period;
- demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and
- define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

2.6 The planning guidance made it clear that the Green Belt is a strategic planning policy constraint designed primarily to prevent the spread of built development and the coalescence of urban areas. The NPPF went on to state in paragraph 145 that:

“Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.”

2.7 It is important to note, however, that these positive roles should be sought for the Green Belt once designated. The lack of a positive role, or the poor condition of Green Belt land, does not necessarily undermine its fundamental role to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Openness is not synonymous with landscape character or quality.

2.8 Paragraphs 147 and 148 stated that:

“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances... ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness,

and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

2.9 New buildings are inappropriate in the Green Belt. There are exceptions to this which were set out in two closed lists, which set the context for the assessment approach outlined in Chapter 3. The first is in paragraph 149 which set out the following exceptions:

- “buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages;
- limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan; and
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development than the existing development, or
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.”

2.10 Paragraph 150 set out other forms of development that are not inappropriate provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. These are:

- “mineral extraction;
- engineering operations;
- local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation or for cemeteries or burial grounds); and
- development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.”

Planning Practice Guidance

2.11 The NPPF's Green Belt policies were supplemented by additional National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The Guidance set out some of the factors that should be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of Green Belt land [See reference 2]. The factors referenced were not presented as an exhaustive list, but rather a summary of some common considerations borne out by specific case law judgements. The guidance stated openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects, which is supported in case law [See reference 3]. Other circumstances which have the potential to affect judgements on the impact of development on openness include:

- the duration of development and its remediability to the original or to an equivalent (or improved) state of, openness; and
- the degree of activity likely to be generated by development, such as traffic generation.

2.12 The guidance also elaborated on the NPPF which required local planning authorities to set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land. The guidance endorsed the preparation of supporting landscape, biodiversity or recreational need evidence to identify appropriate compensatory improvements, including:

- “new or enhanced green infrastructure;
- woodland planting;

- landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal);
- improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital;
- new or enhanced walking and cycle routes; and
- improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision.”

Origins and evolution of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester

The Origins of the Greater Manchester Green Belt

2.13 In 1955 the Government established (through Circular 42/55) the first clear policy on the need for Green Belts in areas outside of London, including the Greater Manchester area [\[See reference 4\]](#). From this original Governmental statement, there was uncertainty over the exact extent of the areas to be defined as Green Belt within areas such as Greater Manchester. This was due to the rapid economic expansion and rapid rate of house building which was seen in the 1960's [\[See reference 5\]](#). Population projections for the end of the century during the 1960s were not realised given the later dramatic drop in birth rates and outward migration in the Greater Manchester area. Continued requirements for large tracts of building land, which were unquantifiable given the uncertainty of future growth levels, meant the size of areas to be included in the Green Belt were not clear.

2.14 Further difficulty deciding on an appropriate approach for the Green Belt arose with the evolution of the planning system in England towards the new Development Plan system under the Planning Acts of 1947 and 1962, as well as the re-organisation of local government. This latter change resulted in the creation of the Greater Manchester Council (GMC) and 10 metropolitan district councils in the North West in 1974 [\[See reference 6\]](#).

2.15 A 'patchwork-quilt' of Green Belt policies were inherited by the new authorities; for example the stretch of Green Belt which is in the vicinity of Manchester Airport had been established as part of an amendment to the Cheshire County Development Plan which considered the Green Belt in the north of the County [\[See reference 7\]](#). As such there was a need to rationalise and bring about consistency in the approach to Green Belt.

Greater Manchester Structure Plan (approved 1981)

2.16 The broad extent of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester appeared in draft in the 1978 Greater Manchester Structure Plan which was approved by the Secretary of State in 1981 [See reference 8]. Detailed boundaries were introduced in the Greater Manchester Green Belt Local Plan adopted in 1984 in the form of the Proposals Map [See reference 9]. Since that time and following the GMC's abolition in 1986 these boundaries have been carried forward and, in some cases, amended through individual Local Plans, Unitary Development Plans and the Core Strategies for each of the ten GM districts [See reference 10].

2.17 The primary purposes of the Greater Manchester Green Belt were set out in Policy OL1 of The Greater Manchester Green Belt Local Plan Written Statement and were in line with policy at a national level:

- To check further growth of a built-up area.
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging.
- To preserve the special character of a town.

2.18 The purposes were in support of the four main themes of the 1981 GM Structure Plan:

- An emphasis upon urban concentration.
- An attempt to redirect development more towards the central core of the conurbation.
- The maintenance of the regional centre, a theme which is linked to the regeneration of Manchester's and Salford's inner areas.
- Resource conservation and amenity.

2.19 The Inspector's report on the Greater Manchester Green Belt Local Plan clarifies that the Green Belt is one of the policies which can play a major contribution towards implementing these four themes. The Inspector identified that it would be appropriate to adopt an approach which established a buffer of open land between the inner edge of the Green Belt and the built-up area in some areas. In other areas, it would be appropriate to draw boundaries which were tightly defined around existing edges of built-up areas, particularly to prevent the merging of established settlements as supported by the advice of "The Green Belts" booklet. It was hoped that this approach would act as a severe restraint to development, thereby redirecting development towards more urban areas and serving the theme of urban concentration. In these situations, the Inspector concluded that the land must fulfil

one or more of the three identified primary purposes of Green Belt [\[See reference 11\]](#).

2.20 The 1981 GM Structure Plan, 1984 GM Green Belt Local Plan and the reviewed and superseded 1986 version of the GM Structure Plan specifically through Policy OL1 identified 26 "general areas" within the Green Belt. Since 1984, alterations to the Green Belt have occurred through individual Local Authority development plans where:

- exceptional circumstances have required amendments (such as the requirement to accommodate the expansion of Manchester Airport)
- additional land has been added to the Green Belt through Local Plans in the 1980's (which was envisaged in the 1984 Plan)

Previous Green Belt Assessments

2.21 A number of previous Green Belt assessments were prepared to inform the Joint Development Plan, initially put forward as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) and later adopted as Places for Everyone (PfE) in 2024.

Stage 1: Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment (2016)

2.22 LUC was commissioned by Manchester City Council on behalf of Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC), Bury MBC, Oldham MBC, Rochdale MBC, Salford CC, Stockport MBC, Tameside MBC, Trafford MBC and Wigan MBC to assess the entire Green Belt within Greater Manchester [\[See reference 12\]](#). This assessment was initially commissioned to form part of the evidence base for the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) but was eventually adopted as Places for Everyone in 2024 following the withdrawal of Stockport MBC from the GMSF in 2020. The assessment was published in July 2016 and assessed all Green Belt land within the Greater Manchester area against the Green Belt Purposes.

2.23 Green Belt 'parcels' were identified based on recognisable boundaries and adjacency to built-up area. The parcels were scored against the purposes through desk-based assessment and field survey. The findings were summarised for each Local Authority based on the performance of each Green Belt purpose. Strategic Green Belt Areas (SGBAs) which were larger predefined spatial units were also assessed against the purposes.

Greater Manchester Assessment of Proposed Additions (2018)

2.24 LUC was commissioned by Manchester City Council on behalf of all ten Greater Manchester Local Authorities to assess 32 additional areas that were not a part of the Green Belt, but which could have the potential to be designated as Green Belt [See reference 13]. This Assessment was published in December 2018 and applied the same methodology as the 2016 study to evaluate areas within Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, and Salford.

Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study (2020-2021)

2.25 LUC was commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority to produce a series of eight studies assessing the Stage 1 GM Green Belt Study. The first group of reports were published in September 2020, followed by a number of addenda that were published in June 2021. These are collectively referred to as 'Stage 2'.

Assessment of Proposed 2019 GMSF Allocations (2020)

2.26 This report assessed the harm to the Green Belt of releasing of proposed allocation sites which lie entirely or in part within the Green Belt. 47 sites were assessed in total. The assessment methodology was based on the contribution of land to the Green Belt purposes and the impact of potential release on the remaining Green Belt. Three of the proposed areas (across five sites) were located within Bolton and yielded a range of harm ratings, from low to high. These included:

- Bewshill Farm (GM6) – low harm;
- Chequerbent North (GM5-1) – high harm;
- Chequerbent North (GM-2) – moderate harm;
- West of Wingates / M61 Junction 5 (GM6-1) – high harm; and
- West of Wingates / M61 Junction 6 (GM6-2) – moderate-high harm.

Addendum: Assessment of Proposed 2020 GMSF Allocations (2020)

2.27 This report formed an addendum to the previous study. It reassessed the harm of releasing specific proposed allocations which had their area or boundary modified. A single site of the previous three in Bolton was included in this study. The Chequerbent North allocation was increased in size by approximately 0.5ha, although it maintained its split harm ratings of high and moderate.

Contribution Assessment of Proposed 2020 GMSF Green Belt Additions (2020)

2.28 This report included a Green Belt Assessment of 56 sites that were proposed to be designated as new Green Belt – as identified in the Draft GMSF. The assessment used the same methodology as the 2016 Stage 1 GM Green Belt Assessment. A portion of the 56 sites evaluated were reassessed from the 2016 and 2018 assessments, while others were new additions. Two sites within Bolton were assessed as potential Green Belt additions: GBA01 Ditchers Farm and GBA2 Horwich Golf Club / Knowles Farm. Ultimately, only the Horwich Golf Club site was designated as new Green Belt land by the PfE (2024), referred to as GBA1 in the plan.

Cumulative Assessment of Proposed 2020 GMSF Allocations and Additions (2020)

2.29 This report set out an assessment of the combined effect of the proposed allocations of and additions to Green Belt, as identified and evaluated in the previous three studies. The assessment methodology was based on a cumulative assessment of proposed releases and areas proposed for designation as new Green Belt on the Strategic Green Belt Areas (SGBAs). There are seven SGBAs which overlap with Bolton Local Authority. The cumulative assessment concluded the following about Bolton's proposed Green Belt releases:

- **GM4 Bewshill Farm** would not affect the contribution of SGBA 8.
- **GM5 Chequerbent North** would contribute to urban sprawl, narrowing of the gap between Westhoughton and Hunger Hill, and encroach on the countryside. This would impact the contribution of SGBA 4 overall towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- **GM6 West of Wingates / M61 Junction 6** would contribute to urban sprawl, narrow the gaps between Westhoughton and Aspull and Westhoughton and Wigan, encroach on the countryside, and potentially detract from Westhoughton's setting and special character. However, the wider Green Belt of SGBA 1 would continue to perform its core purposes, and the designation of new Green Belt land would partly offset these effects.

Identification of Opportunities to Enhance the Beneficial Use of the Green Belt (2020)

2.30 This report identified opportunities to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt through the identification of green infrastructure improvements. Each proposed allocation site, including the three located in Bolton, were evaluated to identify

opportunities to enhance the Green Belt surrounding the sites i.e. to improve access, sport and recreation, biodiversity and wildlife corridors, and/or landscape and visual elements.

Addendum: Assessment of Proposed 2021 PfE Plan Allocations (2021)

2.31 This addendum reassessed the harm rating of a small number of the proposed allocation sites due to changes in the size of the areas proposed for development and/or site boundaries. None of the proposed Bolton sites were evaluated in this assessment.

Addendum: Cumulative Assessment of Proposed 2021 PfE Plan Allocations and Additions (2021)

2.32 Subsequent to the above proposed modifications to allocation sites, the cumulative assessment of proposed allocations and additions was also updated to provide an up-to-date evidence base for PfE. Some of the proposed Green Belt additions across the GM area were recoded and one of the SGBAs overlapping Bolton was reassessed, with no impact from a proposed Bolton release or designation.

Adopted PfE Green Belt

2.33 The above assessments ultimately informed the release of existing Green Belt and designation of new Green Belt in the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan [See reference 14]. Within Bolton, the following land was released from and added to the Greater Manchester Green Belt:

- **Release:** Bewshill Farm (JPA4)
- **Release:** Chequerbent North (JPA5)
- **Release:** West of Wingates (JPA6)
- **Addition:** Horwich Golf Club / Knowles Farm (GPA1)

2.34 Table 2.1 below shows the approximate distribution of Green Belt today within the nine Greater Manchester authorities covered by Places for Everyone. PfE's allocations and designations resulted in a net loss of 1,755 hectares from the Green Belt, a change of -3.3% [See reference 15].

Table 2.1: Indicative extent of Green Belt by Greater Manchester Authority

Local Authority	Total Authority Area (ha)	Designated Green Belt area (ha)	Designated Green Belt Area (%)
Bolton MBC	13,979	7,088	50.7
Bury MBC	9,946	5,407	54.4
Manchester City	11,565	1,232	10.7
Oldham MBC	14,235	6,110	42.9
Rochdale MBC	15,813	9,548	60.4
Salford City	9,720	3,429	35.3
Tameside MBC	10,315	4,936	47.9
Trafford MBC	10,604	3,729	35.2
Wigan MBC	18,817	10,519	55.9
Total	114,994	51,998	45.2

Chapter 3

Assessment Methodology

3.1 This chapter summarises the methodology used to undertake an assessment of the variations in harm to the Green Belt purposes that would result from the release of Green Belt land within the Allocations proposed in the Bolton Draft Local Plan. This methodology is set out in full detail in Chapter 3 of the 2020 Stage 2 Greater Manchester Green Belt Study [See reference 16].

Assessment Approach

Key components

3.2 As the emerging Bolton Local Plan considers the release of new sites from the Green Belt land, there is a need to consider the harm to Green Belt purposes that would result from release of land for development.

3.3 The assessment of harm considers the extent to which the release of land within the proposed site Allocation would reduce the contribution to Green Belt purposes, through both the loss of openness of the released land and the resulting impact that this could have on the strength of the adjacent Green Belt.

Relationship with previous studies

3.4 The 2016 study defined assessment parcels on the basis of physical features that could form clear Green Belt boundaries and then considered, in isolation, the role each parcel played in contributing to the Green Belt purposes. The harm assessment process for each draft Allocation for the GMSF and later PfE worked outwards from the adjacent inset settlement edge, identifying thresholds beyond which the further release of land would increase harm to the Green Belt purposes. This approach means that variations in harm can be more clearly be identified than by the analysis of pre-defined parcels, within which variations may occur.

3.5 The definitions that underpin the analysis of the Green Belt purposes, of large built-up areas, towns and historic towns, are unchanged from the Stage 1 and Stage 2 studies, and the factors that are considered within the harm analysis are the same as those considered in the previous studies – namely the strategic factors associated with location in relation to large built-up areas, towns and historic settlement areas, and the more localised considerations of the openness of land, the relationship with

inset settlement and the relationship with the wider countryside. However, the assumptions regarding development, the avoidance of predefining parcels and the consideration of impact on remaining Green Belt allows a more precise analysis to be carried out, with results that may indicate a greater variation in harm than might be expected when only the contribution of the predefined 2016 parcels was taken into account.

Other considerations

3.6 The impact on Green Belt purposes of the release of land is not inherently related to the size of the area released, in that the contribution of land depends on its relationship with settlements (large built-up areas, neighbouring or historic towns) and countryside. However, the release of a larger area clearly has more potential to weaken the Green Belt by extending into areas that have a greater distinction from urban edges, by diminishing settlement separation and by diminishing the extent to which remaining open land relates to the wider countryside. The analysis of harm as a progression of land release from an inset settlement edge allows variations in this impact to be judged; something which cannot so readily be achieved when considering the overall contribution made by a predefined parcel of land.

3.7 The assessment has assumed that all land within the urban area and settlements inset from the Green Belt (including Protected Open Land), unless constrained by absolute constraints (see paragraph 3.12), could potentially be developed, and therefore potentially has an urbanising and containing impact on the adjacent Green Belt.

3.8 Further, the assessment has assumed that any land released from the Green Belt would, unless constrained by absolute constraints (see paragraph 3.12), be 'developed' and would not retain any 'openness'. It is recognised that specific development proposals may include, within the area to be released, the retention of undeveloped land, and/or the implementation of landscaping measures – e.g. to create a stronger boundary – that could potentially reduce harm to Green Belt purposes; however, the study has not taken any such proposals into account, since they are at varying stages of development and certainty.

3.9 In some locations committed development is coming forward. As this is committed, this has been taken into consideration in terms of its urbanising impact on surrounding land and lack of contribution to Green Belt purposes, including where located within Allocation boundaries.

Proposed development site allocations

3.10 This study examines four proposed development site Allocations which lie partially or wholly within designated Green Belt land in Bolton. The location of the proposed development sites within the Bolton Green Belt are presented in **Figure 3.1** below.

3.11 For each variation in contribution identified within an Allocation area, a sub-area is formally identified, setting out the ratings and supporting analysis in relation to each assessed Green Belt purpose, and considered in combination with the potential impact on the integrity of the neighbouring Green Belt to arrive at a single overall harm rating.

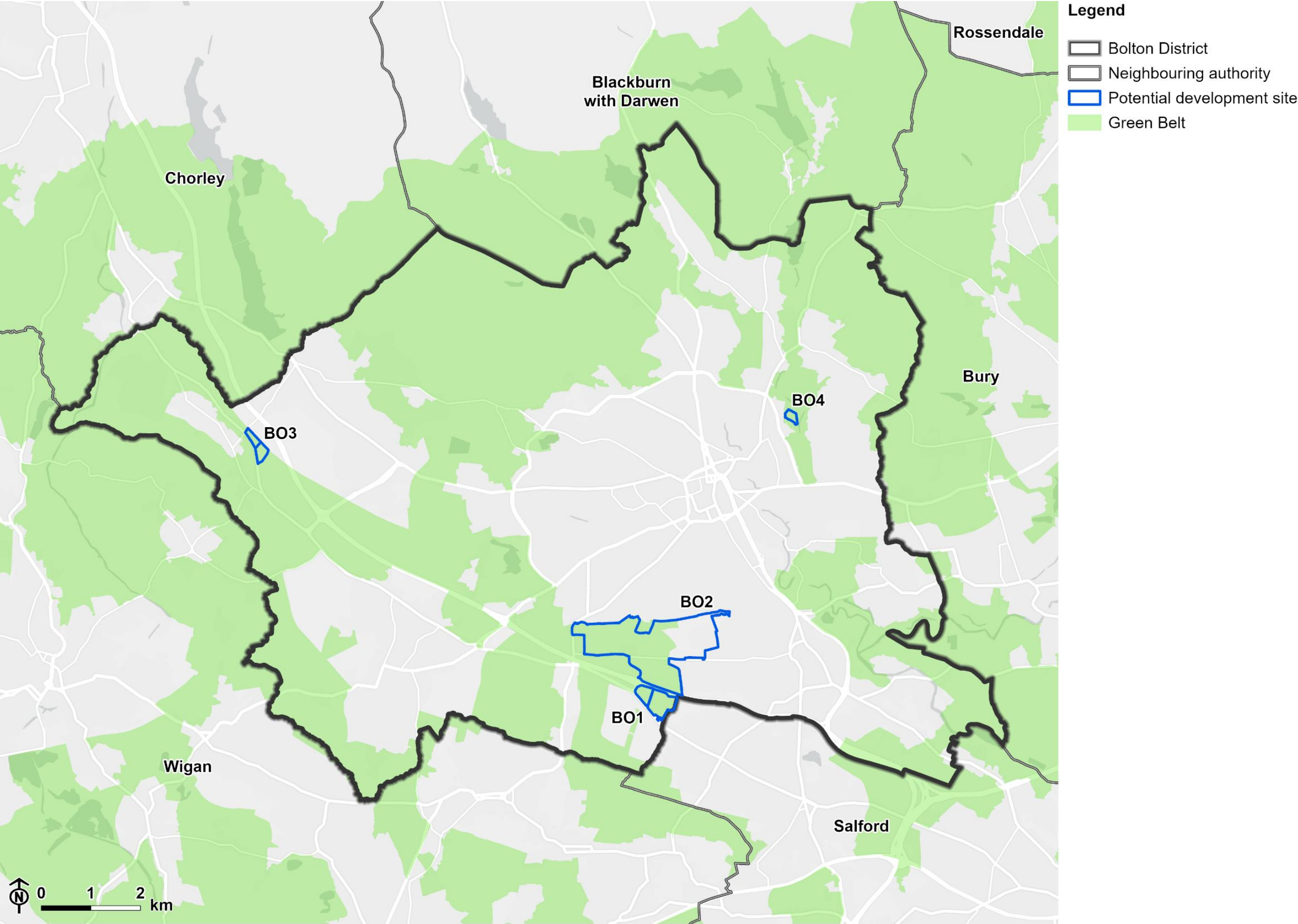
Absolute constraints

3.12 Certain designations are recognised as constituting an ‘absolute’ constraint to development – i.e. areas within which development would not be permitted [See **reference 17**]. It is recognised that in some cases, the constraint to built development will extend beyond the actual boundary of the designation (e.g. a buffer zone). The following are considered to be absolute constraints:

- Special Protection Areas.
- Special Areas of Conservation.
- Ramsar sites.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Ancient woodland.
- Scheduled Monuments.
- Registered Parks and Gardens.
- Common land.
- Flood Zone 3.
- Cemeteries.

