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Countryside Protection Zone Study
for
Uttlesford District Council

May 2024

Revision 02

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 The Countryside Protection Zone (CPZ) emerged as a policy in the 1995 Local Plan and was carried through into the current 2005 Local Plan (see figure 1).

1.2 The policy came about following the 1984 report by Sir Graham Eyre QC, concerning the 1985 planning permission for Stansted Airport. In recommending approval for the airport, Eyre acknowledged the importance of the site's open, countryside setting and described it as an 'airport in the countryside. Sir Graham saw the CPZ as a way to control the expansion of the airport into the surrounding countryside, much like a metropolitan green belt controls the spread of major cities elsewhere in the country.

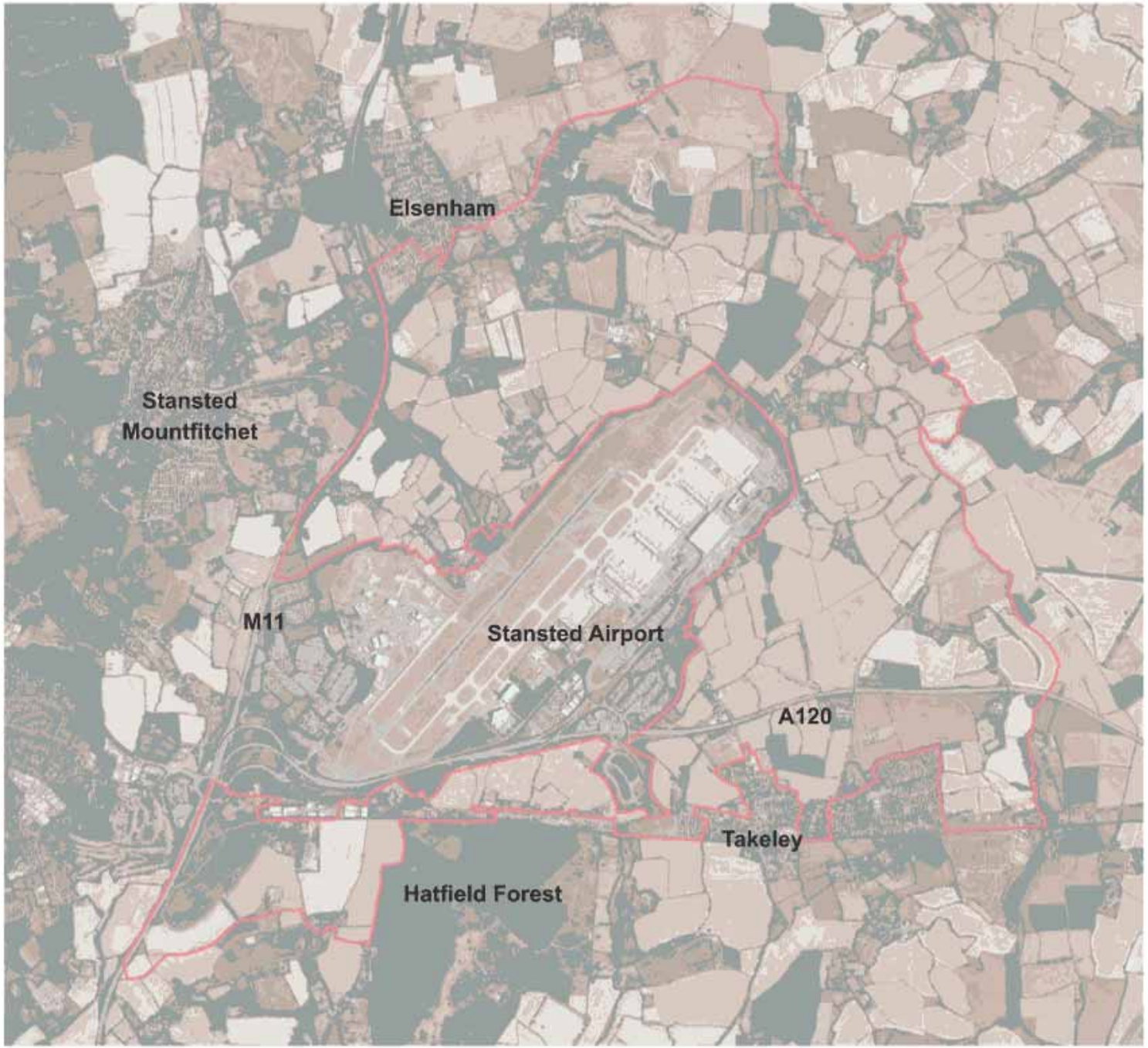


Figure 1 *Countryside Protection Zone: Current boundary and context*

Current Policy

1.3 The 'airport in the countryside' principle continues to be a material planning consideration in relation to any future development at Stansted. The Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted January 2005) makes reference to the CPZ as follows:

"2.2.9. Airport in the countryside. The Plan identifies a Countryside Protection Zone. The priority within this zone is to maintain a local belt of countryside around the airport that will not be eroded by coalescing developments. Development consistent with national planning policy for the countryside will only be permitted if it also accords with this overriding objective."

1.4 Policy S8 'Countryside Protect Zone' defines an area around the airport to restrict development (see figure 2). The wording of this policy is as follows:

"The area and boundaries of the Countryside Protection Zone around Stansted Airport are defined on the Proposals Map. In the Countryside Protection Zone planning permission will only be granted for development that is required to be there or is appropriate to a rural area. There will be strict control on new development. In particular development will not be permitted if either of the following apply:

a) New buildings or uses would promote coalescence between the airport and existing development in the surrounding countryside;

b) It would adversely affect the open characteristics of the zone".

Local Plan Review

1.5 The current 2005 Local Plan which contains Policy S8 is under review. If the council is to maintain a CPZ it must do via the emerging Local Plan for the period 2021-2041. There is no statutory requirement or national policy that requires the CPZ (unlike metropolitan Green Belt which is defined nationally). However, the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan has sought to take the policy forward through Core Policy 12 and a revised CPZ boundary, which is set out in Appendix 7 of the Regulation 18 publication (see figure 3).

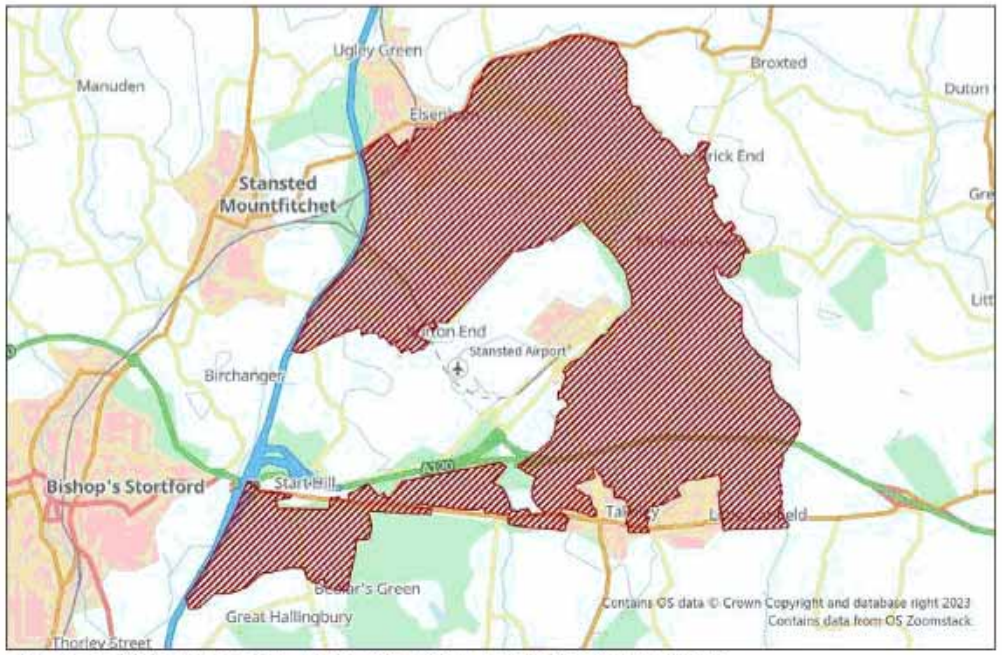


Figure 2 *2005 Local Plan: Policy S8 - Countryside Protection Zone*

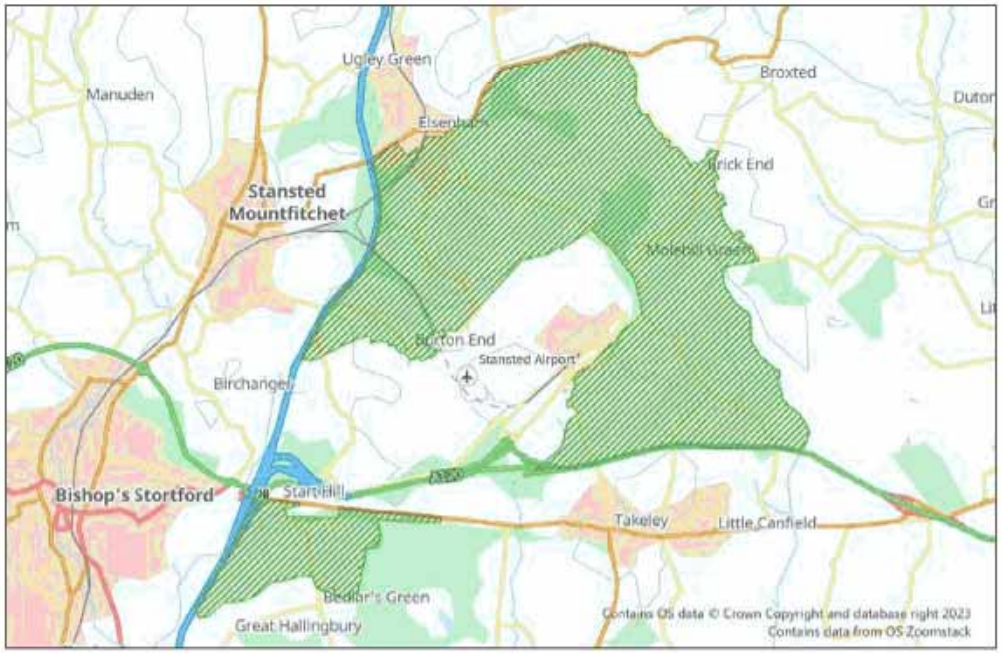


Figure 3 *Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan: Core Policy 12 - Countryside Protection Zone, Policies map, Appendix 7*