3.13 Any function that constrained areas, either within or adjacent to Allocations, may perform as areas of open land and/or as boundary features has been taken into consideration in the assessment of harm.

Figure 3.1: Potential development sites in the Bolton Local Plan



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Harm Assessment Steps

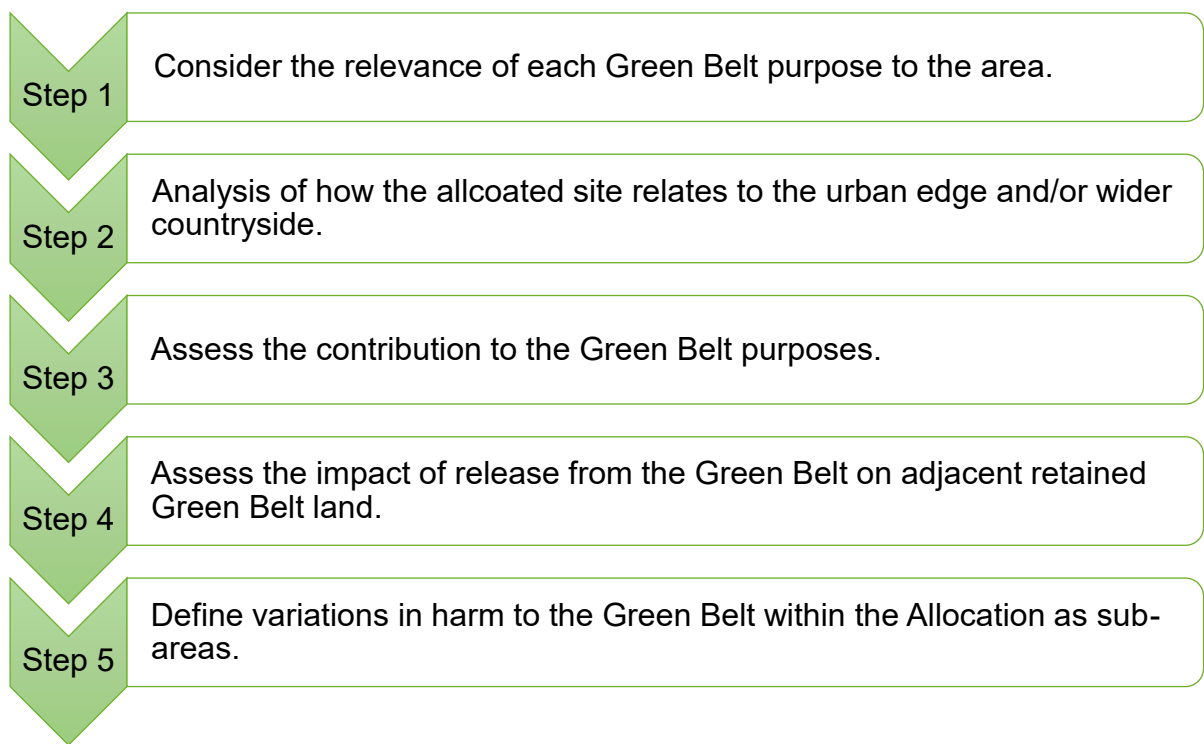
3.14 The assessment process applied to the Green Belt land within each Allocation is split into 5 steps, as shown in **Figure 3.2**.

3.15 The assessment of contribution to Green Belt purposes (Step 3) is the product of the analysis of two distinct elements: consideration of the extent to which each of the Green Belt purposes is applicable in any given area (Step 1); and consideration of the more localised variations in contribution that result from how the sites relates to the urban edge and/or wider countryside (Step 2).

3.16 Step 4 rates the potential impact of the release of land (with the assumption that it will lose openness) on adjacent retained Green Belt land.

3.17 Step 5 combines the judgements from Steps 3 and 4 to arrive at conclusions regarding variations in harm, with sub-areas being defined to reflect these variations to a 1-hectare minimum sub-area size.

Figure 3.2: Harm Assessment Steps



3.18 These are explained in more detail below:

Step 1: Consider the relevance of each Green Belt purpose

3.19 The first step of the assessment process is to identify if the Green Belt land within the Allocation areas has the potential to contribute to any of the NPPF Green Belt purposes, based on the location of the land. As noted in Chapter 2, there was no defined approach set out in national guidance in 2021 as to how Green Belt studies should be undertaken. However, case law highlighted the importance of assessment against the Green Belt purposes within Green Belt assessments [\[See reference 18\]](#) [\[See reference 19\]](#). There are five Green Belt purposes as defined in paragraph 134 of the NPPF:

The purposes of Green Belt

- 1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- 2) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- 3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- 4) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- 5) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Assessing Purpose 1

3.20 It is possible to argue that all land within the Green Belt prevents the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up urban areas, because that is its principal purpose as a strategic planning designation. However, the study requires the definition of variations in the extent to which land performs this purpose. This requires an area-based assessment against this strategic purpose.

3.21 For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to define what constitutes a 'large built-up area' within and in close proximity to Bolton, and what is meant by the term 'sprawl'.

Definition of a large built-up area

There is no definition provided in the NPPF for a large built-up area. Green Belt studies in different locations have ranged from considering the large built-up area

as just the principal settlement around which the Green Belt was defined to considering all inset settlement to be large built-up areas.

3.22 The 2016 Stage 1 study identified which settlements within Greater Manchester were *not* included in the 'large built-up area', including the following in Bolton:

- Hunger Hill
- Chew Moor
- Bottom o'th Moor
- Blackrod

3.23 For the purpose of this assessment, all other settlements were understood as components of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, consistent with the previous Greater Manchester Green Belt studies. Whilst definitions of sprawl vary, the implication of the terminology is that planned development may not contravene this purpose. However, in assessing the impact of releasing land in the context of a strategic Green Belt study, no assumptions about the form of possible future development can be made, so the role an area of land plays will be dependent on its relationship with a large built-up area.

3.24 Land that, if developed, would clearly constitute an extension of a large built-up area will make the strongest contribution to preventing its sprawl. However, it is recognised that a smaller inset settlement area close to a large built-up area can have a relationship with it such that expansion of the latter, particularly if it narrows the gap between the two, can also be considered detrimental to this purpose.

Definition of sprawl

Similarly to large built-up areas, there is no regulatory definition of sprawl.

The 2015 PAS guidance emphasises in relation to Purpose 1 the variable nature of the term 'sprawl' and questions whether positively planned development constitutes 'sprawl' **[See reference 20]**.

The 2015 RTPI Research Briefing on Urban Form and Sustainability is also not definitive on the meaning of sprawl, noting "a variety of urban forms have been covered by the term 'urban sprawl', ranging from contiguous suburban growth, linear patterns of strip development, leapfrog and scattered development" **[See reference 21]**.

Assessing Purpose 2

3.25 The concept of what constitutes a ‘town’ has been widely interpreted in different Green Belt studies, ranging from settlements classified as towns in Local Plan settlement hierarchies to all urban areas inset from the Green Belt regardless of size.

3.26 This assessment remains consistent with the 2016 assessment in terms of its identification of settlements considered relevant to the assessment of gaps between neighbouring towns. Therefore, it includes **all** inset settlements in Greater Manchester, together with settlements in adjacent districts.

3.27 Regardless of whether a particular settlement is large enough to realistically be considered a town, it can be acknowledged that smaller settlements may lie in between larger ones, such that loss of separation between them may in turn have a significant impact on the overall separation between larger ‘towns’.

3.28 The concept of ‘merging’ is clearer, but assessing the extent to which land between towns contributes to preventing this is less so. However, it is generally acknowledged that the role open land plays in preventing the merging of towns is more than a product of the size of the gap between them. The assessment therefore considers both the physical and visual role that intervening Green Belt land plays in preventing the merging of settlements.

3.29 Both built and natural landscape elements can act to either decrease or increase perceived separation, for example intervisibility, a direct connecting road or rail link or a shared landform may decrease perceived separation, whereas a separating feature such as a woodland block or hill may increase the perception of separation.

3.30 This study identifies that land that is juxtaposed between towns makes a contribution to this purpose, and the stronger the relationship between the towns – i.e. the more fragile the gap – the stronger the potential contribution to this purpose of any intervening open land. Physical proximity is the initial consideration, however, where settlements are very close, a judgement is made as to whether their proximity is such that the remaining open land does not play a critical role in maintaining a distinction between the two towns, i.e. that the characteristics of the open land relate more to the towns areas themselves than to the open land in between. Where this is the case, the impact of release of land for development on Purpose 2 may be reduced.

Physical and visual role of preventing merging

The PAS guidance states that distance alone should not be used to assess the extent to which the Green Belt prevents neighbouring towns from merging into one another. The PAS guidance also refers to settlement character and the character of land in between as being relevant considerations when looking at retaining separate identities. – PAS Planning on the Doorstep.

Assessing Purpose 3

3.31 This considers the extent to which land can be considered to constitute ‘countryside’ on the basis of its usage, as opposed to reflecting urban influence.

3.32 Land may, through its usage, have a stronger relationship with the adjacent urban area and, as a result, not be considered ‘countryside’ to the same degree as other open land.

3.33 Equally, land may be largely contained by urban development but may nonetheless retain, as a result of its usage and its size, a countryside character. Also, contribution to Purpose 3 does not equate to the extent of built development, as development that is rural in form is not considered to detract from countryside character.

3.34 It is important not to stray from assessing the Green Belt purposes into assessing landscape character, sensitivity or value as whilst Green Belt land may be valuable in these respects, it is not a requirement or purpose of the designation to provide such qualities. Therefore, the condition of land is not taken into consideration: the poor condition of Green Belt land does not necessarily undermine its fundamental role of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

Assessing Purpose 4

3.35 This purpose makes specific reference to ‘historic towns’, not to individual historical assets or smaller settlements such as villages and hamlets. Green Belt studies have offered a range of interpretations, with a common approach being to consider the relationship with designated Conservation Areas regardless of their location.

Definition of historic towns considered under Purpose 4

An extract from Hansard in 1988 clarifies which historic settlements in England were considered 'historic towns' in the context of the Green Belt purposes. The Secretary of State for the Environment clarified in answer to a parliamentary question that the purpose of preserving the special character of historic towns is especially relevant to the Green Belts of York, Chester, Bath, Oxford and Cambridge [See reference 22]. Durham has since been added to this list.

This is supported by the PAS guidance which states: that "this purpose is generally accepted as relating to very few settlements in practice".

3.36 In the 2016 Stage 1 study, historic settlements were identified by selecting Conservation Areas that encompassed a block of residential settlement, and which were located within one of the settlements assessed in Purpose 2. The area of each historic settlement was defined by expanding the corresponding Conservation Area to include any pre 20th century settlement identified in the Historic Landscape Classification data. Any relatively small Conservation Areas that were not surrounded by pre-20th settlements were not included, nor were Conservation Areas which were comprised only of historic industrial development. To inform understanding of the role that Green Belt provided in preserving the setting of historic towns, intervisibility analysis was undertaken as part of the desk-based assessment of land parcels, followed by field survey.

3.37 The methodology of the 2016 analysis was applied to the assessment of the draft Bolton development site Allocations via a desk based assessment. Recognising that Purpose 4 has been interpreted in different ways, the findings of the 2016 Green Belt Study were reviewed for those parcels in which draft Allocations are located, in order to determine whether the contribution to Purpose 4 was stronger than the contribution to any other purpose, and so likely to be the key factor in any of the harm assessments. The review concluded that Purpose 4 was not significant in this way and that the definition of what constitutes a historic town would not have affected the assessment of harm for the draft Local Plan Allocations.

Assessing Purpose 5

3.38 Most Green Belt studies do not assess individual Green Belt land parcels against Purpose 5, and either do not rate them or rate them all equally, on the grounds that it is difficult to support arguments that the release one parcel of Green Belt land has a greater impact on encouraging re-use of urban land than another [See reference 23].

3.39 This assessment aligns with the conclusion of the previous studies that all land can be considered to contribute equally to this Purpose, and the impact of release of land for development on Purpose 5 is considered to be uniform. This study does not therefore undertake any further assessment in relation to Purpose 5.

Step 2: Identify variations in relationship between Green Belt land and development

3.40 The next step in the assessment is to identify more localised variations in the relationship between Green Belt land and development with an urbanising influence. Land that is related more strongly to urbanising development typically makes a weaker contribution to the first three of the Green Belt purposes, being less likely to be perceived as sprawl (Purpose 1), narrowing the gap between towns (Purpose 2) or encroachment (Purpose 3). These factors do not apply to Purpose 4, as a stronger relationship with the urban area will frequently increase contribution to historic setting and character.

3.41 'Urbanising development' is defined as development which, with reference to the lists provided in paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF, is considered 'inappropriate'.

Appropriate Development

Appropriate development within the Green Belt cannot, according to case law, be considered to have an urbanising influence and therefore harm Green Belt purposes [See reference 24].

For the purposes of this study therefore, development deemed to be 'appropriate' within the Green Belt (as defined in the NPPF) is not considered to constitute an urban land use, or an urban influence in the countryside.

However, what is deemed to be appropriate development in the NPPF has to be carefully considered as developments such as the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments are only considered appropriate as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

3.42 The relationship between open land and developed land is considered under three headings:

- distinction;
- openness; and
- containment.

3.43 Distinction, openness and containment are common factors that affect the first three Green Belt purposes, and their consideration allows for a finer grain of assessment which cannot be achieved through consideration of the broader applicability of the purposes alone (Step 1). These three factors are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Distinction: to what extent does landform and/or land cover create distinction between inset land and the Green Belt?

3.44 'Distinction' considers the relationship between the existing inset settlement and the Green Belt. Landform and/or landcover can create a physical distinction between development and Green Belt land, limiting the relationship between the two. We assume that Green Belt land with a weaker distinction from the urban area(s) will serve to diminish contribution to Purposes 1-3, being less likely to be perceived as sprawl (Purpose 1), narrowing the gap between towns (Purpose 2) or encroachment into the countryside (Purpose 3).

3.45 As examples in **Table 3.1** below indicate, the physical scale of a boundary feature, its consistency over distance and its impact on views are all taken into consideration.

Table 3.1: Distinction assessment

Distinction level	Description	Example features
Very strong distinction	No perception of development beyond, with boundary feature creating a physical gap; or physical feature significantly restricts access and forms a consistent edge.	Woodland block; motorway; river/floodplain.
Strong distinction	Development perceptible but clear sense of distinction; or physical feature restricts access and/or forms a relatively consistent edge over a wider area.	Strong landform distinction (e.g. consistent ridge crest or valley); major road.
Moderate distinction	Development perceptible but generally not visible.	Linear tree cover; mature well-treed hedgerow; stream; moderate landform distinction; minor through road.
Limited distinction	Development clearly perceptible and generally visible.	Regular garden/building boundaries or hedgerows; estate/access road.
Weak distinction	No clear physical definition; settlement edge is blurred.	Some development crosses the boundary.

Openness: to what extent is the land free from ‘urbanising development’?

3.46 The 2021 NPPF identifies openness as an ‘essential characteristic’ of the Green Belt, rather than a function or purpose. The presence of ‘urbanising development’ within the Green Belt can increase the relationship between Green Belt and an inset settlement. Green Belt openness relates to lack of ‘inappropriate development’ rather than to visual openness; thus, both undeveloped land which is screened from view by landscape elements (e.g. tree cover) and development which is not considered ‘inappropriate’, are still ‘open’ in Green Belt terms.

Containment: to what extent is the land contained by urbanising influences?

3.47 Urbanising influences, whether on land inset from the Green Belt or on land within the Green Belt (i.e. likely 'inappropriate' development in Green Belt terms), can contain Green Belt land from the wider countryside and increase its relationship with development.

3.48 This factor relates to containment of Green Belt land by urbanising influences only, and does not include the presence of 'natural' landscape features. The extent to which particular natural landscape features might serve to contain an area of released land, and as a result limit its adverse impact on the remaining Green Belt, is considered in Step 4 below.

3.49 Examples of land which lacks urbanising influences, and is therefore considered to be open in Green Belt terms, and which would not have a containing influence on other Green Belt land, are:

- Any land without built form;
- Agricultural/horticultural/forestry buildings (e.g. farms, glasshouses);
- Mineral extraction or engineering operations that preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it; and
- Low density or small-scale rural settlement.

3.50 Examples of urbanising development which could potentially reduce Green Belt openness, and which could therefore be considered a containing influence, are:

- Buildings other than those for agriculture/horticulture/forestry;
- Solar farms; and
- Car parks.

Step 3: Assessing the contribution of land to the Green Belt Purposes

3.51 Step 3 combines Step 1 (the identification of the potential for Green Belt land to contribute to the Green Belt purposes) and Step 2 (the assessment of relationship of the Green Belt with development) to assess the contribution of Green Belt land within the draft Allocation areas to each of the assessed Green Belt purposes. This provides a more localised assessment than the 2016 Stage 1 assessment, which typically assessed larger land parcels.

3.52 The 2016 study used a five-point rating scale for assessing contribution: strong, moderate, weak, no contribution and not applicable. This analysis has also applied a five-point scale, but the focus is on providing more distinction between ratings at the higher end of the 2016 scale. The revised ratings are as follows:

Table 3.2: Rating comparison chart

2016 Study Rating	New Study Rating
Strong	Significant Relatively significant
Moderate	Moderate Relatively limited
Weak	Limited/no contribution
No contribution	Limited/no contribution
Not applicable	Limited/no contribution

What contribution does land make to Purposes 1-4?

3.53 Examples for each of the five rating levels are set out in **Table 3.3**, **Table 3.4**, **Table 3.5** and **Table 3.6**, although other combinations of factors may be possible. Professional judgement is used, alongside the guiding criteria to determine the most appropriate rating.