Instruction

1.6 In April 2024 (following the publication of the Regulation 18 Local Plan), Hankinson Duckett Associates (HDA) was commissioned by Uttlesford District Council to undertake a study of the CPZ as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan review. Aims of this study are to test the objectives of the CPZ policy, review its performance in relation to existing and proposed policy objective, investigate potential wording and boundary of the CPZ, and possible mitigation opportunities.

Relationship with 2016 CPZ Review

1.7 A review of the CPZ was undertaken in 2016. This was prior to the publication of the latest National Planning Policy Framewok (NPPF) last updated in December 2023) and Landscape Character Assessment for the district (published in October 2023). In addition a number of planning permissions within the area since 2016, have the potential to change some of the findings.

This study will consider the findings of the previous study, in combination with the latest Landscape Character Assessment and planning context. These will all be used as a basis for policy consideration and recommendations.

2 SUCCESS OF THE POLICY

2.1 The existing policy has been successful to a point, however, there have been a number of planning decisions that have allowed development within the CPZ in spite of its local protection (see figure 4).

2.2 As part of the development control process (planning decisions and appeals), planners and inspectors have on occasion identified that the current adopted policy is not wholly compliant with the NPPF. This is partly due to the lack of an up-to-date Local Plan and partly due to the restrictive nature of the wording within the policy.

2.3 There have been a number of appeals that reference the CPZ, including 'Land Known As 7 Acres', Warish Hall Farm, Parsonage Road, Takeley (ref UTT/22/2744/FUL), where the inspector found that:

"Policy S8 is more restrictive than the balancing of harm against benefits approach of the NPPF, noting that the NPPF at paragraph 170 advises that decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and that the 'protection' afforded to the CPZ in Policy S8 is not the same as the Framework's 'recognition." (Para 14.4.13)

2.4 Similarly, there are examples from decision takers that the continuation of the policy has a degree of consistency with the NPPF including 'Land South of Stortford Road', Little Canfield, CM6 1SR (ref UTT/21/3272/OP) where the inspector stated that:

"Although the Framework takes a less restrictive approach to development than these policies, it nonetheless seeks to protect and enhance the countryside and natural environment, and to make effective use of land in urban areas. Policy S8 recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, which is consistent with the Framework. In this respect, the policies are not wholly out of date." (Para 13)

"As set out above Local Plan Policy S8 is a more nuanced planning control in relation to maintaining open countryside around the airport. There is nothing in the evidence which would indicate that the rationale for this policy is no longer relevant, and the policy recognises the intrinsic character of the countryside." (Para 76)

2.5 The benefit of having a specified boundary is that it is clear where the implications of the policy would apply.

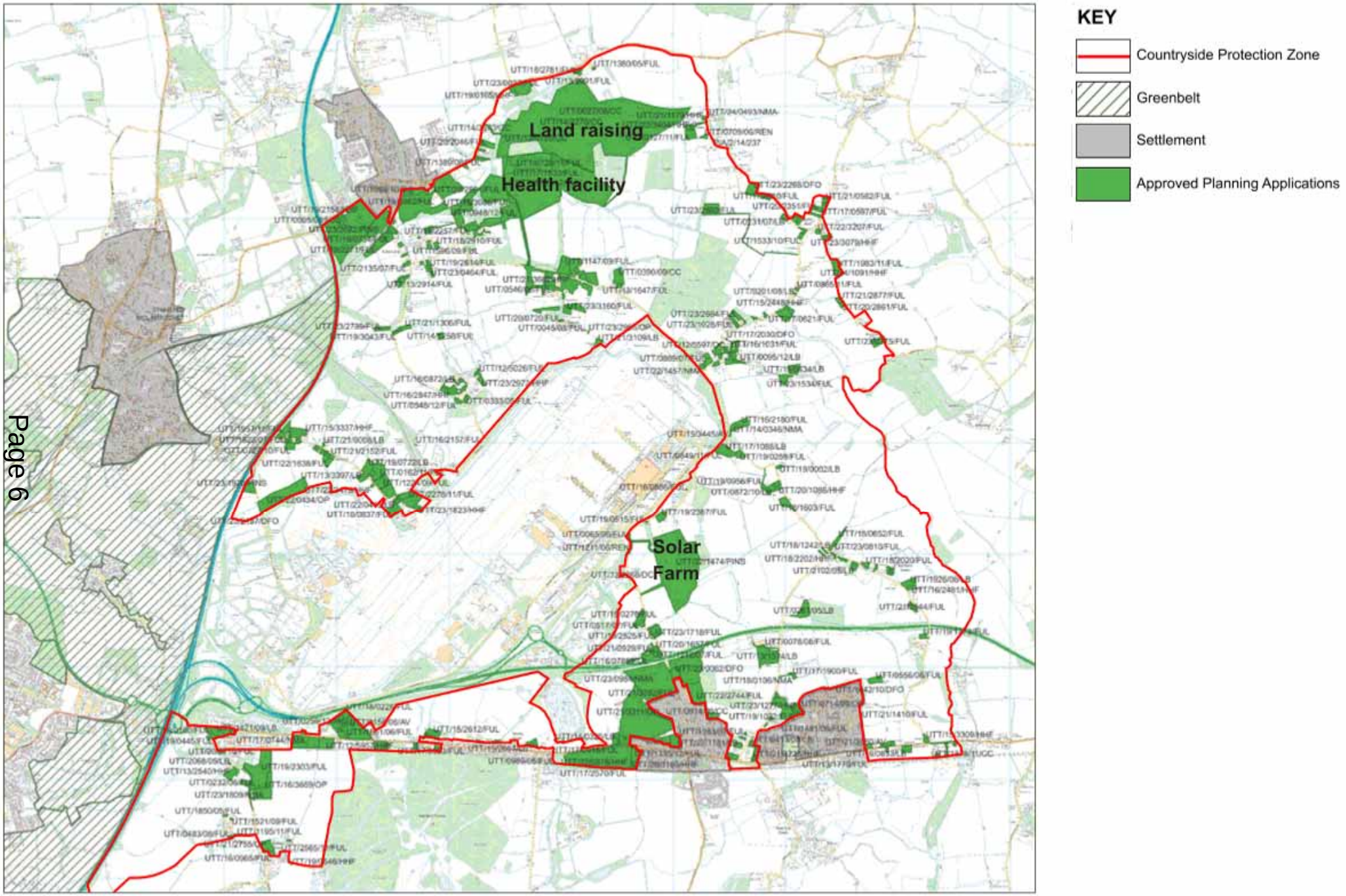


Figure 4 *Permitted Development within the CPZ since 2005*

2.6 Examination of a range of planning and appeal decisions (since 2005), suggest that the second test of the policy (regarding openness) seems to gain more traction in decision taking. The first test (regarding coalescence) appears to be weaker for two reasons:

- A substantial amount of built development could occur within the CPZ without causing coalescence between the airport and development.
- The restriction in terms of coalescence is only placed between the airport and development, as opposed to development between settlements within the CPZ, which would also have an urbanising effect on the designation.

3 EMERGING POSITION

3.1 The concept of protecting the countryside around Stansted Airport is supported in the Regulation 18 Local Plan through Core Policy 12.

3.2 The Regulation 18 Consultation version of the wording for Core Policy 12 is as follows:

"An area around Stansted Airport (the Stansted Airport Countryside Protection Zone) is protected from development to preserve the 'rural' character of the area around the airport. The area is shown by the Policies Map and Appendix 7.

Within the defined area, development will only be supported where, either of the following apply:

i. new buildings or uses would not promote the coalescence between the airport and the existing or allocated development in the surrounding countryside within the CPZ, and

ii. the proposal would not adversely affect the open characteristics of the CPZ."

3.3 The wording is very similar to the adopted policy, albeit with a less restrictive terminology, which would bring the policy in line with the current NPPF. The two tests in particular are very similar to the existing policy wording.

3.4 The allocations put forward within the draft Regulation 18 Local Plan would appear to conflict with the policy wording as it stands. In response, the draft plan seeks to adjust the boundary of the CPZ (see figure 3), such that the allocations fall outside of the boundary.

3.5 While this is a logical response, the alterations set out within Appendix 7 of the Regulation 18 publication have the potential to compromise the future effectiveness of the policy. The proposed changes substantially reduce the quantum of countryside within the CPZ to the south of the airport, which is a location of development pressure. As a consequence, there is a risk that the rural setting to the south of the airport could be compromised in the future.

3.6 The area between A120 (the A120 did not exist when the CPZ was first envisaged) and Stortford Road needs careful consideration for the following reasons:

- Intense development pressure
- Limited space
- Rurality already eroded

3.7 The separation between Stansted airport and nearby development is demonstrated on figure 5 (overleaf).

3.8 There is thus, the indication that retention of the policy would be acceptable, but that the wording of the policy should be carefully considered. In order to inform recommendations regarding the policy wording, further consideration has been given to the landscape context of the CPZ.

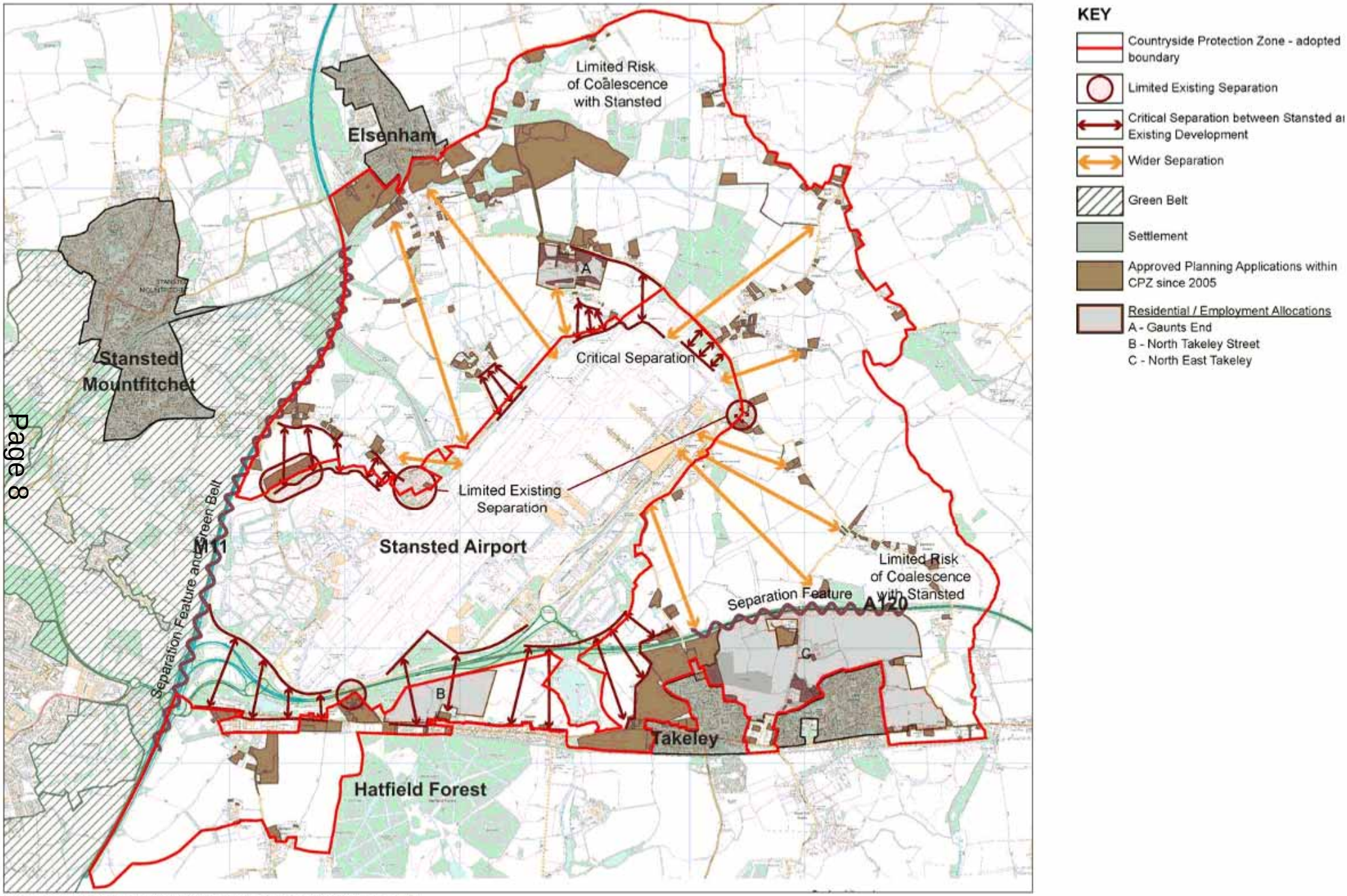


Figure 5 *Separation Analysis of the Current CPZ Boundary*

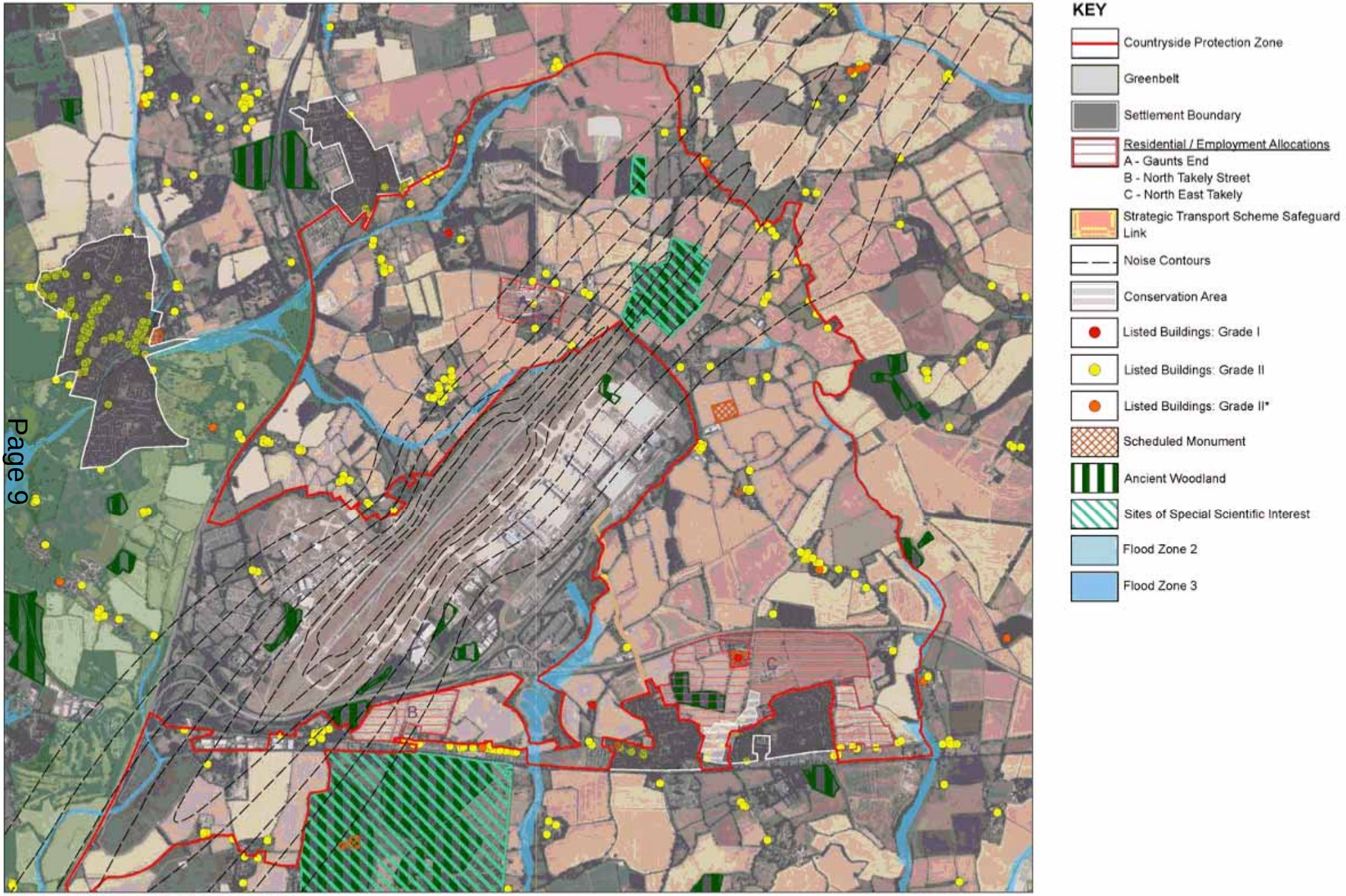


Figure 6 *Landscape Related Constraints*

4 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

Constraints

4.1 Figure 6 illustrates landscape related constraints and policies within the vicinity of the Countryside Protection Zone. These include noise contours and a strategic transport link associated with the airport. Within the CPZ there are areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3, SSSI and a small area of Ancient Woodland known as Prior's Wood. The CPZ also includes a number of listed buildings, two Scheduled Monuments and the Takeley Conservation Area. To the west, the CPZ abuts Green Belt along the M11.

4.2 Individually and in combination, these constraints will limit the development potential of areas of the CPZ.

2016 CPZ Review

4.3 As set out within section 1 of this report, a review of the CPZ was undertaken in 2016. The aim of the study was to '*assess the extent to which the land within the CPZ is meeting its purposes, as set out in Policy S8 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (2005)*'. The study sought to assess the CPZ against clearly defined criteria.