Table 3.3: Approach for the contribution assessment of Purpose 1: Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
Significant contribution to purpose	The settlement in question is a large built-up area, or the release of land would leave only a narrow gap to a nearby large built-up area, and the land contains no or very limited urban development, is not itself contained by any urban development, and has strong distinction from the inset settlement edge.
Relatively significant contribution to purpose	The settlement in question is a large built-up area, or the release of land would leave only a narrow gap to a nearby large built-up area, and the land contains very limited urban development and has a strong sense of openness. The land is not strongly related to the inset settlement.
Moderate contribution to purpose	The settlement in question is a large built-up area, or the release of land would leave only a narrow gap to a nearby large built-up area, and the land contains limited urban development and has a relatively strong sense of openness. The land may relate to both the settlement and the wider countryside or have a degree of separation from both.
Relatively limited contribution to purpose	The settlement in question is a large built-up area, or the release of land would leave only a narrow gap to a nearby large built-up area, but the land already contains urban development

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
	compromising the sense of openness, or it relates more strongly to the urban area than to the wider countryside.
Limited or No contribution to purpose	The settlement in question is a large built-up area, or the release of land would leave only a narrow gap to a nearby large built-up area, but the land is already fully developed or contained by urban development; or The land is not close enough to a large built up area for development to have an association with it.

Table 3.4: Approach for the contribution assessment of Purpose 2: Prevent neighbouring towns from merging

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
Significant contribution to purpose	Release would result in physical or visual coalescence of towns; or Would leave a narrow physical gap with no physical elements to preserve separation; or Would result in a significant reduction in gap size, where the land in question relates more strongly to the countryside than any inset settlement.
Relatively significant contribution to purpose	Release would result in significant narrowing of the physical gap, but physical feature(s) would preserve a sense of separation; or Would result in a significant reduction in gap size, where the land in question has some degree of containment, or does not have strong boundary distinction from an inset settlement, or has diminished openness; or

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
	Would significantly diminish gap size, but the settlements are already to a degree connected; or Would increase the relationship between settlements that have narrow separation, with no significant separating features, but would not significantly narrow the gap - e.g. by widening the frontage of a settlement.
Moderate contribution to purpose	Release would result in significant narrowing of the physical gap, but urbanising containment, weak distinction from the urban edge, limited openness or existing linkage between settlements mean that the land has a stronger association with the urban area than the wider Green Belt; or Would result in a moderate narrowing of a wider gap, where land has a stronger relationship with open countryside than with an inset settlement; or. Would increase the relationship between settlements that have fairly narrow separation, but would not significantly narrow the gap - e.g. by widening the frontage of a settlement.
Relatively limited contribution to purpose	Development would result in a limited narrowing of a wider gap; or The gap is not too narrow, and urbanising containment, weak distinction from the urban edge, limited openness or existing linkage between settlements mean that the land has a strong association with the urban area.
Limited or No contribution to purpose	The land is not located within a gap between towns; or The land plays no role, or a very limited role in maintaining the separation between towns due to the presence of significant

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
	separating features and/or significant distances between the towns; or The land plays no significant role due to the extent of development; or The land forms a gap that is too narrow and lacking in separating features to create any clear distinction between towns (i.e. a sense of leaving one and arriving in another).

Table 3.5: Approach for the contribution assessment of Purpose 3: Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
Significant contribution to purpose	The land contains the characteristics of open countryside (i.e. an absence of built or otherwise urbanising uses in Green Belt terms), is not itself contained by any urban development and has strong distinction from the inset settlement edge.
Relatively significant contribution to purpose	The land contains the characteristics of open countryside. It relates more strongly to the wider countryside than the settlement and has very limited urbanising development.
Moderate contribution to purpose	The land contains the characteristics of open countryside but has a relationship with the settlement; or The land is open but has a usage that strengthens its relationship with the settlement.

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
<i>Relatively limited</i> contribution to purpose	The land has very limited characteristics of open countryside and has urbanising development that compromises openness. The land relates more strongly to the settlement than to the wider countryside.
<i>Limited or No</i> contribution to purpose	The land contains urbanising development of a scale, density or form that significantly compromises openness; or It is too influenced and contained by urban development to retain any sense of being countryside, or sharing a relationship with the wider countryside.

Table 3.6: Approach for the contribution assessment of Purpose 4: Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
<i>Significant</i> contribution to purpose	The land plays a significant role in the setting and or special character of historic towns in terms of its physical extent and degree of visibility and/or its significant contribution to special character.
<i>Relatively significant</i> contribution to purpose	The land plays a relatively significant role in the setting and or special character of historic towns in terms of its physical extent and degree of visibility and/or its significant contribution to special character.
<i>Moderate</i> contribution to purpose	The land plays a moderate role in the setting of historic towns in terms of its physical extent and degree of visibility and/or its contribution to special character.

Contribution Rating	Assessment criteria
Relatively limited contribution to purpose	The land plays a minor role as it lacks any direct visual relationship with historic towns, and is not visible in the context of views to it. It does however contribute in some way to the wider setting.
Limited or No contribution to purpose	Land makes no contribution – i.e. does not form part of the setting or contribute to the special character of historic towns.

What contribution does land make to Purpose 5?

3.54 As noted under Step 1, all Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to Purpose 5. For completeness, standard text is provided in the assessment outputs to state this.

Step 4: Assess impact of release on adjacent Green Belt land

3.55 The nature of any boundary features are considered as part of the assessment of the potential impact of releasing land from the Green Belt on the Green Belt purposes. This determines the extent to which adjacent retained Green Belt land incurs loss of integrity through increased containment and/or loss of distinction between development and open land.

3.56 If a revised Green Belt boundary results in a less distinct boundary between the settlement and the countryside, the release of the area of Green Belt under assessment is likely to weaken the land that remains designated as Green Belt. However, even if a strong alternative boundary can be defined, there is potential for land that remains designated as Green Belt to be weaker, due to increased containment. In some locations it may be possible for a clearer Green Belt boundary to be defined – e.g. through use of a feature (see **Table 3.1**) that marks a stronger, or more widely consistent, distinction between a built-up area and countryside.

3.57 The extent of this impact upon the adjacent land that remains designated as Green Belt is limited by the existing strength of adjacent Green Belt land in relation to the Green Belt purposes. Only the increased containment or weakening of the Green Belt boundary of adjacent retained Green Belt land that makes a stronger

contribution to Green Belt purposes than the land being assessed for release will increase the overall harm of the release.

3.58 Green Belt land that is occupied by absolute constraints cannot be impacted by release of adjacent land, as this land is protected from development and as such its integrity cannot be weakened.

3.59 The assessment assumes that the existing boundary features between land proposed for release and the Green Belt will be retained. For example, if land proposed for release is comprised of woodland, it is assumed that the woodland would be lost to development, but that the edge of this woodland adjoining the Green Belt would be retained.

3.60 Considering the impact on containment and impact on distinction in combination provides a rating for the impact that the release of Green Belt land has on the integrity of adjacent retained Green Belt land, using a four-point scale of: significant / moderate / minor / no or negligible. Guidelines for each of the four rating levels are set out in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Factors affecting the impact of release on adjacent Green Belt land

Impact rating	Criteria
Major impact	Development has major impact on adjacent Green Belt as: ■ it significantly increases the containment of adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a stronger role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; and ■ it results in a significantly weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. changing from a strong Green Belt boundary to a weaker, or more convoluted boundary).
Moderate impact	Development has a moderate impact on adjacent Green Belt as: ■ it significantly increases the containment of adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a stronger role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; or

Impact rating	Criteria
	■ it results in a significantly weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. changing from a strong Green Belt boundary to a weaker, or more convoluted boundary); or ■ it moderately increases the containment of adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a stronger role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; and ■ it results in a moderately weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. changing from a strong Green Belt boundary to a weaker, or more convoluted boundary).
Minor impact	Development has a minor impact on adjacent Green Belt as: ■ it moderately increases the containment of adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a stronger role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; or ■ it results in a moderately weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. changing from a strong Green Belt boundary to a weaker, or more convoluted boundary); or ■ it minimally increases the containment of adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a stronger role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; and ■ it results in a minimally weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. changing from a strong Green Belt boundary to a weaker, or more convoluted boundary).
No/Negligible impact	Development has no or negligible impact on adjacent Green Belt as: ■ it does not lead to the containment of any adjacent retained Green Belt land; or

Impact rating	Criteria
	■ it contains adjacent retained Green Belt land that plays a weaker role in relation to the Green Belt purposes than the land being released; and ■ it results in no significant change in strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. resulting in no significant change in strength of Green Belt boundary); or ■ it results in a clearer or more consistent distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt (i.e. resulting in a clearer or more consistent Green Belt boundary).

Step 5: Define variations in harm to the Green Belt within the Allocations as sub-areas

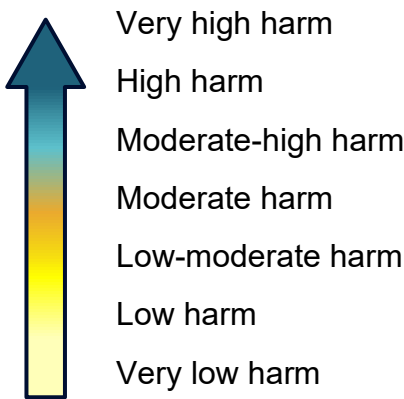
3.61 The assessed contribution of land within the Allocations to the Green Belt purposes (Step 3) is combined with the assessed impact of its release on remaining land designated as Green Belt (Step 4) to determine an overall assessment of the harm of releasing land from the Green Belt. Variations in harm rating within an Allocation are reflected in the definition of sub-areas, where appropriate.

3.62 Sub-areas are defined where it is appropriate to reflect clear variations in identified harm of Green Belt release, as well as variations in the reasons for identified harm of Green Belt release. This does not extend to picking out very small areas of variation – typically less than a hectare – which can be considered too small to be ‘strategic’.

3.63 Where an allocation is split into multiple sub-areas, the overall harm of the release will reflect the rating of the sub-area assessed as causing the highest harm – for example if, moving outwards from a settlement edge, there is a progression in levels of harm from low to moderate to high, the overall harm of the Allocation’s release will be high.

3.64 Green Belt harm is rated using a seven-point scale ranging from very high to very low harm:

Figure 3.3: Harm rating scale



3.65 Figure 3.3 provides an indication as to how loss of contribution to the Green Belt purposes (Step 3) and the impact on adjacent Green Belt (Step 4) influence the overall harm of Green Belt release, and benchmark examples for each of the seven rating levels are set out in **Table 3.8**.

3.66 Greater impact on adjacent retained Green Belt land will serve to increase harm, whereas lack of impact on adjacent retained Green Belt will serve to reduce harm. Loss of contribution to multiple Green Belt purposes can also increase harm. However, professional judgement has been used in each individual case to consider how much weight to attach to each contributing element. Clear and detailed justification is provided in the assessment outputs for all ratings given in relation to how the overall judgement of Green Belt harm has been reached.

Figure 3.4: Guidelines for rating harm on the basis of contribution to purposes and impact of release

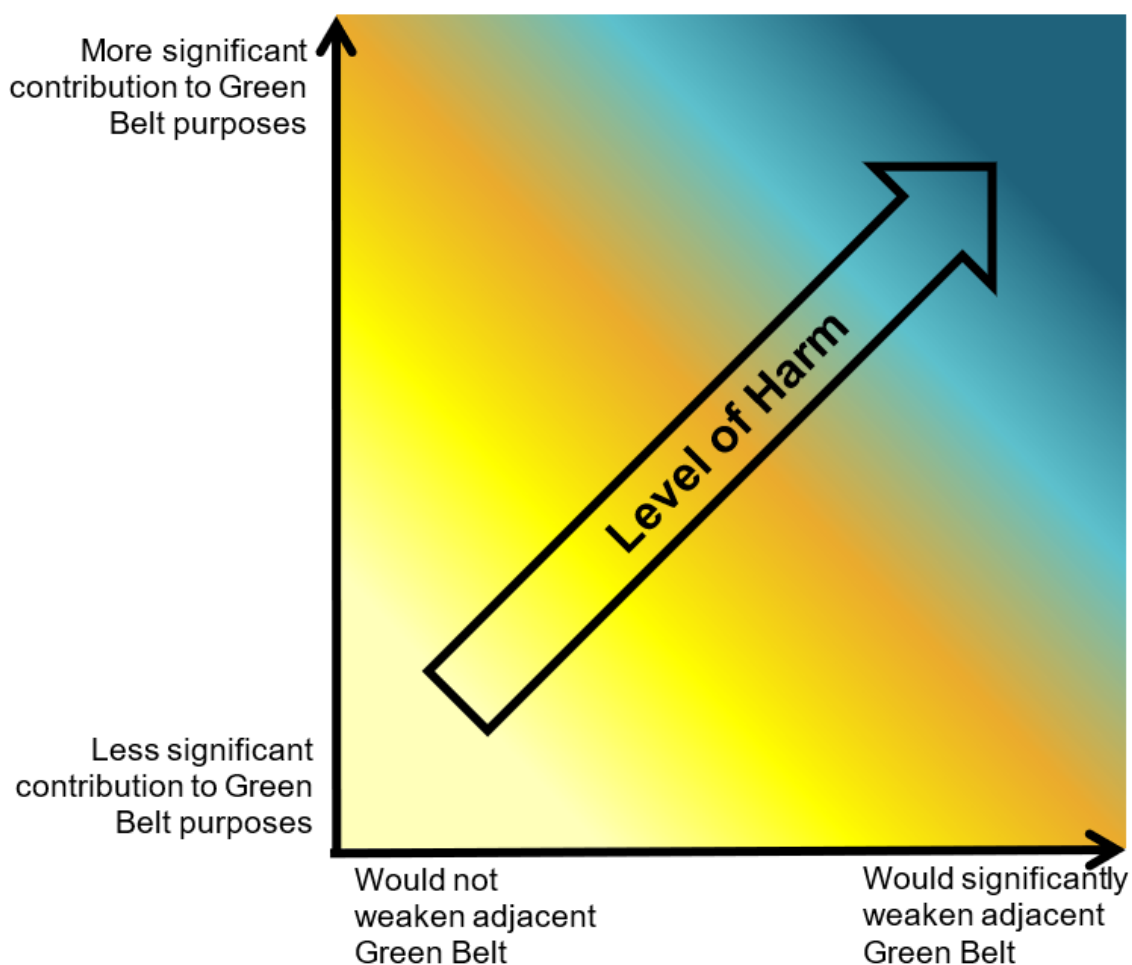


Table 3.8: Examples of overall judgements of Green Belt harm

Overall harm rating	Description
Very high harm	Release of land results in a loss of significant contribution to at least one of the Green Belt purposes, and would constitute at least a moderate weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.

Overall harm rating	Description
High harm	Release of land results in a loss of significant contribution to at least one of the Green Belt purposes, and would constitute at least a minor weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.
Moderate-high harm	Release of land from the Green Belt would mean a relatively significant loss of contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes and a less significant loss of contribution to others, and would cause a minor weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.
Moderate harm	Release of land from the Green Belt would mean a moderate loss of contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes and a less significant loss of contribution to others, and would cause a minor weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.
Low-moderate harm	Release of land from the Green Belt would mean a relatively limited loss of contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes and a limited loss of contribution to others, and would cause a minor weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.
Low harm	Release of land from the Green Belt would mean limited or no loss of contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes and a limited loss of contribution to others, and would cause no more than a minor weakening of the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.
Very low harm	Release of land from the Green Belt would mean limited or no loss of contribution to all of the Green Belt purposes and a limited loss of contribution to others, and would not

Overall harm rating	Description
	weaken the integrity of land that remains designated as Green Belt.

Chapter 4

Assessment Findings

4.1 This chapter sets out the detailed findings of the assessment of harm.

4.2 The harm ratings and sub-area references and areas are summarised in Table 4.1. Figure 4.1 shows the potential degree of harm to the Green Belt purposes that would result if land were released.

4.3 The detailed findings of the assessment of harm are included below. For each sub-area (or for the Allocation as a whole, if no sub-areas identified):

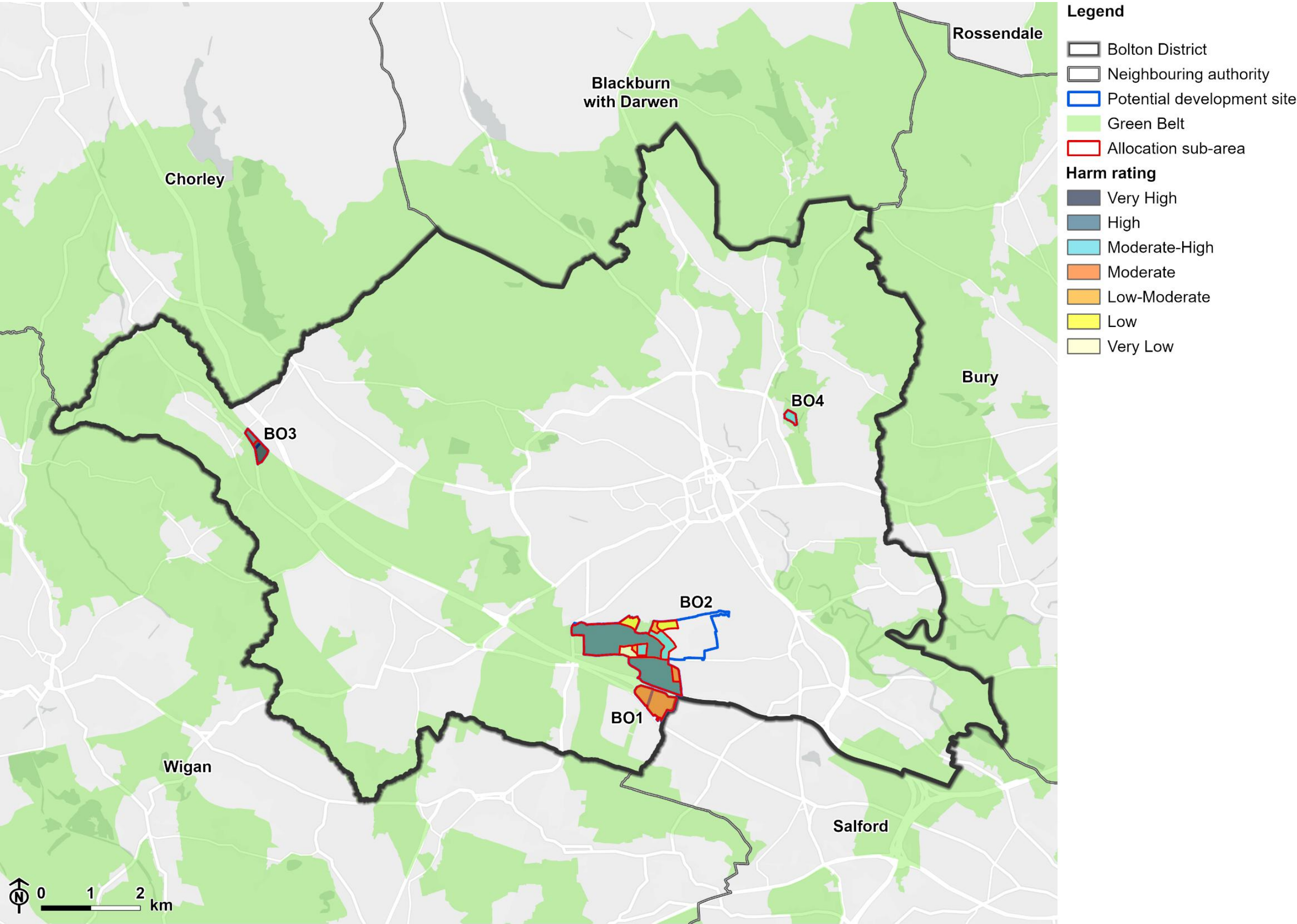
- an OS map and an aerial view showing the sub-area boundary, existing Green Belt land and any absolute constraints;
- a description of the sub-area, including its boundaries and relationship with inset settlements and the wider Green Belt;
- rating and supporting text assessing loss of contribution to the Green Belt Purposes 1-5 resulting from release of the sub-area;
- an analysis of the potential impact of release on the strength of adjacent retained Green Belt land and Green Belt boundaries; and
- rating and supporting text assessing the overall harm to the Green Belt purposes of release of the sub-area, considering loss of contribution to the Green Belt purposes and impact on strength of adjacent Green Belt land.