4.4 The study noted (at para 2.21) that:
'...there are similarities between the purposes of the CPZ and those of Green Belts and other strategic planning policies, such as Strategic Gaps or Green Wedges, and guidance can be drawn from previous assessments of these policies.'

4.5 The report then defined four criteria / purposes for assessment, which drew parallels with the policy wording, but did not apply the wording specifically. These criteria were:

- To protect the open characteristics of the CPZ
- To restrict the spread of development from the airport.
- To protect the rural character of the countryside around the airport.
- To prevent changes to the rural settlement pattern of the area by restricting coalescence.

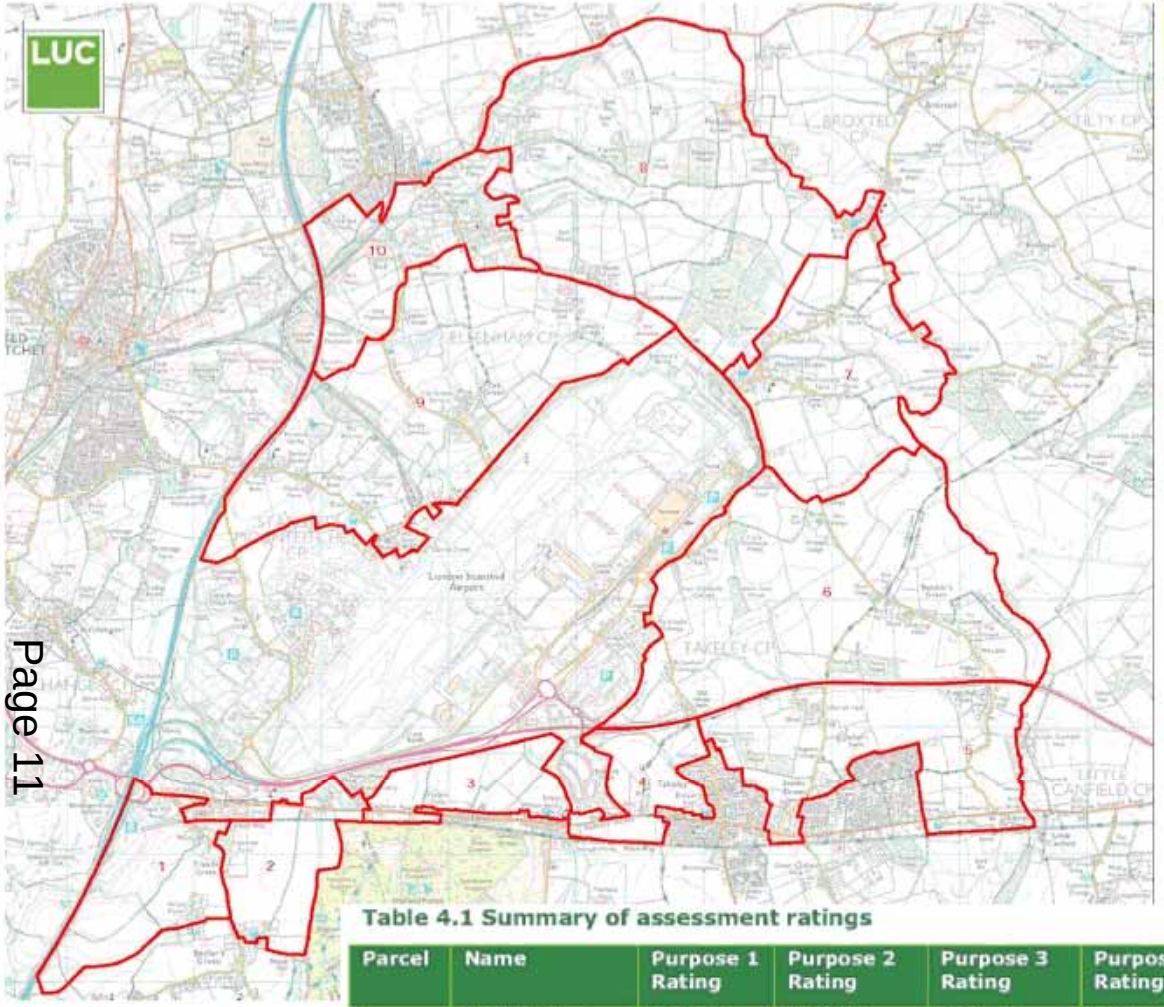
4.6 The CPZ was divided into 10 assessment parcels, based upon areas of similar character, with boundaries defined by recognizable features. Each of the parcels was assessed against the four defined criteria.

4.7 The summary table of the report and a plan identifying the assessment parcels is provided overleaf.

4.8 The report concluded that:
'5.1 ... there are variations in the contribution that different parcels in the study area make to CPZ purposes. However, this study has demonstrated that the majority of the CPZ is performing well against the purposes defined for it. The CPZ helps to maintain the openness of the countryside and protects its rural character and restrict the spread of development from the airport. For some parcels, particularly to the south of the airport, the CPZ plays an essential role in protecting the separate identity of individual settlements.

5.2 In summary, therefore, the CPZ is helping to maintain the vision of the 'airport in the countryside'. Unless other planning policy considerations suggest otherwise, we recommend that the CPZ is carried forward into the new Local Plan.

4.9 The emerging Local Plan seeks to take forward the CPZ designation. The comment in the conclusions regarding the separate identity of individual settlement is not reflected in the wording of either the adopted or regulation 18 policy wording. It is evident from recent planning permissions (notably to the west of Takeley), provided since the publication of the 2016 CPZ Review, that this element of the assessment is not currently a key policy consideration, but is an element that could be introduced through a future CPZ policy.



2016 CPZ review extracts

Table 4.1 Summary of assessment ratings

Parcel	Name	Purpose 1 Rating	Purpose 2 Rating	Purpose 3 Rating	Purpose 4 Rating	Summary of Harm
1	Tilekiln Green	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Moderate
2	Yewtree Farm	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
3	Takeley Street	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
4	Takeley	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
5	Smith's Green	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
6	Bamber's Green	High	High	High	Low	High
7	Molehill Green	High	High	High	Medium	High
8	Pledgdon Green	High	High	High	Low	High
9	Tye Green	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Moderate
10	Elsenham	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Moderate

4.10 The 2016 CPZ review promoted the retention of all assessment parcels, but also put forward a number of boundary recommendations, which included the following:

- Rationalising the boundary of Parcel 1 to exclude the eastern extents of Junction 8 of the M11).
- Moving the northern boundary of Parcel 10 to the railway line (which itself could prevent coalescence between the airport and Elsenham to the north).
- Redefining the boundary of parcels 2 and 3 to maintain the rural character of the area and prevent further consolidation of the villages by extending the boundary of the CPZ to Flitch Way to the south of Takeley Street in Parcel 3 and by redefining the boundary of Parcel 2 to exclude the Vision Industrial Estate.

4.11 These can be taken into consideration within an emerging policy boundary, however thought would also need to be given to current landscape character and settlement extents, as well as emerging allocations.

Landscape Character Assessment

4.12 The Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was published in October 2023 as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan review to help inform locational policies, appropriate design and mitigation, and provide baseline information for more detailed landscape and visual assessment. The Character Assessment is comprehensive and has helpful guidance.

4.13 The LCA identifies three generic Landscape Character Types across the Borough:

- Type A: Chalk Upland
- Type B: Farmland Plateau
- Type C: River Valley

4.14 Landscape Character Types are sub-divided into discrete geographic areas forming a total of 19 local Landscape Character Areas across the District. The CPZ is covered by three Landscape Character Areas (see figure 7):

- Character Area B5 - Broxted Farmland Plateau: covers the majority of the CPZ, in particular the central and eastern parts of the policy.
- Character Area B7 - Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau: relatively small southern portion of the CPZ.
- Character Area A2 - Stort River Valley: relatively small north-western and south-western parts of the CPZ.

4.15 For each Character Area, the report provides:

- A location and summary;
- Key characteristics;
- Landscape character description; and a
- Landscape Evaluation

4.16 The landscape evaluation contains a summary of landscape qualities and sensitivities, anticipated forces for changes (for example agricultural intensification or development) and landscape guidelines. The guidelines set out an overarching ambition for the character area, along with suggestions as to how this can be achieved.

4.17 The designation of the CPZ could be seen to tie in with the overarching landscape guidelines for each of the character areas. These are re: provided below for convenience:

4.18 Character Area B5 - Broxted Farmland Plateau: *'The overall strategy for Broxted Farmland Plateau LCA is to enhance the rural character of this intensively farmed area with its small historic villages linked by winding lanes. Seek to integrate new development and strengthen landscape patterns through reinforcing hedgerow boundaries and connecting adjacent woodlands.'*

4.19 Character Area B7 - Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau: *'The overall strategy for Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the ancient and ecologically important Hatfield Forest. Protect the relatively undeveloped and tranquil character of the area. In the south seek to integrate new development and strengthen landscape patterns through reinforcing hedgerow boundaries and connecting adjacent woodlands.'*

4.20 Character Area A2 - Stort River Valley: *'The overall strategy for Stort River Valley LCA is to enhance the rural character of the farmed landscape with its historic villages. Seek to conserve inter-valley and cross-valley views and strengthen landscape patterns by integrating urban fringe elements, conserving semi-natural habitats and restoring hedgerows and tree cover.'*

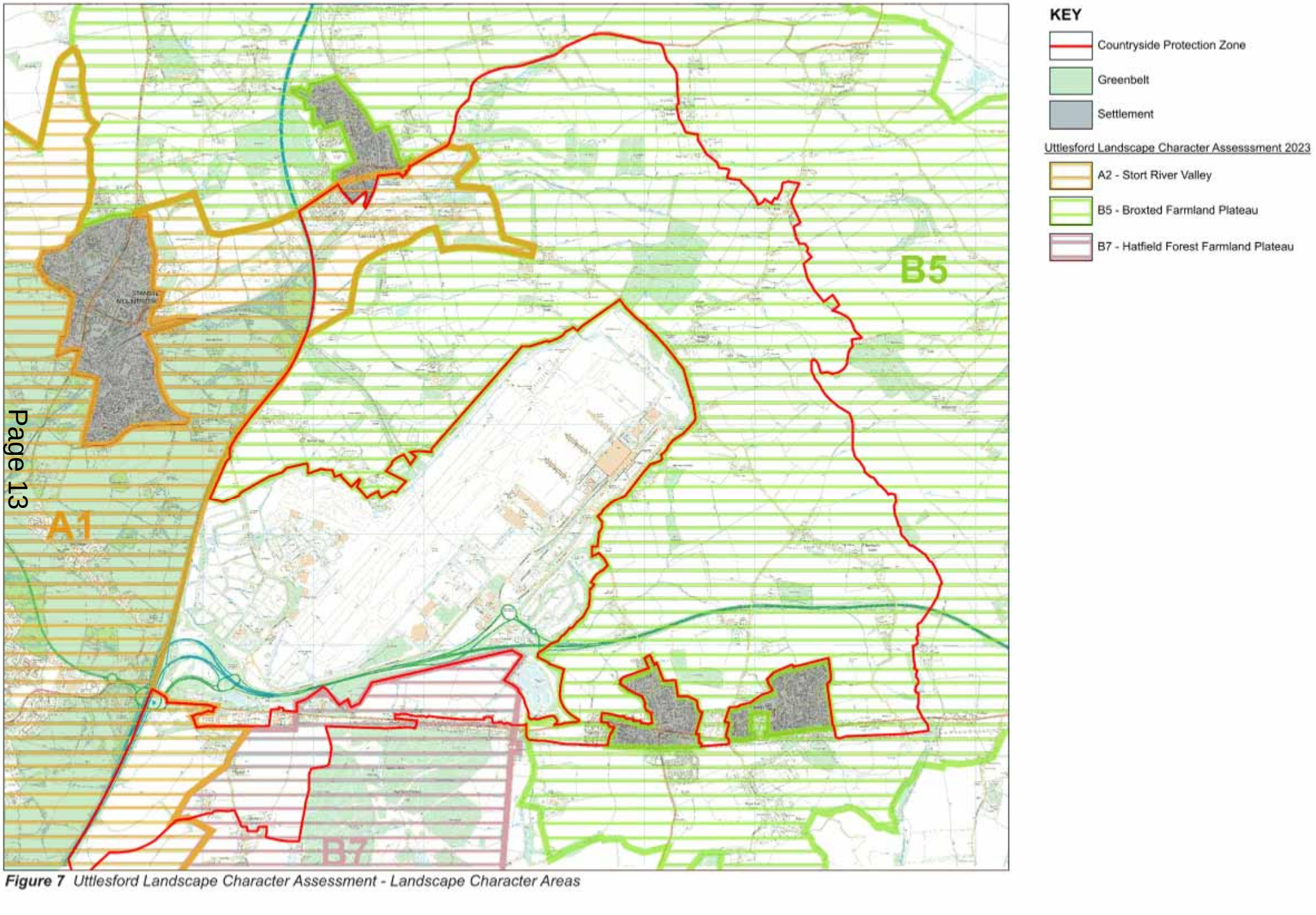


Figure 7 *Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment - Landscape Character Areas*

4.21 The character assessment findings note that the existing boundaries of Stansted airport are generally well defined and well treed, that the airport has a major influence on the landscape and that there are more human influences to the south of the CPZ than to the north, including urbanising influences from expanding settlement and the noise from the A120 and the B1256. It appears that the 'rural' character of the area to the south of the airport has been adversely affected since the adoption of the policy within the current Local Plan.

4.22 Relevant extracts from the Landscape Character Assessment are provided within Appendix 1.

5 POLICY GUIDANCE

5.1 The NPPF contains a whole chapter concerning Green Belt, but no direct advice on specific policies relating to separation or gaps. However, there is significant precedence of 'gap' policy having been established by various Local Authorities over the last few decades. In December 2008, the Partners for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) published '*Policy Framework for Gaps*' which sets out criteria to guide establishment of Settlement Gaps within the south of Hampshire. This criteria has also been utilised by authorities outside south Hampshire.

5.2 The core criteria for gap policy set out by PUSH '*Policy Framework for Gaps*' (December 2008) is as follows:

a) The open nature/sense of separation between settlements cannot retained by other policy designations;

b) The land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence.

c) In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation

5.3 These criteria could assist with the future consideration of the CPZ designation, which has parallels with the concept of settlement gaps designated within Local Plans for other authorities.

5.4 Paragraphs 3.2 - 3.4 of the PUSH guidance are also considered relevant to the emerging CPZ policy:

'3.2 Local Development Documents will identify the location of the gap(s) and include a policy and ancillary documentation which show on an Ordnance Survey map base the extent of land included within the gap(s). The policy will set out the types of development which will be permitted within the gap(s) based on the principle that development within Gaps will only be permitted if:-

a) it would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of settlements; and

b) it would not individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development compromise the integrity of the gap.

3.3 The designation of a gap therefore does not completely preclude development. Proposals which would not adversely affect the function of the gap and which would otherwise be acceptable in planning terms could be permitted. However the cumulative impact of a number of even small scale developments could have a significant impact on the sense of separation between settlements and would be a consideration in the decision making process.

3.4 In considering the future planning of the land within defined gaps, the local planning authorities will consider opportunities for the positive uses of the land within the gap to meet wider planning objectives, such as provision of green infrastructure.'

6 CURRENT CHALLENGES

6.1 The preceding sections of this study have identified a number of challenges regarding the CPZ, that should be considered within the emerging policy. These primarily relate to land associated with the A120 and Stortford Road and include:

- Changes to the settlement pattern within the CPZ since the adoption of the policy. Some of these changes - for example the permitted development to the west of Takeley - have changed the relationship between settlement and Stansted airport.
- Development pressure, both through ongoing speculative applications and draft allocations within the regulation 18 Local Plan. A future CPZ policy will need to balance the reasons for this pressure, not least the sustainability of these locations for development (evidenced outside this report), with the need to protect the rural setting to the airport.
- The proposed CPZ boundary alterations set out within Appendix 7 of the Regulation 18 publication would substantially reduce the quantum of countryside within the CPZ to the south of the airport. As a consequence, there is a risk that the rural setting to the south of the airport could be compromised in the future.
- Erosion of settlement pattern through piecemeal ribbon development. This is not currently an explicit consideration of the policy.
- Additional urban influences from new and expected development and road infrastructure, that has changed the context of areas within the CPZ.
- The potential for cumulative effects - currently outside of policy wording.
- Identified potential weaknesses within the policy wording.
- Recognition of the findings of the CPZ review, which identified further purposes that the policy could relate to and that the existing land within the CPZ contributed positively to those purposes.

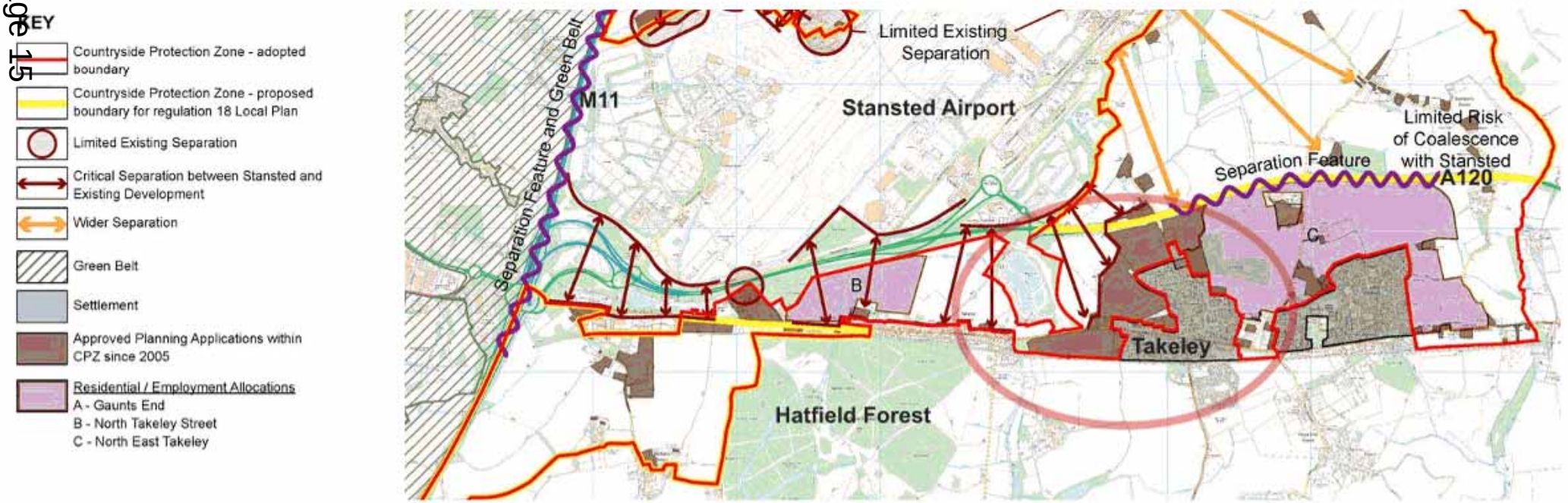


Figure 8 *Representation of some of the spatial challenges within the southern part of the existing CPZ*

7 POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 There are opportunities to strengthen the policy and to broaden its objectives, whilst maintaining the overarching concept of an airport in the countryside. This could be consistent with the national approach to Green Belt for example and draw inspiration from other policy guidance and the evidence base already in place for the Local Plan.