Table 4.1: Green Belt assessment of harm ratings

Allocation Reference	Allocation Name	Allocation area (ha)	Allocation / Sub-area Reference	Allocation / Sub-area area (ha)	Harm rating
BO1	North of Salford Road	30.87	BO1	30.87	Moderate
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 1	6.24	Low
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 2	6.39	Low

Allocation Reference	Allocation Name	Allocation area (ha)	Allocation / Sub-area Reference	Allocation / Sub-area area (ha)	Harm rating
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 3	2.84	Low - Moderate
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 4	13.17	Moderate - High
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 5	3.98	Moderate
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 6	45.95	High
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 7	4.37	Moderate - High
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 8	1.37	Low - Moderate
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 9	6.75	Very Low
BO2	Health Innovation Bolton	172.12	BO2 - 10	81.03	High
BO3	Leigh Tenement Farm	11.51	BO3 - 1	3.51	High
BO3	Leigh Tenement Farm	11.51	BO3 - 2	8.00	Very High
BO4	West of The Alders	4.36	BO4	4.36	Moderate - High

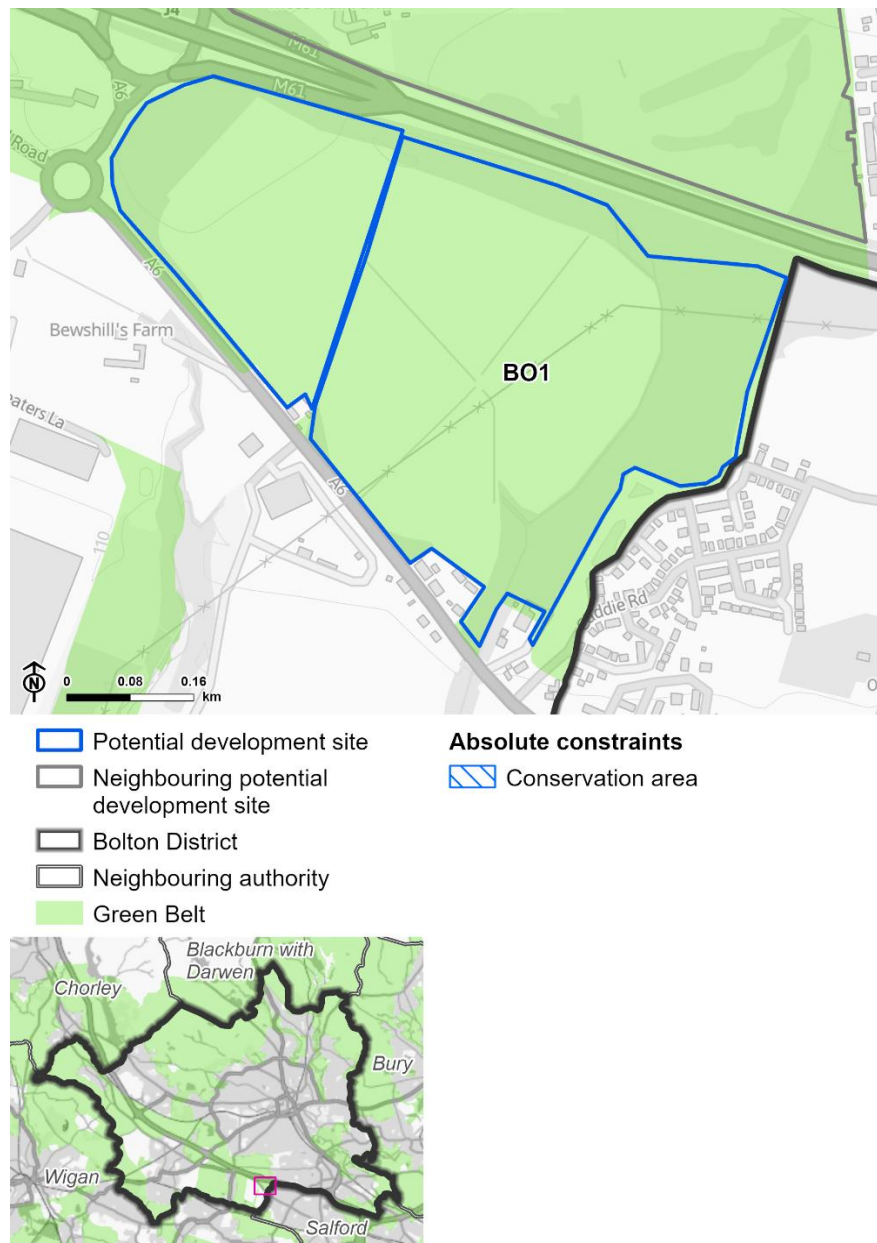
Figure 4.1: Overall harm map



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BO1 – North of Salford Road

Figure 4.2: North of Salford context



4.4 The Allocation lies to the north-west of Little Hulton, south-west of Farnworth and south of Bolton. It comprises a number of open fields and areas of dense tree cover and is contained by the inset edge to the east and south-west, with adjacent urban development comprising new residential development and large-scale commercial warehouses. The M61 and associated tree buffers form a strong outer boundary feature to the north.

BO1 – Overall harm of release

Harm Rating	Area (ha)
Moderate	30.87
Total Allocation area	30.87

Summary of harm

4.5 The Allocation comprises a series of open fields enclosed by the M61, the A6, and extensive tree cover. While the A6 and the tree belt to the south and east provide a relatively strong distinction from the urban edge, the site is otherwise largely contained by the surrounding inset area, and the scale and proximity of the adjacent development to the south has some urbanising influence on the Allocation.

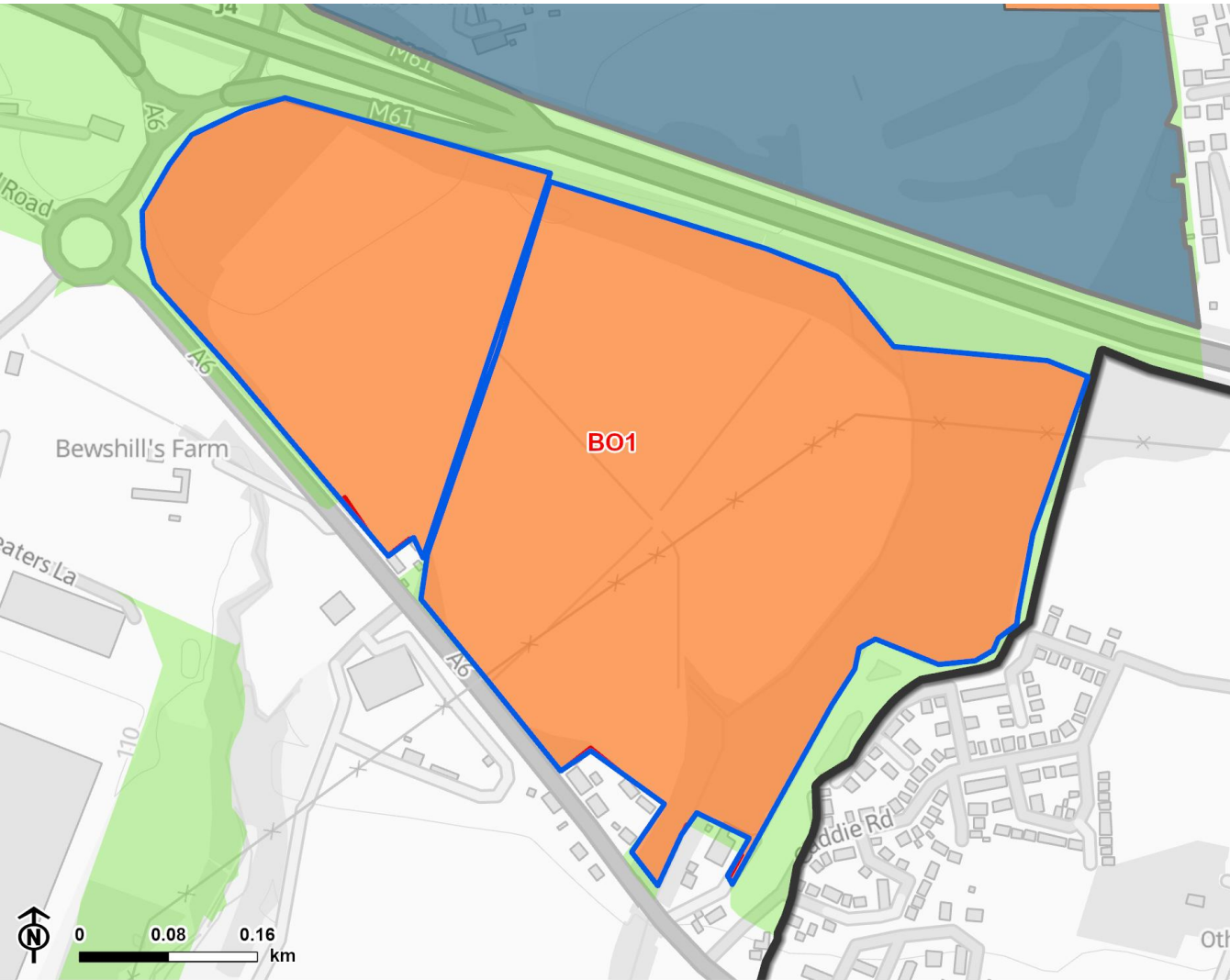
4.6 As a result, the Allocation makes a relatively significant contribution to checking the unrestricted sprawl of Greater Manchester and to safeguarding the wider countryside from encroachment. The surrounding settlements are already substantially merged, with no remaining Green Belt land maintaining their separation. Consequently, the Allocation makes a limited contribution to Green Belt Purpose 2.

4.7 Release of the Allocation would slightly increase the containment of the remaining Green Belt land to the north. However, the M61 and its associated tree buffer would provide a strong, permanent and clearly defined boundary between the inset settlement and the wider Green Belt. As such, release of the Allocation would have a negligible effect on the function and integrity of adjacent Green Belt land and would therefore result in a Moderate level of harm to Green Belt purposes.

Potential to mitigate harm

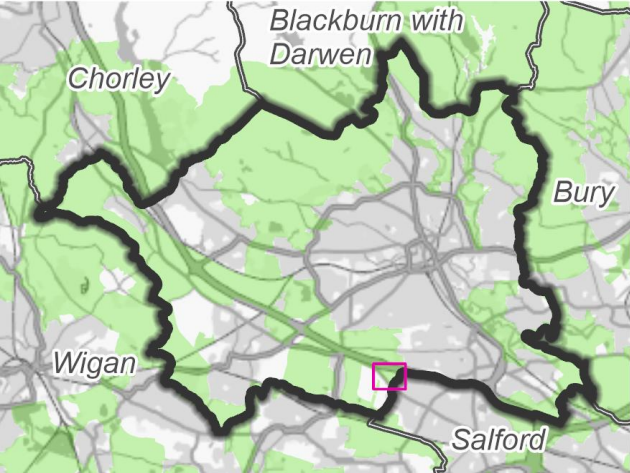
4.8 The principal cause of harm from release of this Allocation would be from the loss of the Green Belt land within the Allocation itself, as opposed to its impact on retained Green Belt land. Should the parcel be developed, the M61 and surrounding mature tree cover to the north and the west would form a stronger consistent boundary between the inset area and the wider Green Belt. Development which retains the density of the outer tree cover would ensure that a negligible impact on adjacent Green Belt land is retained. Any other mitigation measures would not reduce the harm of release of this Allocation.

Figure 4.3: BO1 - Overall harm



- Allocation sub-area
- Potential development site: BO1
- Neighbouring potential development site
- Bolton District
- Neighbouring authority

- Harm rating**
- Very High
 - High
 - Moderate-High
 - Moderate
 - Low-Moderate
 - Low
 - Very Low



BO1 Assessment



Area description

Bolton Allocation 1 (BO1) lies on the north-western edge of Little Hulton and predominantly comprises a small area of fields which contain no urbanising development to diminish openness. Salford Road (A6) to the south and mature tree cover to the east form a clear inner boundary between the site and the urban area but the large-scale commercial development along the A6 to the south-west has some urbanising influence on the parcel. The Allocation is wholly contained by varying levels of mature tree cover and tree lines as well as the M61 to the north and A6 to the west.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively Significant

Land lies adjacent to Little Hulton, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. The Allocation is free from development and the mature tree cover to the east and the A6 and tree lines to the south form clear boundary features between the area and the urban edges. However, the site is significantly contained by urban edges to the east and south-west which limits its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

The Allocation lies to the west of towns Little Hulton and Farnworth, but the towns are already linked to significant degree to the east, such that release would have limited contribution to preventing the neighbouring towns from merging.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Significant

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character, and has clear boundaries which separate it from the urban area.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: No/negligible

Release of the area would lead to slightly increased containment of the Green Belt land to the north of the M61. However, as the M61 and the associated mature tree cover form a stronger and more consistent boundary between the inset settlement and the Green Belt, release would not increase the harm on adjacent open land.

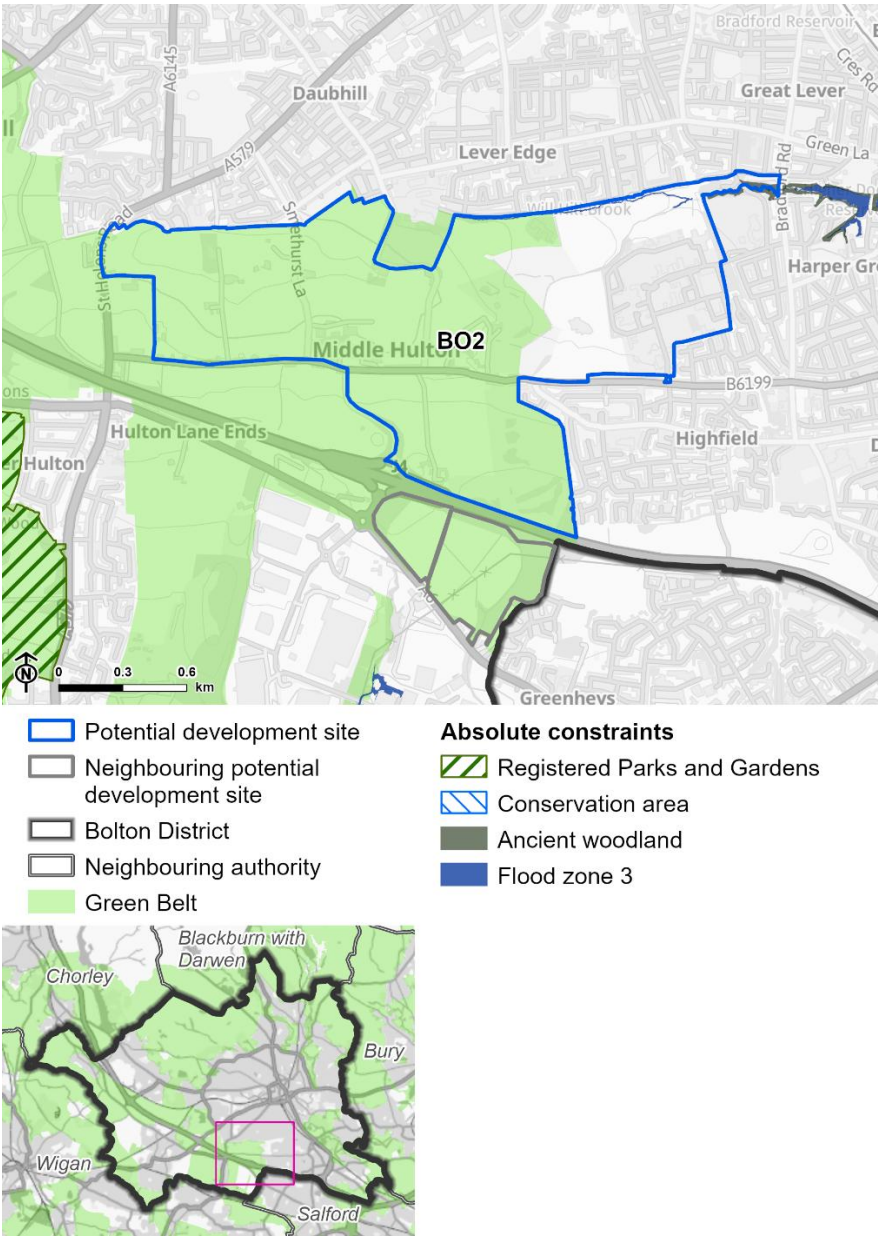
Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Moderate

Release of land within the Allocation as an expansion of Little Hulton would result in a Relatively Significant impact on checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up area and safeguarding the wider countryside from encroachment, but a Limited/No impact on all other Green Belt purposes. It would constitute a Negligible weakening of adjacent Green Belt land. Overall harm from the release of the Allocation is therefore assessed as Moderate.

BO2 – Health Innovation Bolton

Figure 4.4: Health Innovation Bolton context



4.9 The Allocation lies to the south of Bolton, west of Farnworth and north-east of Over Hulton. It predominantly comprises open, sloping agricultural fields, bisected by Plodder Lane, which runs east-west through the site. Edge Fold Industrial Estate and areas of washed-over development are situated along Plodder Lane. The eastern part of the site is occupied by Great Lever and Farnworth Golf Course, and a small area in the north-east contains Kings Leadership Academy Bolton and its associated sports fields. The M61 and the A6 junction forms the south-eastern boundary of the Allocation.

BO2 – Overall harm of release

Harm Rating	Area (ha)
High	126.98
Moderate-High	17.54
Moderate	3.98
Low-Moderate	4.24
Low	12.63
Very Low	6.75
Total Allocation area	172.12

Summary of harm

4.10 The BO2 Allocation is divided into ten sub-areas to reflect variations in the degree of harm arising from release. The assessment identifies a range of harm levels across the Allocation, with a sub-area in the west resulting in Very High harm to Green Belt purposes. While three sub-areas are influenced by existing urban development within the Green Belt or from the inset settlement, the majority of the open agricultural land contributes to the containment of urban form, preventing countryside encroachment and the separation of towns.

4.11 Release of the western part of the Allocation would result in a particularly significant harm to the Green Belt purposes. Development in this location would extend beyond the existing hill crest, negating its role to preventing sprawl, creating a prominent urbanising influence that would increase containment of the wider Allocation reducing its connectivity with the wider countryside. Notably, its release would substantially reduce the open land separating Bolton and Over Hulton. The urban development along St Helen's Road means that, in the area, the towns' separation is particularly fragile such that the openness and landform slope of the sub-area is significant to preventing their merging. Release would also cause a knock-on weakening of adjacent open land and therefore cause at least Very High harm to the Green Belt purposes.