7.2 Examples of opportunities include:

- If changing the boundary of the CPZ, consider including additional land to the south, to maintain a larger area of rural land to the south of the airport. Currently the CPZ extends further to the north and east than to the south.
- Consider the boundary of the CPZ in the context of current settlement (including permissions).
- Consider revising the policy tests in order to conform with the NPPF and have a greater synergy with the overarching aims of the CPZ.
- Look at the potential for land-use change that would benefit the CPZ (i.e would benefit the rural character of the land within the CPZ). This would need to be carefully considered and worded to ensure that it would not conflict with the operation of the airport (for example proposals to plant trees which may increase the risk of bird strike).
- Potential to include the consideration of settlement identity and separation.
- Potential to tie in the findings and guidelines set out within the 2023 Landscape Character Assessment, which generally seek to enhance rural character, for instance *"strengthening landscape patterns through reinforcing hedgerow boundaries and connecting adjacent woodlands"*.
- Potential to consider mitigation measures for proposed development which may reduce the harm to the CPZ.

Figure 9 *Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment 2023*

Figure 10 *Hedgerow Boundaries and Connected Woodlands (Image: Woodland Trust)*

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that the council retains the policy but seeks to adjust the policy wording and the boundary extents of the CPZ.

Boundary extents

8.2 As noted previously within this study, the boundary changes proposed within the regulation 18 Local Plan, would remove a large area of the designation to the south-east of Stansted airport, which has the potential to compromise the future integrity of the policy.

8.3 This report has analysed the development changes to the south of the airport and has also considered the proposed allocations to the south of Stansted. In order to maintain an area of open countryside around Stansted, without preventing sustainable growth, it is recommended that additional land to the south of the airport is included within the CPZ, and that the inner boundary is redrawn to accommodate some of the development. This strategy would allow for additional housing and employment within the area, whilst preserving the aims and functionality of the CPZ.

8.4 Figure 11 identifies the key boundary changes proposed. The plan identifies the existing policy boundary as a red dashed line, the regulation 18 boundary as a yellow line and a revised alternative boundary in blue.

8.5 The boundary to the south-west of the airport would remain as existing, but the southern edge would extend to encompass Hatfield Forest and land to the south-west of Takeley, returning northwards to the Flitch Way along identifiable landscape features. The permitted developments to the west of Takeley would be removed from the CPZ, however the open space land uses secured as part of the permissions would be retained within the CPZ in order to maintain a gap between Takeley and the ribbon development associated with the B1256.

8.6 The open land associated with basins between the B1256 and the A120 would be moved into the CPZ (it is currently excluded). This change would maintain a rural buffer between the north-western edge of Takeley, Stansted airport and the ribbon development associated with the B1256, which would connect the main body of the CPZ to the proposed southern extension.

8.7 To the north of Takeley, it is proposed that the western part of the allocation - located to the west of Smith's Green is retained within the CPZ, in order to maintain settlement pattern and identity. The land to the east of Smiths Green, however, would be removed, with the boundary being re-drawn along the alignment of the A120. In this location it is considered that there is sufficient open and rural land to the north and west of the A120, to maintain the countryside setting to Stansted.

8.8 These changes seek to respond positively to the findings of the 2016 CPZ review, whilst being mindful of the current settlement context and aspirations of the emerging Local Plan. The southern expansion of the designation would enable the provision of a tangible rural setting to the south of Stansted for the foreseeable future.

8.9 It is recommended that the boundary to the north, east and west should generally remain as existing, but with a small change to the north-western boundary, between the airport and Elsenham, by moving the boundary south to align with the railway line and new edge of development. This change falls in line with one of the suggestions set out within the 2016 CPZ review.

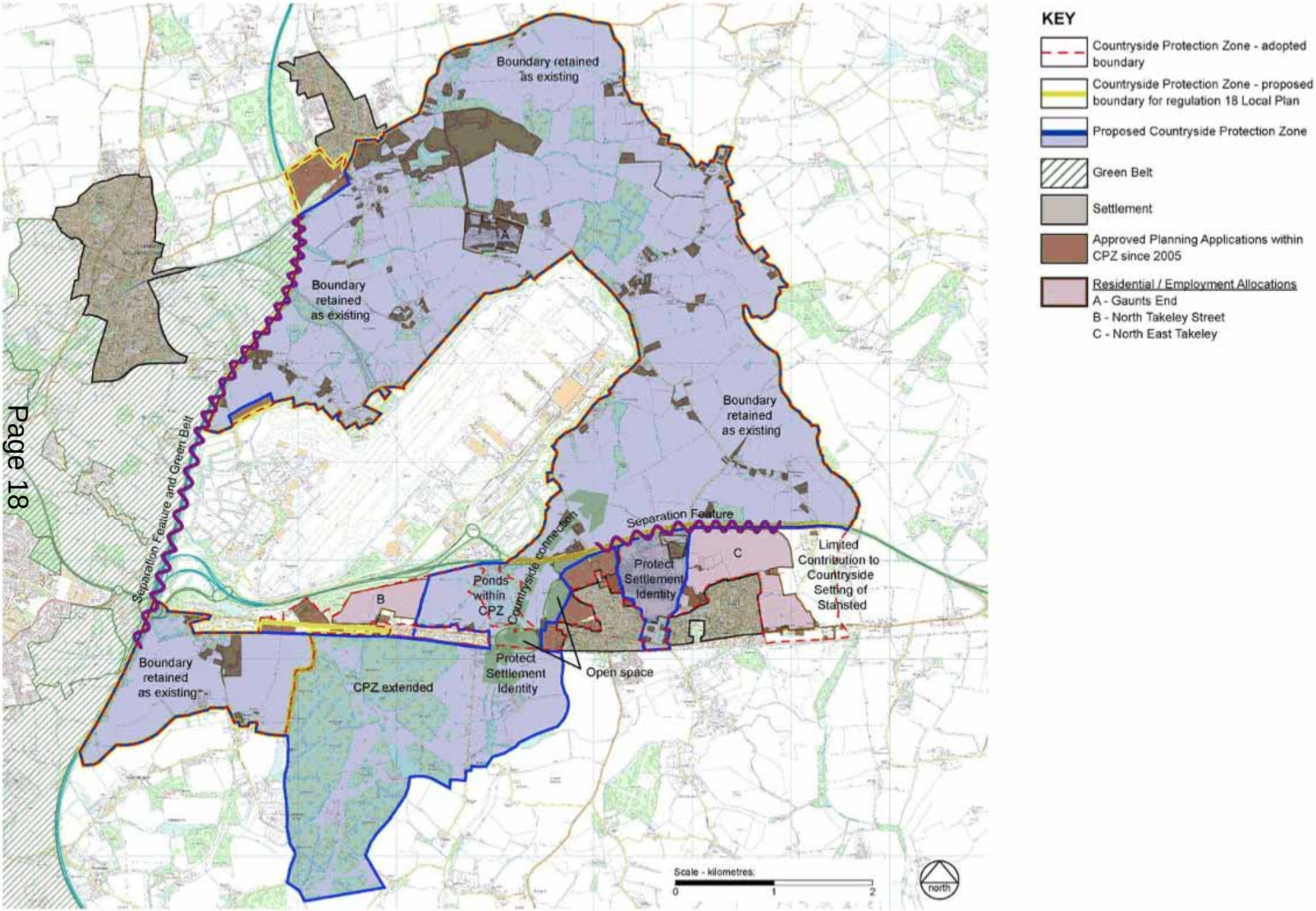


Figure 11 *Potential Countryside Protection Zone*

Policy wording

8.10 The analysis undertaken within this study has identified some weaknesses within the current policy wording, which could be addressed through different wording. In addition, re-wording the policy could further align the policy with the current NPPF and incorporate some aspirations for the beneficial use of the CPZ.

8.11 Some guidance could be taken from the 2016 LUC study of the CPZ, which set out 4 purposes for the designation:

- To protect the open characteristics of the CPZ
- To restrict the spread of development from the airport
- To protect the rural character of the countryside around the airport
- To prevent changes to the rural settlement pattern of the area by restricting coalescence.

8.12 An alternative would be to re-word the first test of the policy, such that new development would not individually, or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development, compromise the integrity of the separation between settlement within the CPZ and Stansted in order to maintain the integrity and rural character of the CPZ. This could encompass settlement identity as well as physical and visual separation between the development and the airport.

8.13 Example policy wording could consist of:

"An area around Stansted Airport (the Stansted Airport Countryside Protection Zone) is protected from development to conserve and enhance the 'rural' character of the area around the airport. The area is shown by (add reference to appropriate plan).

Within the defined area, development will permitted where, all of the following apply:

i. it will not (either individually or cumulatively) diminish the physical and / or visual separation between settlements within the CPZ and Stansted airport;

ii. the proposal would not adversely affect the open characteristics of the Countryside Protection Zone;

iii. it will protect individual settlement identity; and

iv. the proposals would implement positive landscape measures which would strengthen characteristic landscape patterns within the CPZ, in accordance with the guidelines set out within the Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment.

In addition, land use change will be permitted where the proposals result in positive uses of the land within the CPZ, in accordance with the guidelines set out within the Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment.

9 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 This study has analysed the councils existing evidence base and draft policies in order to provide advice and recommendations regarding the Countryside Protection Zone (CPZ).

9.2 The study concludes that the policy should remain within the emerging Local Plan, however it is recommended that the council seeks to adjust the policy wording and the boundary extents of the CPZ.

9.3 In terms of the boundary, the proposed changes envisaged would accommodate the proposed allocations, acknowledge the physical intercession of the A120 but also include new areas of countryside that would maintain the rural setting to Stansted to the south (see figure 11).

9.4 It is anticipated that these recommendations would retain the policy within a future Local Plan but would seek to protect the CPZ more effectively than currently allowed for within the Reg 18 Local Plan.

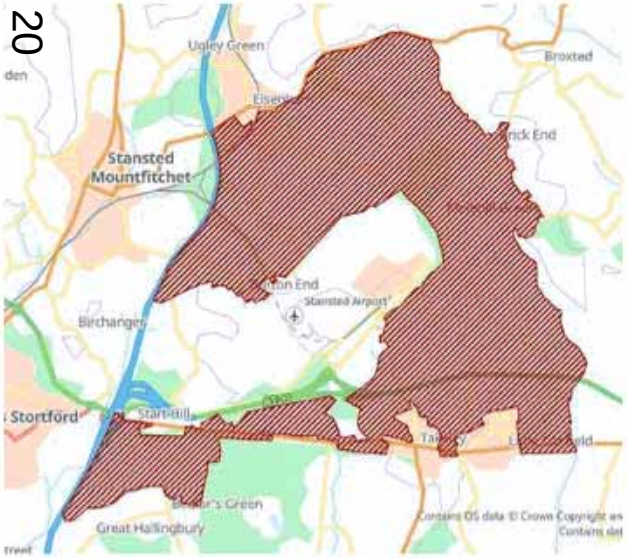


Figure 12 *Adopted Countryside Protection Zone*

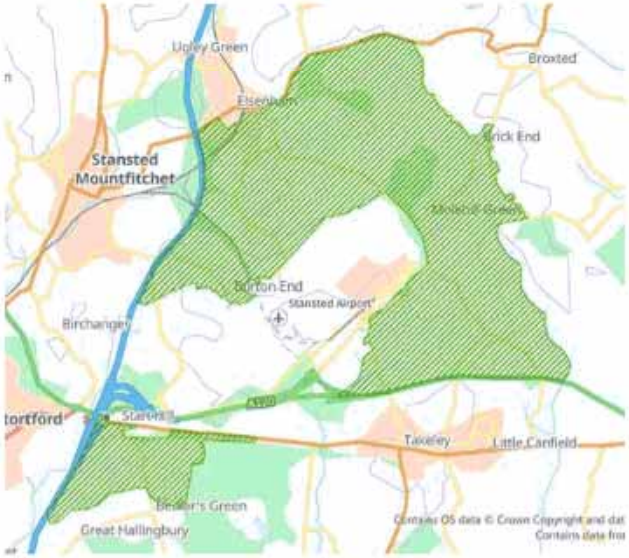


Figure 13 *Regulation 18 Countryside Protection Zone*

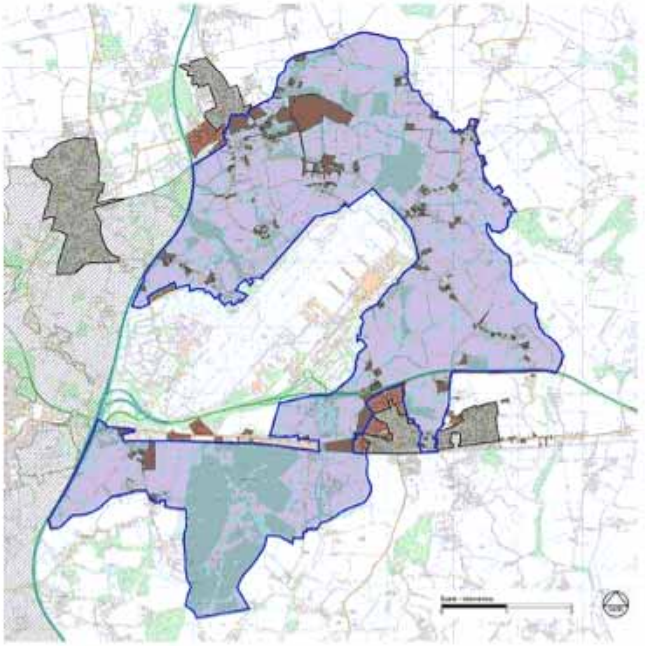


Figure 14 *Potential Countryside Protection Zone*

APPENDIX 1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT EXTRACTS

APPENDIX 1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT EXTRACTS

Relevant extracts (provided verbatim) from the descriptions of each Character Area are listed below:

Character Area B5 - Broxted Farmland Plateau

Key characteristics

Geology, soils, topography and drainage

- Gently undulating plateau which sits between the Rivers Stort and Chelmer.
- The River Roding and its tributaries form shallow valleys within the plateau.
- Bedrock of chalky boulder clay overlain with glacial till resulting in fertile soils.

Land use and field patterns

- Land use is dominated by Intensive arable farmland, with small areas of pasture on the edges of settlements.
- A large-scale regular field pattern, resulting from modern amalgamation. Fields are enclosed by ditches or tracks with intermittent hedgerows.

Trees and woodland cover

- Occasional large blocks of woodland, often of ancient origin, break up the arable farmland, however the limited hedgerows result in less tree-cover.
- The edges of Stansted Airport are heavily treed.

Semi-natural habitats and biodiversity

- Deciduous woodland, grassland and wetland provide variety within the intensively farmed agricultural landscape, many designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Historic landscape character
- Historic field pattern consists of pre-18th century irregular fields. Settlements are set along linear greens.
- Scattered farmsteads, halls and moated sites provide time-depth across the area.

Settlement, transport pattern and rights of way

- A well-settled landscape, including the relatively large villages at Elsenham and Takeley and small linear settlements . Modern development has extended along the roads.
- Narrow, twisting lanes bounded by grass verges contrast with the dual carriageway A120 in the south.
- A network of footpaths including the promoted routes Harcamlow Way and Saffron Trail, and the Flitch Way former railway line.

Views and perceptual qualities

- Strong sense of openness and long views across the arable farmland from open lanes, particularly where the plateau broadens and flattens.
- Woodland blocks within the area and outside provide a wooded horizon to most views.
- A more rural and tranquil character in the north, with more human influences in the south. Aeroplanes taking off from Stansted Airport are audibly and visibility intrusive.

5.154 Settlement pattern is now varied; small villages and hamlets are linear, such as Barber's Green and Broxted. 20th and 21st century expansion has created polyfocal linear settlements, such as Henham. New residential development at Elsenham, Henham and Takeley is more suburban, although there are some links to local building materials and vernacular style. The original linear form of Takeley has now been altered by modern expansion to the south-west north of the Flitch Way, and in the north, bringing the northern edge of the settlement closer to the A120.

Views and perceptual influences

5.159 This is an open and exposed landscape, enhanced by limited tree cover, with little to interrupt long views over the surrounding undulating landscape.

5.160 Churches set on hills are visible in long views and provide local landmarks. From several locations in the north and east of the character area, panoramic views are available across the Chelmer Valley slopes and to Great Dunmow.

APPENDIX 1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT EXTRACTS

Relevant extracts (provided verbatim) from the descriptions of each Character Area are listed below:

Character Area B5 - Broxted Farmland Plateau

Key characteristics

Geology, soils, topography and drainage

- Gently undulating plateau which sits between the Rivers Stort and Chelmer.
- The River Roding and its tributaries form shallow valleys within the plateau.
- Bedrock of chalky boulder clay overlain with glacial till resulting in fertile soils.

Land use and field patterns

- Land use is dominated by Intensive arable farmland, with small areas of pasture on the edges of settlements.
- A large-scale regular field pattern, resulting from modern amalgamation. Fields are enclosed by ditches or tracks with intermittent hedgerows.

Trees and woodland cover

- Occasional large blocks of woodland, often of ancient origin, break up the arable farmland, however the limited hedgerows result in less tree-cover.
- The edges of Stansted Airport are heavily treed.

Semi-natural habitats and biodiversity

- Deciduous woodland, grassland and wetland provide variety within the intensively farmed agricultural landscape, many designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Historic landscape character
- Historic field pattern consists of pre-18th century irregular fields. Settlements are set along linear greens.
- Scattered farmsteads, halls and moated sites provide time-depth across the area.

Settlement, transport pattern and rights of way

- A well-settled landscape, including the relatively large villages at Elsenham and Takeley and small linear settlements . Modern development has extended along the roads.
- Narrow, twisting lanes bounded by grass verges contrast with the dual carriageway A120 in the south.
- A network of footpaths including the promoted routes Harcamlow Way and Saffron Trail, and the Flitch Way former railway line.