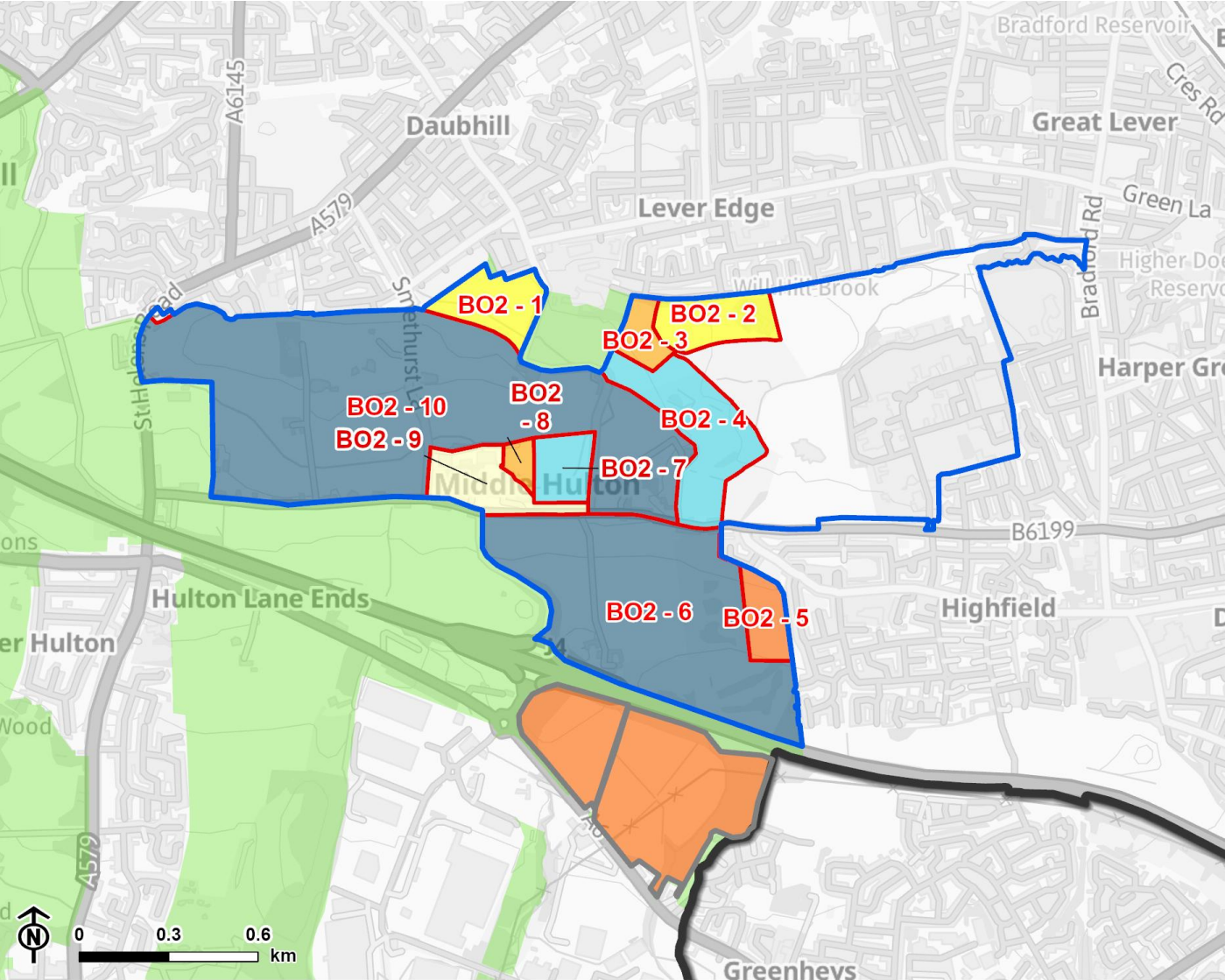
Potential to mitigate harm

4.12 Strengthening the Allocation's outer boundary along Plodder Land and Watergate Lane, such as by planting a dense tree buffer, could potentially increase

the future distinction between inset land and retained Green Belt land to the south-west. This could also help to limit the weakening of this land and help to strengthen its role in maintaining separation between Bolton and Farnworth and Over Hulton. Forming stronger internal boundaries in the central areas along the hilltop could also limit harm of a partial release of land in northern parts of the site, by limiting impact on land on the south-facing slopes. Any development on the south-facing slopes will have more visible impact on surrounding Green Belt land in the gap between towns, and therefore harder to mitigate.

4.13 Where release of the north and north-east sub-areas in the Allocation would have a lower harm on the Green Belt purposes, the principal cause of harm from their release would be from the loss of the Green Belt land within the sub-area itself, as opposed to its impact on retained Green Belt land. As such, mitigation measures would not reduce the overall harm of release of these sub-areas. Nevertheless, strengthening the outer boundaries of these sub-areas, for example with increased tree planting, could potentially increase the future distinction between inset land and retained Green Belt land.

Figure 4.5: BO2 - Overall harm



- Allocation sub-area
- Potential development site: BO2
- Neighbouring potential development site
- Bolton District
- Neighbouring authority
- Green Belt
- Harm rating**

Very High

High

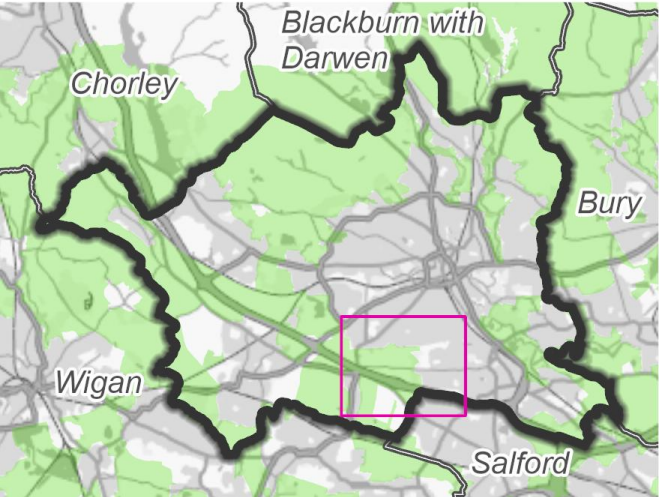
Moderate-High

Moderate

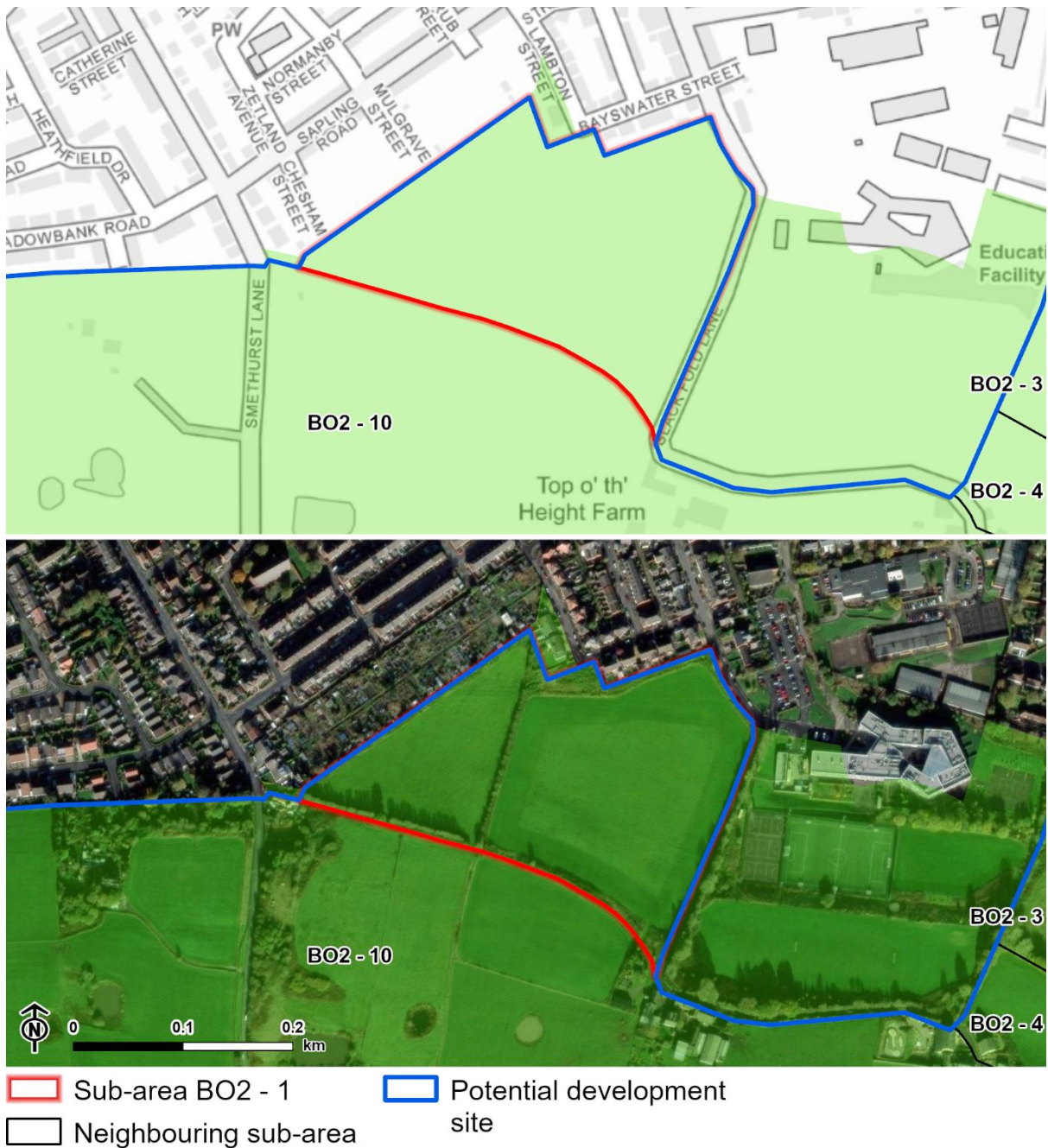
Low-Moderate

Low

Very Low



BO2 - 1 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 1 (BO2 - 1) comprises farmland adjacent to the urban edge of Bolton, to the south of the suburb of Daubhill. It lies in the gap between the latter and Over Hulton. The sub-area is free from urbanising development but the inset edges to the north and west in combination with Essa Academy secondary school and the associated sports fields to the east create a significant degree of containment. The sub-area comprises rising landform which largely follows the landform of the adjacent urban edge. The weak inner boundaries formed largely by residential property lines, Sapling Road Allotments and hedgerows mean that overall, land has a relatively strong relationship with the surrounding urbanising development. The outer boundary to the south is characterised by a mature hedgerow and a notable uphill bank, with surrounding adjacent land forming a continued gentler rise in landform which reaches the crest of the hillslope.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively limited

Land lies adjacent to Bolton, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. However, as the sub-area is significantly contained by the inset area and has a relatively strong relationship with the settlement, such that it has a limited role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

The sub-area does lie between Bolton and Over Hulton but is more closely related to the former. Other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Limited

Release would encroach on land which is significantly contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Bolton is a historic town, but this area is strongly related to modern development and makes no significant contribution to the setting of historic parts of the town.

Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: No/negligible

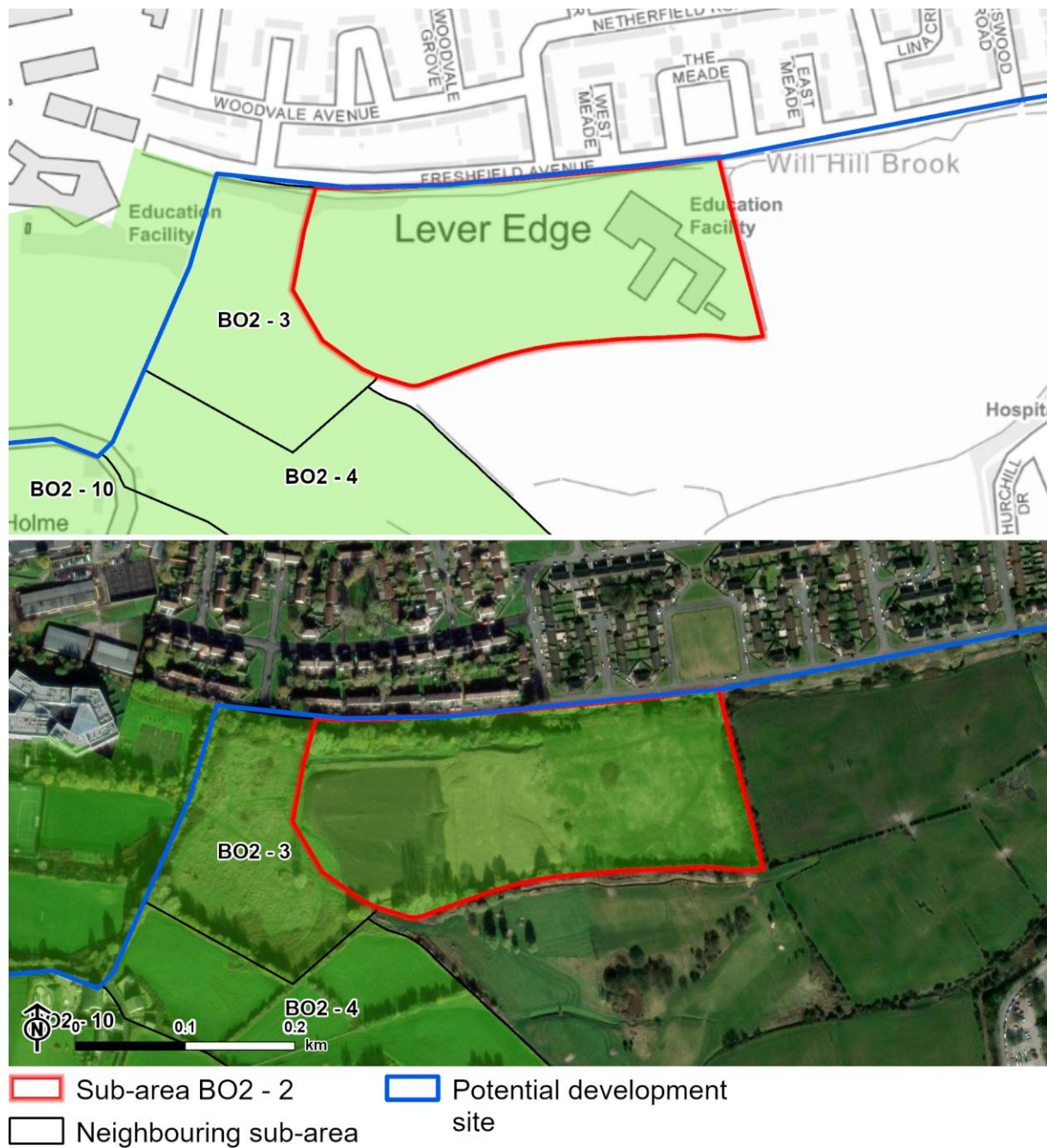
Release of the sub-area would not increase the containment of any adjacent Green Belt land due to its significant existing level of containment by the urban edge. The sub-area’s outer boundary formed by the notable change in landform and mature hedgerow, would maintain a strong and consistent boundary between the inset settlement and the Green Belt and therefore, would not increase the harm of its release on adjacent open land.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Low

Release of the sub-area would constitute relatively limited sprawl and would constitute a negligible weakening of retained Green Belt land. It would not impact the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton due to the orientation of the landform slope and other Green Belt land in the gap that plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Low.

BO2 - 2 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 2 (BO2 - 2) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton and west of Farnworth. The sub-area contains King's Leadership Academy Bolton, with the main secondary school building located in the east of the sub-area and sports pitches and open school grounds in the west. This has some impact on Green Belt openness, but the remaining open areas maintain a relationship with the wider Green Belt. The sub-area is largely contained by urban development including urban development along Freshfield Avenue to the north, Essa Academy to the west and the forthcoming development to the east and south where Green Belt land has been released. This has significant urbanising influence on the sub-area. Freshfield Avenue, mature tree cover and Will Hill Brook form moderate boundary separation between the parcel and the urban edge to the north, but only sparse tree lines and hedgerow separate the parcel from the urban areas to the east and south. The sub-area lies to the periphery of the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Limited/No

Land lies adjacent to Bolton, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. However, as the sub-area is significantly contained by the inset area and contains urbanising development and land uses, it has a limited role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

The sub-area lies to the periphery of the main area of land forming the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton. Other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Limited/No

Release would encroach on land which is characterised by development that is urban in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Bolton is a historic town but this area is strongly related to modern development and makes no significant contribution to the setting of historic parts of the town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

Release of the sub-area would increase containment of adjacent land that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. This includes the open sloping fields to the south-west. As the sub-area contains urban development, the boundary between the Green Belt and inset area has been breached. The mature tree line to the south-west would maintain a consistent boundary between the inset settlement and the Green Belt. Overall, further development or release would have a minor impact on adjacent open land.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Low

Release of the sub-area would constitute relatively limited sprawl due to its existing containment and urbanising influences, and would constitute a minor weakening of surrounding Green Belt land. It would not impact the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton due to its peripheral location, treed outer boundary and the fact that other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Low.

BO2 - 3 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 3 (BO2 - 3) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton and west of Farnworth. The sub-area contains a small open field which is free from urban development and urbanising land uses. The sub-area lies adjacent to King's Leadership Academy Bolton playing fields, and Essa Academy playing fields, with Freshfield Avenue, Will Hill Brook and mature tree cover forming a moderate inner boundary to the north, but only sparse tree lines and school fences separate the parcel from the urban land uses to the east and south. The sub-area lies to the periphery of the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Moderate

Land lies adjacent to Bolton, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. However, as the sub-area is partially contained by the inset area and adjacent urban land uses, and has only moderate distinction from the urban edges, it has a limited role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Limited

The sub-area lies to the periphery of the main area of land forming the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton. Other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Moderate

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Bolton is a historic town but this area is strongly related to modern development and makes no significant contribution to the setting of historic parts of the town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

Release of the sub-area would increase containment of adjacent land that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. This includes the open sloping fields to the south. The mature tree line to the south and west would maintain a consistent boundary between the inset settlement and the Green Belt. Overall, further development or release would have a minor impact on adjacent open land.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Low-Moderate

Release of the sub-area would constitute moderate impact on checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up area and on safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and would constitute a minor weakening of surrounding Green Belt land. It would not impact the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton due to its peripheral location, treed outer boundary and the fact that other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Low-Moderate.

BO2 - 4 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 4 (BO2 - 4) lies to the west of Farnworth and south of Bolton, within the gap between Farnworth and Over Hulton. The sub-area predominantly comprises the Great Lever and Farnworth Golf Course and is predominantly free from urbanising development, the golf course building and residential development on Plodder Lane to the south do not diminish the openness of the sub-area as a whole. The boundary separation between the sub-area and the inset settlement is formed by open golf course topography and sparse tree lines and there is some landform change as the topography slopes eastward toward to urban edge. Therefore, landform and land cover create moderate distinction from the adjacent urban edge. The sub-area is partially contained by the inset settlements to the north, east and south. The parcel's outer boundary is predominantly formed by a mature and consistent hedgerow.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively Significant

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Farnworth, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is free of urbanising development, however the weak distinction with the urban edge and its containment on two sides limits to a degree its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Limited

Release of the sub-area would still leave a distinct area of open land between Farnworth and Over Hulton that maintains their strong separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Significant

Release would encroach on land which has moderate distinction from the urban edge and is partially contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Bolton is a historic town but this area is strongly related to modern development and makes no significant contribution to the setting of historic parts of the town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

Release would wholly contain the adjacent land to the north that plays a weaker role in relation to Green Belt purposes. As the sub-areas outer boundary is formed by consistent mature hedgerow and the surrounding landform change, release would result in a minor weakening of the strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Moderate-High

Release of land within the sub-area as an expansion of Farnworth and Bolton would constitute a relatively significant impact on checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up area and on safeguarding the countryside from encroachment but would have a relatively limited impact on preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another. It would constitute a minor weakening of adjacent Green Belt land. Harm from the release of the sub area is therefore assessed as Moderate-High.

BO2 - 5 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 5 (BO2 - 5) lies to the west of Farnworth, within the gap between Farnworth and Over Hulton. The sub-area is an open field that is contained by the urban edge to the north and east. The boundary separation between the sub-area and the inset settlement is formed by open residential property lines and sparse tree lines. Therefore, landform and land cover do not create any significant distinction from the adjacent urban edge, increasing its urbanising influence. The parcel is contained by the Great Lever and Farnworth Golf Course and its associated tree cover to the west and south.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Moderate

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Farnworth, which is part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is free of urbanising development, however the weak distinction with the urban edge and its containment on two sides limits to a degree its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: No/Limited

Release of the sub-area would still leave a distinct area of open land between Farnworth and Over Hulton that maintains their strong separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Moderate

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

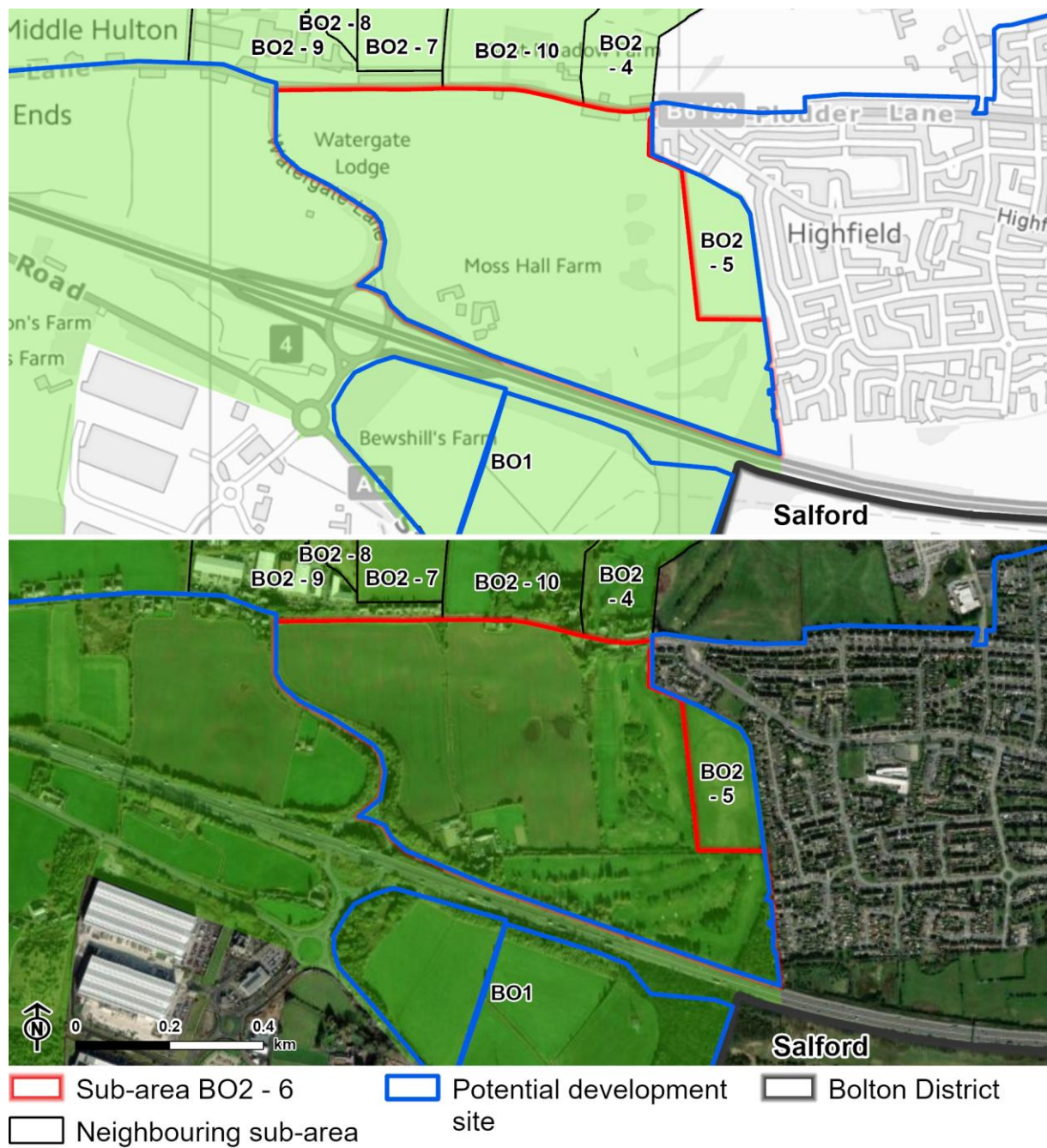
Release would slightly increase the containment of the adjacent land to the south that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. However, due to the presence of mature tree lines surrounding the sub-area and the wooded areas to the south, release result in a minor weakening of the strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Moderate

Release of land within the sub-area as an expansion of Farnworth would constitute a moderate impact on checking the unrestricted sprawl of the large built-up area and on safeguarding the countryside from encroachment but would have a negligible impact on preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another. It would constitute a minor weakening of adjacent Green Belt land. Harm from the release of the sub area is therefore assessed as Moderate.

BO2 - 6 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 6 (BO2 - 6) lies to the west of Farnworth. Bolton and Farnworth are already substantially merged, but the west part of the sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton. The sub-area primarily comprises open, sloping fields with associated agricultural buildings located along Slack Fold Land, and also part of Great Lever and Farnworth Golf Club. The sub-area contains no urbanising development that diminishes openness, and the landform change and areas of tree cover and mature tree lines create relatively strong distinction from the adjacent urban edges. The M61 and associated tree buffers form the outer boundary to the south while Watergate Lane and less consistent tree buffers form the outer boundary to the west, with the sloping landform and openness of the sub-area providing a strong sense of the open countryside.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Significant

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Farnworth, which forms a part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is free of urbanising development and benefits from strong distinction from the urban edge, contributing to its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Moderate

Release of land would reduce an open gap between towns Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton that, taking into consideration the presence of intervening smaller settlements along Plodder Lane and St Helen's Road, is relatively narrow in this location. The land to the west of Watergate Lane maintains the most important open part of the gap, such that development of the sub-area would reduce the size of the gap, but significant separating features would remain.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Significant

The absence of urbanising uses and strong distinction on the urban edge give this sub-area a strong relationship with surrounding open countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

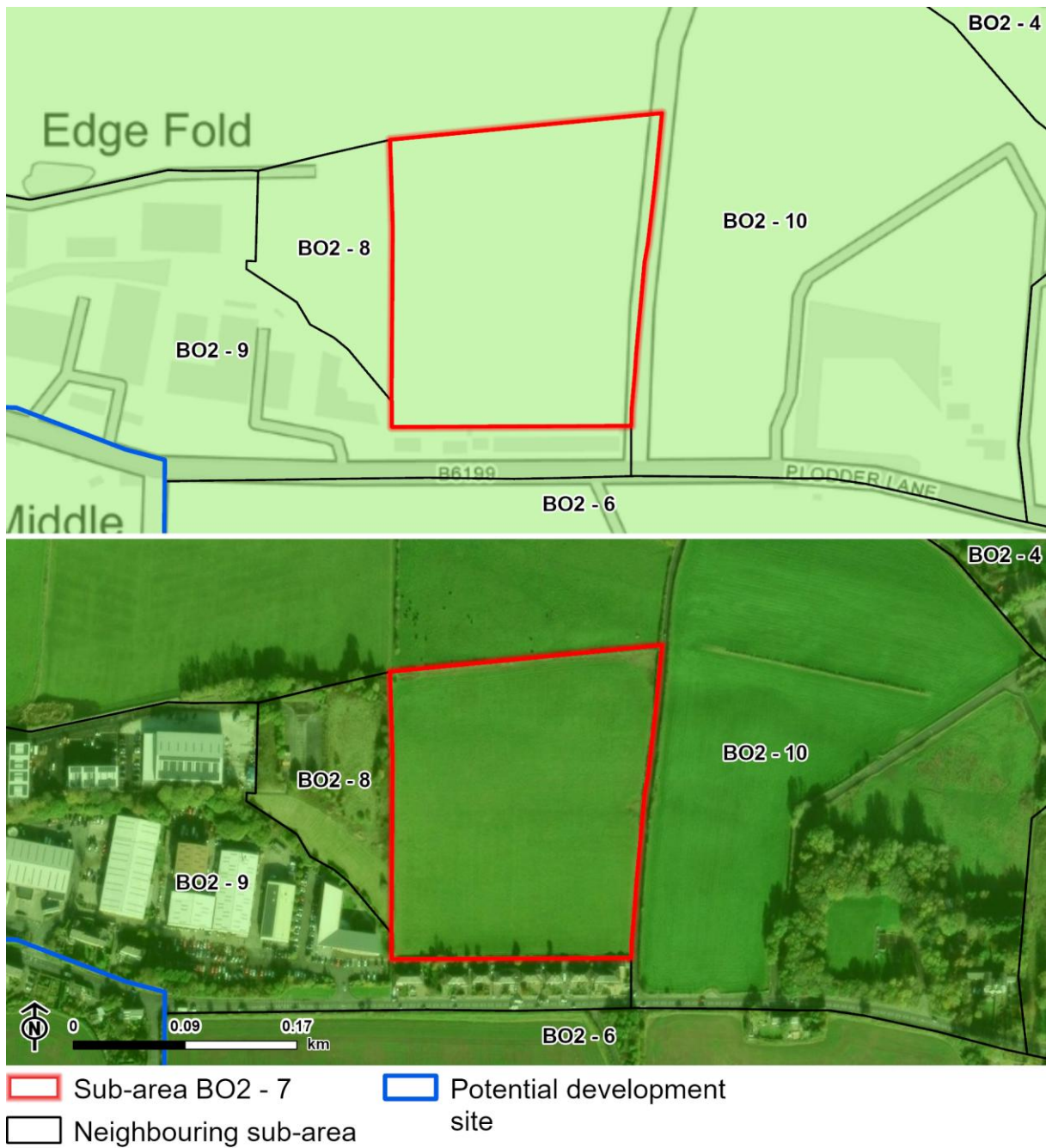
Release would increase the containment of adjacent land to the west of Watergate Lane that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes as it plays a significant role in preventing the coalescence of town. However, release would not result in a significant change in strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt due to the outer boundary features, surrounding landform change and the urban development along Plodder Lane.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

High

Release of the sub-area, as part of the release of the Allocation as a whole, would constitute significant sprawl and encroachment on the countryside, and a moderate impact on preventing the merger of towns. It would constitute a minor weakening of retained Green Belt land by increasing the level of containment to the west. Harm from release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as High.

BO2 - 7 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 7 (BO2 - 7) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton and west of Farnworth. The sub-area contains a small field with no urbanising development within it to diminish openness. The sub-area lies to the north of terraced residential development on Plodder Lane and east of the Edge Fold Industrial Estate. These are separated from the sub-area by residential and industrial property fences which creates weak distinction from the washed over development. The sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Moderate

The sub-area is near to Bolton and Farnworth which form part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. It is partially contained by adjacent washed over development but is free from urbanising development, it has a moderate role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Limited

The sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton. As the sub-area is partially contained by the adjacent washed over development and other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation, it plays a relatively limited role in preventing their merging.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Moderate

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained by the urban area, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Moderate

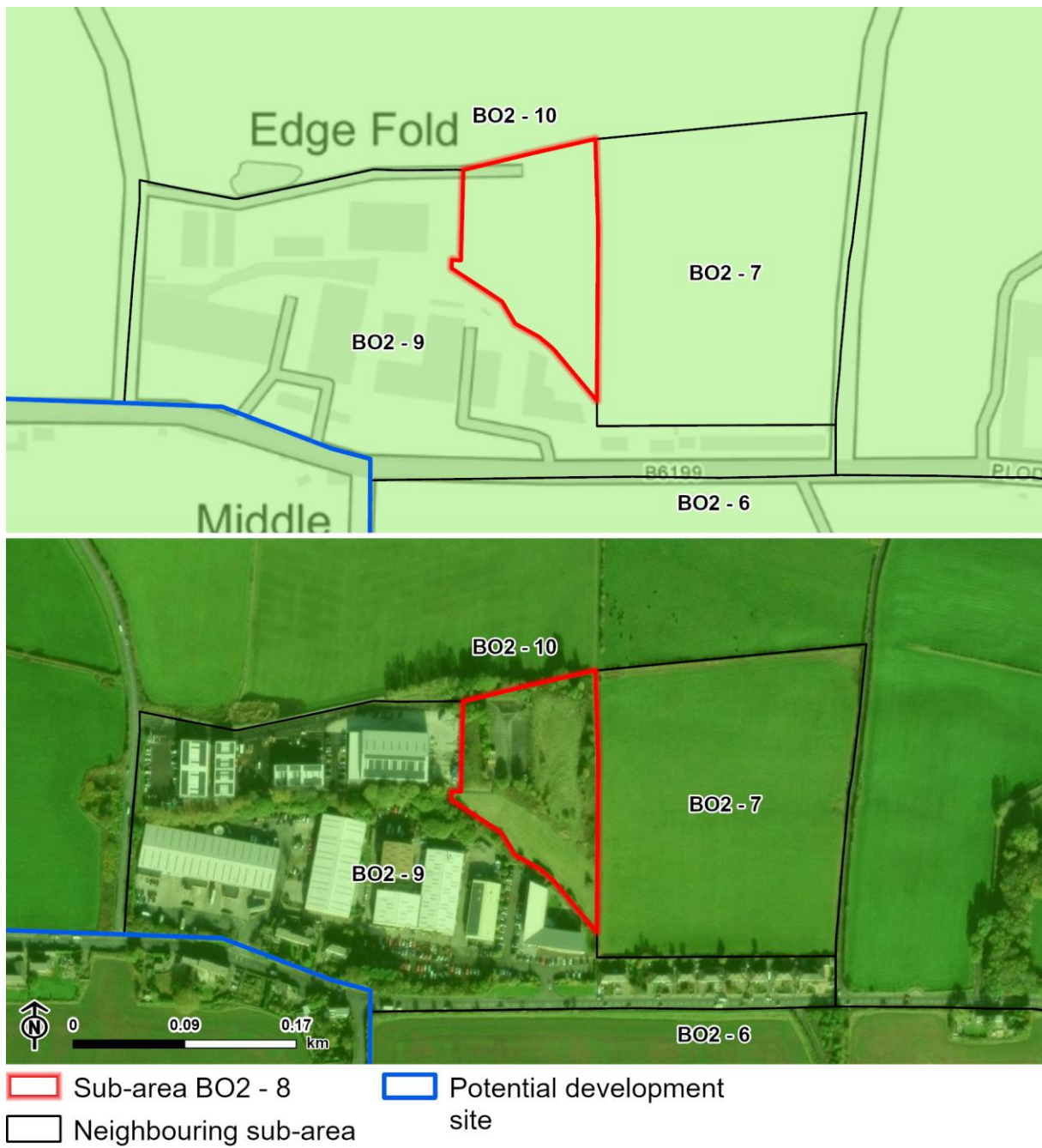
Release would increase containment of adjacent land to the north and east that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. Release would also result in weaker or less consistent distinction between the surrounding Green Belt and the washed over development, with development on the hillslope negating the role in the landform change.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Moderate-High

Release of the sub-area would constitute relatively significant sprawl and encroachment of the countryside due to openness and relationship with wider open Green Belt land to the north and east. It would have a relatively limited impact the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton due to its partial containment by adjacent washed over development and the fact that other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Its release would have a moderate impact on adjacent Green Belt land. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Moderate-High.

BO2 - 8 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 8 (BO2 - 8) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton and west of Farnworth. The sub-area contains a small area of open land with a small area of car parking that is partially contained by the Edge Fold Industrial Estate, but with no urbanising development to diminish openness. It is separated from the industrial estate by sparse tree cover and hedgerow boundaries which creates weak distinction from the washed over development. Its outer boundary to the north is formed by mature tree cover, but there is only sparse tree cover and hedgerows to the east. The sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively Limited

The sub-area is near to Bolton and Farnworth which form part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester. It is partially contained by an area of washed over development, has weak distinction from the area and is set some distance apart from the large built up edge, such that it has a relatively limited role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

The sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton. As the sub-area is partially contained by the washed over development and other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation, it plays a limited role in preventing their merging.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Limited

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained by the urban area, and contains some urbanising land uses. It is nonetheless open and undeveloped in character, so makes a relatively limited contribution to safeguarding the countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Minor

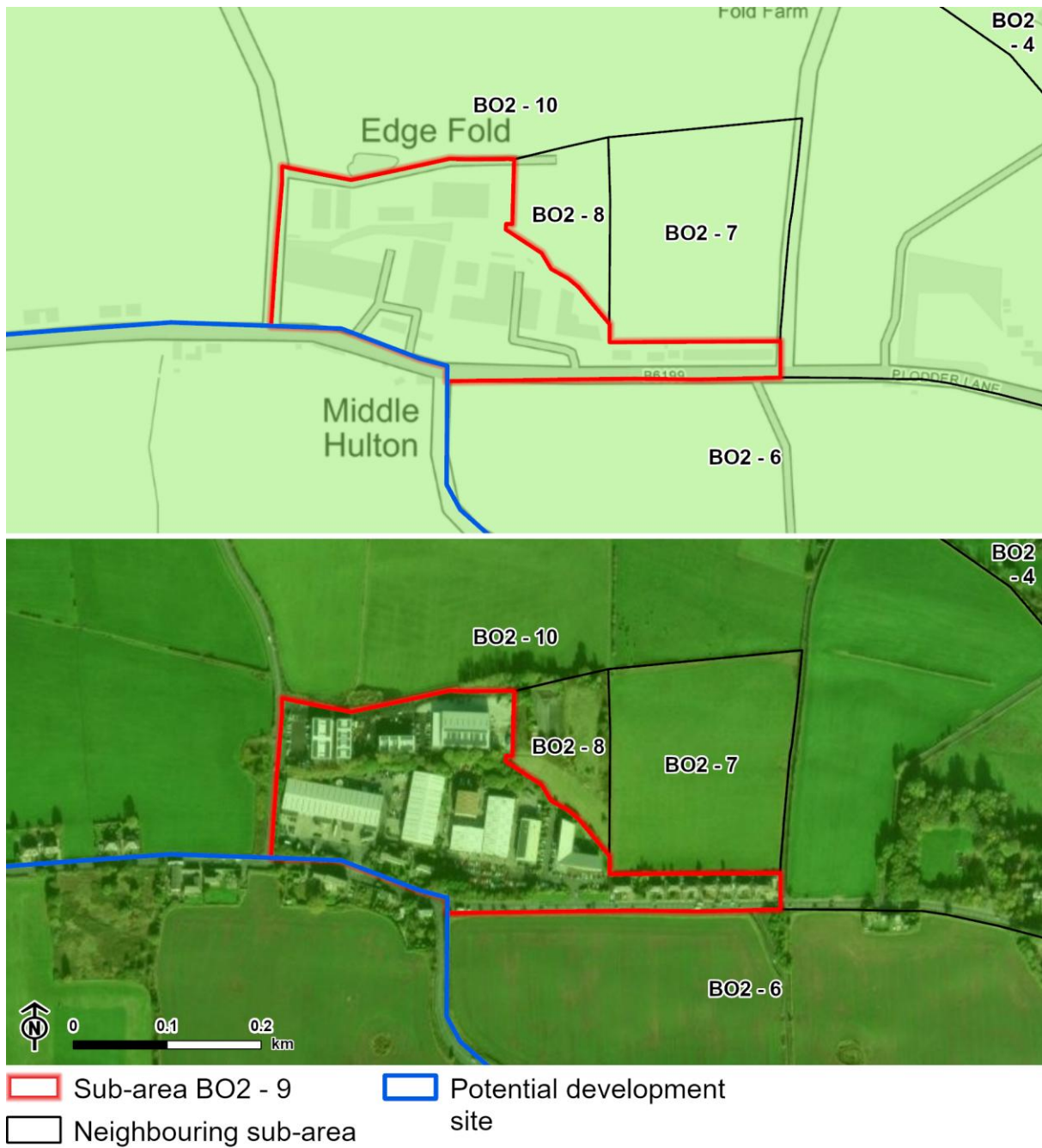
Release would slightly increase containment of adjacent land to the east that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. It would not result in weaker or less consistent distinction between the surrounding Green Belt and the washed over development, due the mature tree cover forming its outer boundary and the surrounding landform change.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Low-Moderate

Release of the sub-area would constitute relatively limited sprawl and encroachment of the countryside due to its partial containment by washed over development and its urbanising land uses. It would have a limited impact the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton due to this containment and the fact that other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Its release would have a minor impact on adjacent Green Belt land. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Low-Moderate.

BO2 - 9 Assessment



Area description

BO2 sub-area 9 (BO2 - 9) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton and west of Farnworth. The sub-area contains Edge Fold Industrial Estate and associated car parking and hardstanding storage areas, and a number of residential dwellings located on Plodder Lane. This has significant impact on Green Belt openness, such that any remaining openness has an urban context and doesn't contribute to the openness of the Green Belt. As the sub-area is surrounded by open Green Belt land is not significantly contained by any urban edges and is set apart from settlements by some landform change and tree lines that form moderate distinction between the sub-area and the inset areas. The sub-area within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Limited/No

The sub-area is near to Bolton and Farnworth which form part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, but as it contains significant urbanising development and land uses and is separated from the large built up area edge by landform change and tree lines, it has a limited role as a barrier to sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

The sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton. As the sub-area is significantly built up and other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation, it plays a limited role in preventing their merging.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Limited/No

Release would encroach on land which is characterised by development that is urban in character.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: No/negligible

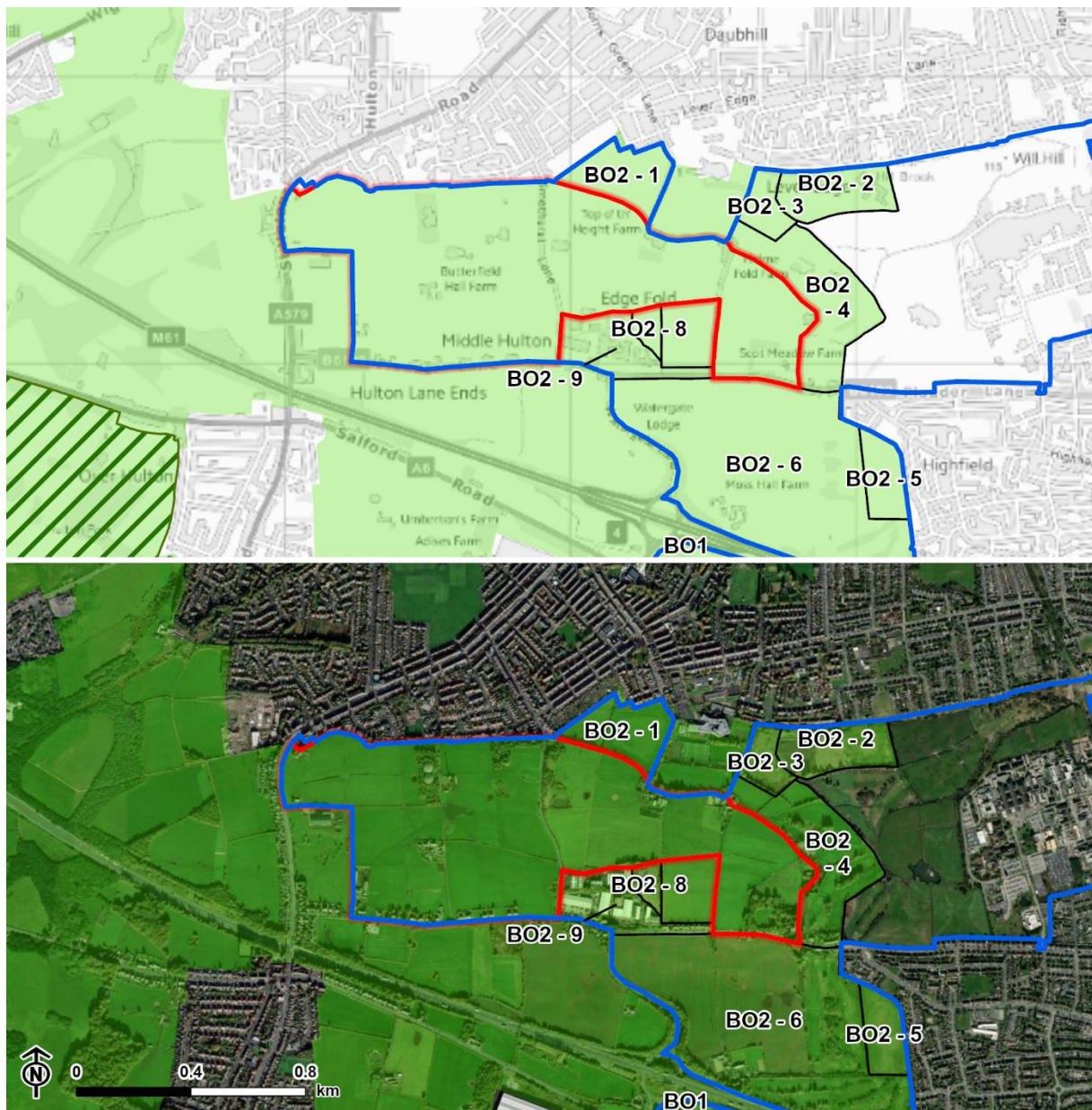
Release of the sub-area would not increase the containment of any adjacent Green Belt land due to its significant existing level of urban development. Equally, it would result in no significant change in strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt. Overall, further development or release would not increase the harm on adjacent open land.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Very Low

Release of the sub-area would constitute relatively limited sprawl due to its existing urbanising influences, no longer forms part of the countryside, and would constitute a negligible weakening of surrounding Green Belt land. It would not impact the gap between Bolton/Farnworth and Over Hulton due to its built-up character and the fact that other Green Belt land plays a stronger role in maintaining separation. Harm from the release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Very Low.

BO2 - 10 Assessment



- Sub-area BO2 - 10
- Potential development site
- Neighbouring sub-area

Absolute constraints

- Registered Parks and Gardens

Area description

BO2 sub-area 10 (BO2 - 10) lies to the south of the suburb of Daubhill in Bolton, west of Farnworth and north-east of Over Hulton. Bolton and Farnworth are already substantially merged, but sub-area lies within the gap between Bolton and Over Hulton. The sub-area primarily comprises open agricultural fields with associated agricultural buildings, and areas of tree cover such that it contains no urbanising development that diminishes openness. The landform of this area is significant, it contains the highest point of the surrounding hillslope, and with the slope falling away from the Bolton urban edge. The urban development along St Helen's Road, Plodder Lane and within Edge Fold Industrial Estate means that the parcel is subject to some urbanising influence and is largely contained. However, the size of the area, its openness and its relatively strong distinction from the urban edges is such that development within it would be perceived as sprawl.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively Significant

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Bolton, which forms a part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is free of urbanising development and benefits from relatively strong distinction from the urban edge due to the landform character and areas of tree cover, contributing to its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Significant

Release of land, particularly in the west of the sub-area, would remove a significant separating area between towns Bolton and Over Hulton. Although a small open field would remain in the gap to the south of the sub-area, the consistent urban development along St Helen's Lane means that the gap is particularly fragile in this area, such that development on the hilltop and open sloping fields would remove clear visual separation.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Significant

The absence of urbanising uses and relatively strong distinction on the urban edge give this sub-area a strong relationship with surrounding open countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Moderate

As an area of higher ground to the south of Bolton, the parcel makes some contribution to the town’s historic setting but it does not have a significant relationship with any historic parts of the settlement.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Moderate

Release would largely sever the adjacent sub-areas to the north and east from the wider countryside, but these play a weaker role in relation to Green Belt purposes. Release would also increase the containment of adjacent land to the south of Plodder Lane that plays an equally strong role in relation to Green Belt purposes. Due to the surrounding landform change and the minor roads, tree lines and urban development that form the sub-area’s outer boundaries, release would result in no significant change in strength of distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt

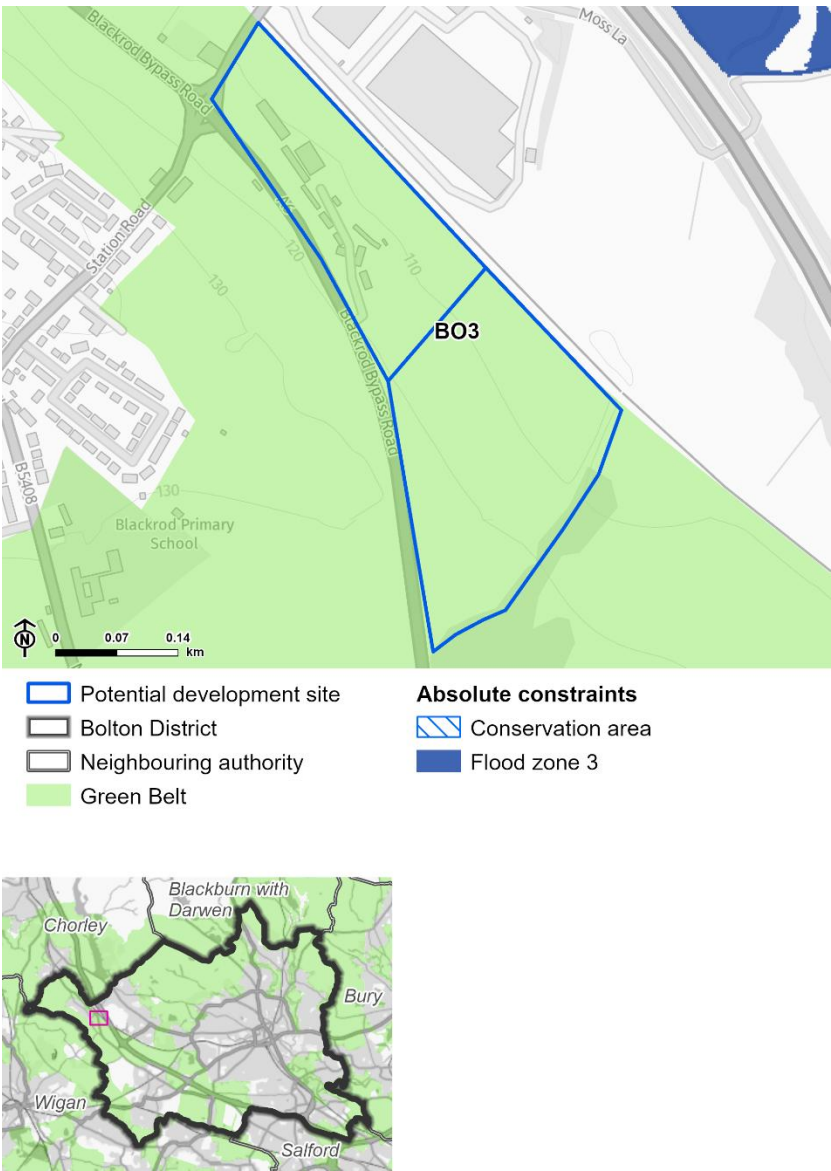
Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

High

Release of the sub-area, as part of the release of the Allocation as a whole, would constitute relatively significant sprawl and encroachment on the countryside, and would also have a relatively significant impact on preventing the merger of towns due to the fragility of the gap in this location, and the importance of the open hilltop and sloping fields in maintaining an area of visual separation. It would constitute a moderate weakening of retained Green Belt land by increasing the level of containment surrounding Green Belt land. Harm from release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as High.

BO3 - Leigh Tenement Farm

Figure 4.6: Leigh Tenement Farm context



4.14 The Allocation lies to the south-west of Horwich and south-east of Blackrod, within a narrow gap between the settlements. It lies between the railway line and Blackrod Bypass Road (A6), with Blackrod railway station and Blackrod Interchange Industrial Estate adjacent to the railway line. The northern area of the Allocation comprises some washed over development which includes industrial warehouses and associated car parking and hardstanding storage areas, but also some retained rural land uses and open areas. The southern area of the Allocation comprises open sloping fields enclosed by a linear wooded area to the south.

BO3 – Overall harm of release

Harm Rating	Area (ha)
High	3.51
Very High	8.00
Total Allocation area	11.51

Summary of harm

4.15 The BO3 Allocation is split into two sub-areas which reflect variations in harm. The release of the southern area of the Allocation would result in Very High overall harm to the Green Belt purposes. Development in this location would represent a significant alteration to the existing settlement pattern, extending built form beyond the railway line and A6 and substantially reducing the openness of the intervening land. It also comprises open land that makes an important contribution to maintaining the separation between Horwich and Blackrod. As a result, its release it would weaken the role of the Green Belt in preventing the merging of towns and sprawling of the large built up area, as well as safeguarding the wider countryside from encroachment.

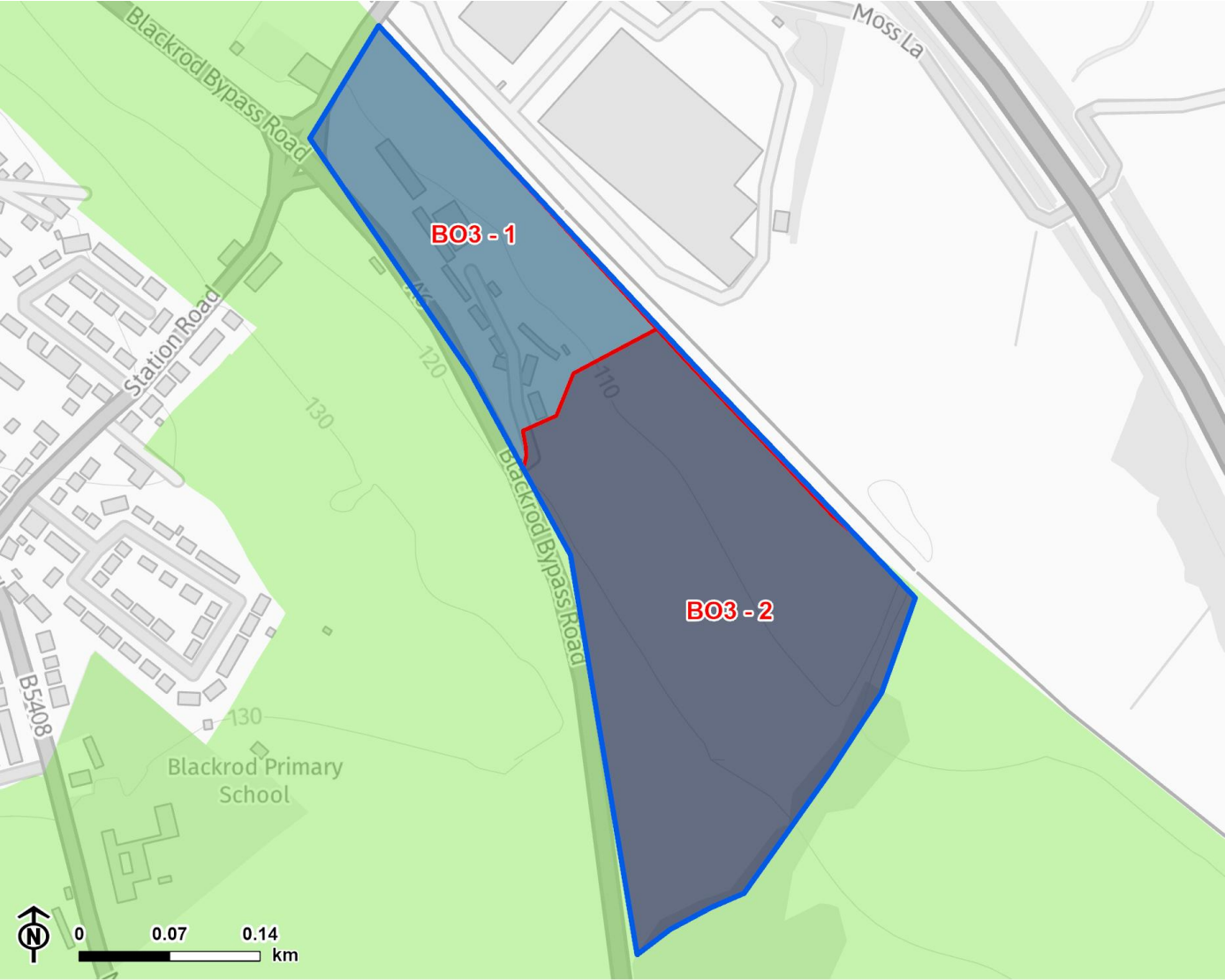
4.16 The release of the southern sub-area would also have a major impact on the function of adjacent Green Belt land to the south-east and west. By increasing containment, reducing connectivity and weakening the distinction between the urban area and surrounding countryside, development would diminish the effectiveness of retained Green Belt land and increase pressure on adjoining areas. Consequently, release of this part of the Allocation would result in Very High harm to Green Belt purposes.

4.17 The northern sub-area contains a limited amount of washed-over development and has a closer relationship with the existing urban area. However, despite these urbanising influences, the land continues to exhibit a sense of openness, is separated from urban edges by strong boundary features and remains functionally connected to the wider countryside. It also lies in the most fragile part of the gap between Horwich and Blackrod, such that its release would have a relatively significant impact on the merging of the towns. Its release would therefore result in a loss of Green Belt function, although to a lesser extent than the southern sub-area, leading to High harm overall.

Potential to mitigate harm

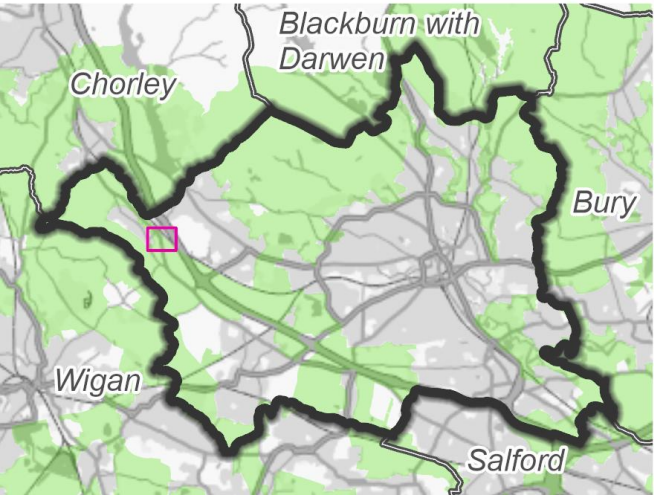
4.18 The principal cause of harm from release of this Allocation would be from the loss of open Green Belt land within the Allocation itself, which would weaken the gap between towns and breach the strong consistent boundary between the Allocation and the urban edge. As such, mitigation measures would not reduce the overall harm of release of this Allocation, particularly as the outer boundaries are already relatively strong. Nevertheless, strengthening the boundary between the Allocation and adjoining retained Green Belt land to the south-east and west could potentially increase the future distinction between inset land and retained Green Belt land. This could help to limit the weakening of this retained Green Belt land as result of the release of the Allocation.

Figure 4.7: BO3 - Overall harm



- Allocation sub-area
- Potential development site: BO3
- Bolton District
- Neighbouring authority

- Green Belt
- Harm rating**
- Very High
 - High
 - Moderate-High
 - Moderate
 - Low-Moderate
 - Low
 - Very Low



BO3 - 1 Assessment



Area description

BO3 sub-area 1 (BO3 - 1) lies to the south-west of Horwich and south-east of Blackrod, within a narrow gap between the settlements. It lies between the railway line and Blackrod Bypass Road (A6), with Blackrod railway station and Blackrod Interchange Industrial Estate located to the north-east. Station Road and the associated development and car parking also contains the sub-area to the north-east. The sub-area comprises some washed over development which includes industrial warehouses and associated car parking and hardstanding storage areas. The remaining open areas are heavily influenced by urban influences, but they retain rural land uses and a sense of connection with the wider countryside. The landform and boundary features form relatively strong distinction from the surrounding inset settlements.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Moderate

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Horwich, which forms a part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is partially developed and contained, but it benefits from strong distinction from the urban edge due to the railway line, A6 and a sparse tree line, and landform change, contributing to its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Significant

Although the sub-area is partially developed, release of the land would remove a large part of the remaining open land in the fragile gap separating towns Horwich and Blackrod. The urban development and urban land uses along Station Road mean that the gap is particularly fragile in this location and therefore, release of the sub-area would mean that only a small open field would remain between the towns.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Moderate

Release would encroach on land which is partially contained and developed, but which is nonetheless open and undeveloped in some areas, retaining a connection with the wider surrounding countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town. Horwich is a historic town but its older core is some distance to the north, separated from the parcel by modern development.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Major

Release would significantly increase containment of adjacent land that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. In particular, the sloping land to the west of the A6 would become almost entirely contained, and the open land to the north of Station Road would be largely severed from the open land to the south. Equally, release would result in weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt to the south as the railway line would become fully breached and only open field boundaries remain to form a new separating feature.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

High

Release of the sub-area, as part of the release of the Allocation as a whole, would constitute moderate sprawl and encroachment on the countryside, and would have a relatively significant impact on preventing the merger of towns. Although the sub-area contains some urbanising development and is subject to urban influence from the adjacent industrial development and railway station, it lies in a fragile gap between towns, and beyond the railway line which is important in maintaining a strong boundary feature that restricts the sprawl of the large built-up area. Its release would constitute a major weakening of retained Green Belt land to the west, south and north by increasing the level of containment and by decreasing distinction from the inset area. Harm from release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as High.

BO3 - 2 Assessment



- Sub-area BO3 - 2
- Potential development site
- Neighbouring sub-area

Absolute constraints

- Site of Special Scientific Interest

Area description

BO3 sub-area 2 (BO3 - 2) lies to the south-west of Horwich and south-east of Blackrod, within a narrow gap between the settlements. It lies between the railway line and Blackrod Bypass Road (A6), with Blackrod railway station and Blackrod Interchange Industrial Estate located to the north-east. The sub-area contains moderately sloping landform, and these features establish relatively strong distinction from the urban edges. The area has no urbanising development to diminish openness and has a mature linear tree buffer to the south-east.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Significant

- The sub-area lies adjacent to Horwich, which forms a part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. The sub-area is free of urbanising development and benefits from strong distinction from the urban edge due to the landform character, railway line and A6, contributing to its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Relatively Significant

Release of land would reduce a gap between a towns Horwich and Blackrod. The gap between the towns would become increasingly narrow, but a significant area of sloping open fields would remain to the west of the A6.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Significant

The absence of urbanising uses and strong distinction on the urban edge give this sub-area a strong relationship with surrounding open countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Limited/No

Land does not make a significant contribution to the setting of any historic town. Horwich is a historic town but its older core is some distance to the north, separated from the parcel by modern development.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Major

Release would increase containment of adjacent land that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes, and would reduce its connectivity with the wider Green Belt. In particular, this includes the sloping open fields to the west of the A6 which would become largely contained on three sides, and the open land to the south-east. Release would also result in weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt to the south. Although a mature tree buffer forms a consistent outer boundary, the key railway line, A6 and landform slope would be breached.

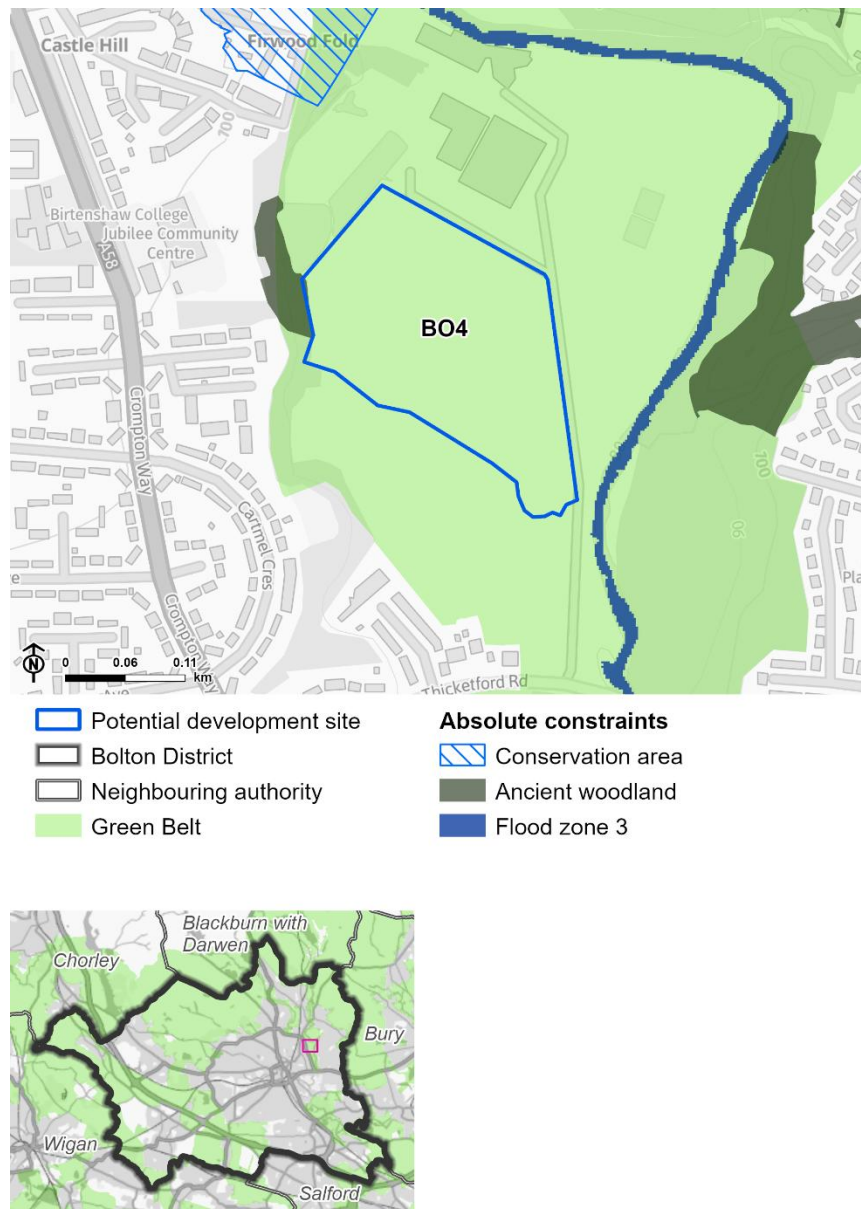
Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Very High

Release of the sub-area, as part of the release of the Allocation as a whole, would constitute significant sprawl and encroachment on the countryside, and also a relatively significant impact on preventing the merger of towns due to the narrowness of the gap in this location, and the importance of the open, sloping fields in maintaining a significant area of openness. It would constitute a Major weakening of retained Green Belt land by increasing the level of containment and decreasing distinction from the inset area. Harm from release of the sub-area is therefore assessed as Very High.

BO4 - West of The Alders

Figure 4.8: West of The Alders context



4.19 The Allocation is located within a linear strip of Green Belt that runs south to north through the north-east area of Bolton, following the Bradshaw Brook and associated valley. It lies to the east of Tonge, and the west of Harwood and Brightmet, all suburbs of Bolton. It contains an open field and is bound to the north by a built-up industrial area which contains large warehouses and areas of hardstanding and storage, the Alders lane and wider tree cover and Bradshaw Brook to the east, and a mature tree belt to the west and south.

BO4 – Overall harm of release

Harm Rating	Area (ha)
Moderate-High	4.36
Total Allocation area	4.36

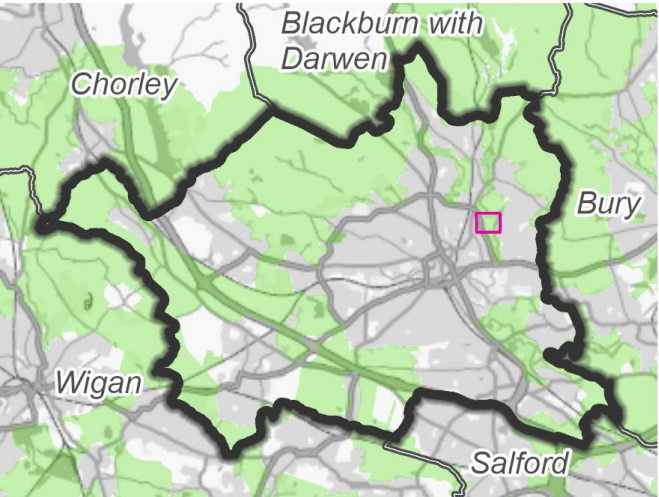
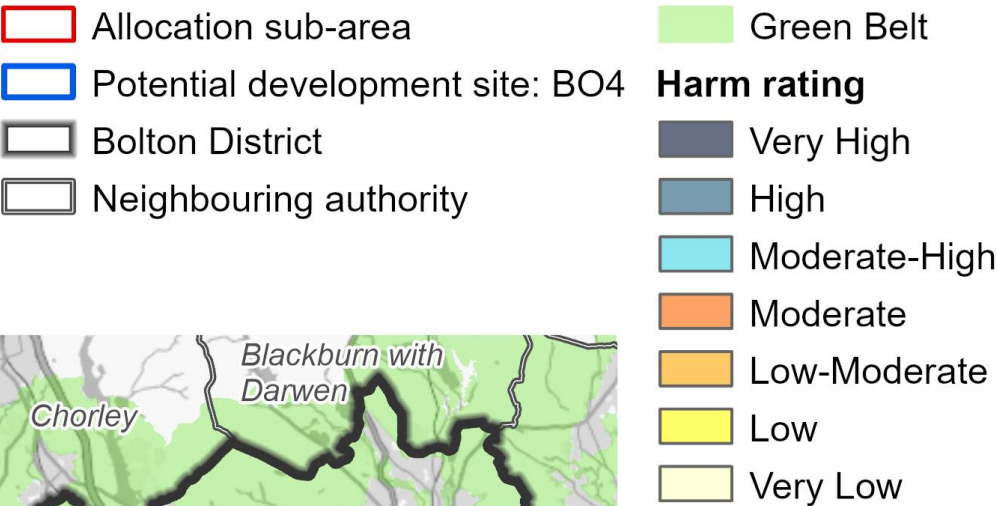
Summary of harm

4.20 The BO4 Allocation comprises one open field which lies within the linear Green Belt land that follows the Bradshaw Brook corridor. It is surrounded by an industrial estate to the north, dense tree cover to the west, a tree lined field boundary to the south and The Alders Lane, Bradshaw Brook and wider tree cover to the west. Steep slopes associated with the Bradshaw Brook valley means that the parcel lies at a lower elevation than the surrounding urban areas. The Allocation therefore has relatively strong distinction from the urban edge to the east and west. As the Allocation is contained by Bolton suburbs, it does not contribute to preventing the merging of neighbouring towns, but it does make a relatively significant contribution to checking the sprawl of Greater Manchester and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Release of the Allocation would increase containment of the adjacent open field to the south and the sloping wooded land to the east, as well as reducing connectivity of the wider linear Green Belt corridor. Release would also result in a weaker boundary between the inset settlement and the Green Belt, which would be defined by The Alders Lane and a sparse tree line. Release of the Allocation would therefore result in Moderate-High harm to Green Belt purposes.

Potential to mitigate harm

4.21 The principal cause of harm from release of this Allocation would be from the loss of the Green Belt land within the Allocation itself, but its impact on retained Green Belt land to the east and south is also a key reason for its Moderate-High harm. As such, mitigation measures would not significantly reduce the harm of release of this Allocation, but strengthening the southern boundary feature between the Allocation and adjoining retained Green Belt land as well as along The Alders through substantial tree planting and landscaping, could potentially increase the future distinction between inset land and retained Green Belt land. This could help to limit the weakening of this retained Green Belt land as result of the release of the Allocation.

Figure 4.9: BO4 - Overall harm



BO4 Assessment



Area description

BO4 lies within a linear area of Green Belt land which runs from south to north through the north-east area of Bolton, following the Bradshaw Brook and associated valley. It lies to the east of Tonge, and the west of Harwood and Breightmet, all suburbs of Bolton, and lies directly to the south of an area of industrial warehouses and their associated hardstanding and storage areas. While it is therefore contained by urban edges on all sides, the size of the wider open area and the landform change and boundary features particularly to the east and west form relatively strong distinction from the settlement and therefore, development within it would be perceived as sprawl. There is no urbanising development in the Allocation that diminishes openness and the surrounding wooded and open Green Belt land establishes a sense of connection with the wider countryside.

Impact on purposes

- Purpose 1 – Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Rating: Relatively Significant

The sub-area lies adjacent to Bolton, which forms a part of the large built-up area of Greater Manchester, so development of this area would constitute sprawl. Although the Allocation is largely contained, it forms part of a wider sizable linear area of Green Belt. It is free of urbanising development and benefits from strong distinction from the urban edge due to the landform character and areas of tree cover and Bradshaw Brook, that, collectively contribute to its role in preventing sprawl.

- Purpose 2 - Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Rating: Limited/No

As the Allocation is entirely contained by suburbs associated with Bolton, land does not lie between neighbouring towns.

- Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Rating: Relatively Significant

Release would encroach on land which is nonetheless free from urbanising development, has strong distinction from the urban edges and retains a connection with the wider surrounding countryside.

- Purpose 4 - Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Rating: Moderate

The parcel is part of the valley of Bradshaw Brook, which contributes positively to the wider historic setting of Bolton but does not have a relationship with the town’s historic core. It lies close to the Firwood Fold Conservation Area but is separated from it by a woodland block and so has no visual relationship with it.

- Purpose 5 - To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Rating: Equal contribution

All Green Belt land is considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.

Impact on adjacent Green Belt

Rating: Moderate

Release would increase containment of the small adjacent field to the south and the sloping wooded land to the east that plays a stronger role in relation to Green Belt purposes. It would also significantly narrow the linear area of Green Belt along Bradshaw Brook in this location, limiting the connectivity of the Green Belt land to the south, including Seven Acres Country Park, with the wider Bradshaw Brook valley to the north. Release would mean that the resulting urban edge to the east would be defined by The Alders Lane and hedgerow, and a sparse tree line to the south, which would result in weaker distinction between the inset settlement and the Green Belt.

Overall Harm to Green Belt purposes from release of land

Moderate-High

Release of the Allocation would constitute relatively significant sprawl and encroachment on the countryside but would also have a negligible impact on preventing the merger of towns. The Allocation is contained within the linear, wooded and sloping Bradshaw Brook corridor, is free from urbanising development and has relatively strong distinction from the inset urban edges due to the surrounding tree cover and landform slope. Release would have moderate impact on preserving the setting and special character of Bolton. Its release would constitute a moderate weakening of retained Green Belt land to the south and east by increasing the level of containment, reducing connectivity with the surrounding open wooded corridor, and by decreasing distinction from the inset area. Harm from release of the Allocation is therefore assessed as Moderate-High.

Appendix A

Glossary of key terms

Key Term	Definition
Allocations / development allocations	Sites proposed to be allocated for development within the Plan.
Appropriate development	Development that cannot be considered to have an urbanising influence and therefore harm Green Belt purposes. This includes built development within the Green Belt that is listed as being ‘not inappropriate’ within paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF.
Boundary features	Physical features that mark the existing or potential Green Belt edge.
Case law	The law as established by the outcome of former cases.
Constrained land	Land that is restricted to development, for example due to it being covered by ‘absolute constraints’ such as floodplain or designated sites (see paragraph 3.12).
Containment	The enclosure of Green Belt land from the wider countryside by urbanising influences, both inset and washed over.
Contribution	The extent to which Green Belt land fulfils the purposes of the Green Belt (as set out in the NPPF).
Distinction	Distinction considers the relationship between the existing inset settlement and the Green Belt. Landform and/or landcover can create a physical distinction between development and Green Belt land, limiting the relationship between the two.

Key Term	Definition
Encroachment	The advancement of urban development and influence into the countryside.
Exceptional circumstances	Justifiable reasons for the alteration of Green Belt boundaries. There is no definition of the policy concept of 'exceptional circumstances'. This can include consideration of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, i.e. planning for economic growth, housing need, health and wellbeing, accessibility and biodiversity, cultural heritage and climate change resilience. The relatively poor performance of the land against Green Belt purposes is not, of itself, an exceptional circumstance that would justify release of the land from the Green Belt. Conversely, higher performing Green Belt may be appropriate for release where exceptional circumstances are demonstrated.
Fragile gap	A gap of open land between settlements that is narrow and as such development within this gap would significantly reduce or entirely remove the gap between settlements.
GMSF	Greater Manchester Spatial Framework.
Green Belt	Land designated to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The NPPF defines the essential characteristics of Green Belts to be their openness and their permanence.
Green Belt boundary	The inset settlement edge adjoining the Green Belt.
Green infrastructure	The NPPF defines Green Infrastructure to be a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable

Key Term	Definition
	of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
Harm	The impact of release of land from the Green Belt on the Green Belt purposes.
Inappropriate development	Built development within the Green Belt that is not listed as being 'not inappropriate' within paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF.
Infill development	Development within the Green Belt in an area that is already enclosed by existing development, such as in villages that are washed over by the Green Belt.
Inset	Settlements or areas of land that are not covered by the Green Belt designation but are surrounded by Green Belt land (i.e. settlements or areas that are not 'washed over' but the Green Belt).
Inspector's reports	Reports produced by Planning Inspectors as part of the examination of Local Plans, which outline the Inspector's views on the soundness of a Local Plan and its evidence base (including Green belt studies).
Intervisibility	The ability to see in a direct line of sight from one position to another, considering the intervening landform and landcover. For example, intervisibility between neighbouring towns.
Large built-up area	There is no definition provided in the NPPF for a large built-up area. Green Belt studies in different locations have ranged from considering the large built-up area as just the principal settlement around which the Green Belt was defined to considering all inset settlements to be large built-up areas.

Key Term	Definition
Merging of towns	The expansion of development that results in towns becoming physically connected and thus indistinguishable from one another.
Mitigation	Measures that can reduce harm to the remaining Green Belt as a result of release of land.
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework.
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance.
Openness	Green Belt openness relates to lack of ‘inappropriate development’ rather than to only visual openness; thus both undeveloped land which is screened from view by landscape elements (e.g. tree cover) and development which is not considered ‘inappropriate’, are still ‘open’ in Green Belt terms.
Parcels	Pre-defined areas of land that were assessed in the 2016 Stage 1 Green Belt study.
PAS	Planning Advisory Service.
PfE	Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan
Purposes	NPPF Paragraph 134 states that Green Belts should serve five purposes: 1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas. 2) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another. 3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. 4) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

Key Term	Definition
	5) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
Release	Removal of land from the Green Belt designation.
Relevance	The potential for land to contribute to a Green Belt purpose.
Sub-area	Sub-sections of Allocations for which the release of which would result in differing degrees of harm.
Sustainable development	The NPPF summarises sustainable development to be development that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Urban sprawl	Definitions of sprawl vary and mainly refer to the unrestricted growth of urban areas.
Urbanising development / influence	Built development that is inappropriate within the Green Belt (that is not listed as being 'not inappropriate' within paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF.)
Washed over	Land (open or developed) that is within the Green Belt designation (i.e. not 'inset').

References

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