Views and perceptual qualities

- Strong sense of openness and long views across the arable farmland from open lanes, particularly where the plateau broadens and flattens.
- Woodland blocks within the area and outside provide a wooded horizon to most views.
- A more rural and tranquil character in the north, with more human influences in the south. Aeroplanes taking off from Stansted Airport are audibly and visibility intrusive.

5.154 Settlement pattern is now varied; small villages and hamlets are linear, such as Barber's Green and Broxted. 20th and 21st century expansion has created polyfocal linear settlements, such as Henham. New residential development at Elsenham, Henham and Takeley is more suburban, although there are some links to local building materials and vernacular style. The original linear form of Takeley has now been altered by modern expansion to the south-west north of the Flitch Way, and in the north, bringing the northern edge of the settlement closer to the A120.

Views and perceptual influences

5.159 This is an open and exposed landscape, enhanced by limited tree cover, with little to interrupt long views over the surrounding undulating landscape.

5.160 Churches set on hills are visible in long views and provide local landmarks. From several locations in the north and east of the character area, panoramic views are available across the Chelmer Valley slopes and to Great Dunmow.

5.161 Water towers, telegraph poles and telecommunications masts are occasionally visible on the horizon and are detracting visual features on the skyline. Electricity pylons are visible outside the area in the north.

5.162 Stansted Airport is a major influence on the character of the south-west of this area. Though screened by trees and shrubs, its buildings and tower can be seen in long views from many locations within the character area. The access roads and perimeter roads and associated commercial premises have introduced a more urban feel to the local landscape. The sound and view of aircraft is almost constant.

5.163 Recent residential development at Elsenham and in the south at Takeley and Smiths Green is open to the wider landscape, and therefore has a slightly sub-urbanising influence. The historic linear settlement patterns in these villages have also now been lost.

5.164 Traffic noise from the A120 and the B1256 in the south and a section of the M11 which crosses the north-west disrupt rural tranquility. Away from these trunk roads and the Stansted flight path, tranquility is moderate and there is a greater experience of dark skies to the north of the area.

Key landscape qualities and sensitivities

5.165 The most valued attributes of this LCA, which would therefore be most sensitive to change are summarised as:

- Large blocks of ancient and semi-natural woodland.
- Woodland and grassland which break up the farmed landscape, and wetland habitats along the River Roding .
- Twisting, lanes, often of ancient origin, with open species-rich grass verges.
- A sense of historic integrity in the north resulting from a historic dispersed settlement pattern of traditional hamlets, often located around greens.
- The open character of higher areas of the plateau, allowing long views across the landscape.

Pressures and forces for change

- Agricultural intensification leading to further loss or fragmentation of semi-natural habitats, now limited to the hedge network and woodland blocks.
- Intensification has also led to past loss of hedgerows and decline in hedgerow management.
- Expansion of horse grazing close to settlement with fields subdivided into paddocks by fences.
- Pollution of the River Roding and its tributaries from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from surrounding farmland.
- Invasive species within the river and banks, including Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam altering the plant composition of the river banks.
- Pressure from increased traffic on rural lanes impacting local levels of tranquillity and erosion of verges.
- Recent residential expansion at the edges of Elsenham and Takeley creating a sub-urban character.
- Development pressure on the edge of existing settlements, especially Takeley, which may be detrimental to rural landscape character and the sense of tranquillity.
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings on the higher ground, which may be visually intrusive.
- Drive for more renewable energy generation leading to demand for wind turbines and solar farms either within or visible from the LCA.
- Noise and visual impact from proximity to Stansted Airport.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including higher average temperatures and drier summers, wetter winters, more frequent winter storms and flooding leading to:
- Changes in woodland / tree species composition due to the spread of pests/ pathogens, (particularly phytopthora pathogens and ash die-back), including a loss of mature and veteran trees. This could also impact native hedgerows.
- Loss of woodland /trees due to wind-throw and of dieback in drought prone locations.
- Spread of non-native and invasive species such as giant hogweed.
- Changes in cropping and land use as a response to climate change impacting the character of the farmland.
- Drought conditions leading to crop failures, and reduced productivity changing the character of the farmed landscape.

- Changes to seasonal flooding and flash floods, and an increasing demand for flood defence activity. This could create more physical habitat degradation and introduce potentially detracting features.

Landscape Guidelines

The overall strategy for Broxted Farmland Plateau LCA is to enhance the rural character of this intensively farmed area with its small historic villages linked by winding lanes. Seek to integrate new development and strengthen landscape patterns through reinforcing hedgerow boundaries and connecting adjacent woodlands.

Protect and conserve

- Protect and conserve existing semi-natural habitats, including ancient and semi-natural woodlands and the intermittent hedgerows.
- Conserve historic lanes, ditches and unimproved roadside verges. Avoid unsympathetic highways works, including lighting and inappropriate road upgrades.
- Protect the sparsely settled, tranquil character of the north of the landscape.
- Ensure that important heritage assets (including the farmsteads, moated sites and halls) are appropriately managed to avoid their loss or degradation.
- Protect the dispersed linear settlement pattern of smaller villages, hamlets and farms.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their contribution to landscape character.
- Conserve the rural character of historic farmsteads as features of the agricultural landscape.
- Conserve dark skies by limiting unnecessary lighting along narrow lanes/ road junctions and associated with new development.

Manage

- Manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland through traditional woodland management techniques as important landscape, historical and nature conservation sites. Where opportunities arise, encourage woodland planting to link fragmented sites.
- Encourage regeneration of woodlands such as at Elsenham and High Wood; promote natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland.
- Strengthen and enhance the marginal riverside habitat along the River Roding, including marshland, pasture, reed beds and off-stream wetlands. Manage the spread of invasive species.
- Manage and expand the area of land available for arable field margins, and ensure these are protected from agricultural inputs to adjacent crops.
- Manage and expand the areas of unimproved grassland.
- Manage the recreational use of the landscape (along PRoW) which provide informal access on linked routes through farmland.
- Encourage sensitive management and screening of existing horse grazing and related activities; seek to enhance the visual appearance of grassland managed as horse paddocks.
- Manage visual and audible intrusion of road traffic, particularly where the A120 and B1051 crosses the area, including through roadside tree planting.

Plan

- Plan tree planting and woodland creation appropriate to the landscape character, in large woodland blocks. Use climate hardy species and follow 'Right Tree, Right Place' principles.
- Enhance landscape character and local biodiversity by creating new hedgerows and grasslands, as part of a wider network of connected habitats.
- Plan to extend riparian vegetation and other wetland habitats along the River Roding, to form green corridors, contribute to landscape character and green and blue infrastructure, and contribute to nature recovery networks.
- Plan to decrease erosion and siltation of water courses through appropriate crop species and minimising nutrient applications.
- Ensure that plans for modern farm buildings are sensitively located and their impacts on the landscape mitigated through careful design and deciduous tree planting.
- Use planning and design guidelines to resist urbanisation in this very rural landscape. Any new development should utilise traditional materials and building styles.
- Plan to integrate existing urban fringe areas into the landscape, especially

the new residential developments at Takeley.

- Ensure any future residential expansion on valley sides is small-scale and respects the historic settlement pattern of dispersed villages and traditional vernacular. Ensure that development is well integrated with the surrounding landscape to minimise visual impact.
- Plan for future development on settlement edges, particularly at Takeley. Any new development should incorporate green infrastructure links to contribute to nature recovery networks, enhance landscape character and provide sustainable opportunities for travel, access and recreation.
- Plan to incorporate green infrastructure links to contribute to nature recovery networks, enhance landscape character and provide sustainable opportunities for travel, access and recreation.

Character Area B7 - Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau

Key characteristics

Geology, soils, topography and drainage

- Gently undulating plateau of glacial till, situated between Pincey Brook to the south and east and the Stort River valley to the west.
- Chalky boulder clay bedrock overlain with glacial till produces fertile soils.

Land use and field patterns

- Hatfield Forest occupies the north of the plateau, and forms a dominant feature in the landscape. An irregular field pattern of wood pasture nestles in the clearings with regular assarts on its fringes.
- Outside of the forest, intensively farmed arable fields are dominant, with a regular field pattern, in which hedgerows have been reduced or replaced by ditches.

Trees and woodland cover

- Hatfield Forest, a nationally important ancient woodland, makes up a significant percentage of the district's woodland cover.
- Elsewhere, occasional small woodlands create structure within the arable fields.

Semi-natural habitats and biodiversity

- Hatfield Forest is designated as an SSSI and NNR for its variety of woodland, wood pasture and grassland habitats.
- Pockets of priority habitat deciduous woodland are found on the edge of settlements to the south. Historic landscape character
- Hatfield Forest is one of the finest remaining examples of medieval forest in the country.
- To the south, field patterns are typically post-enclosure.
- Historic farmsteads and cottages are scattered across the character area.

Settlement, transport pattern and rights of way

- Dispersed hamlets are strung along straight, ancient lanes. Settlements are often set along wooded village greens in Hatfield Forest.
- Strong recreation within Hatfield Forest, which has Open Access, and along the promoted routes the Harcamlow Way and Three Forests Way.

Views and perceptual qualities

- An enclosed character within the forest, with a more open character to the south.
- Hatfield Forest provides a strong wooded horizon in views from much of this area.
- Despite proximity to Stansted Airport, there is a tranquil, enclosed character within the forest.
- Outside the forest, proximity to Stansted Airport disrupts tranquillity.

5.191 Settlement is historic and largely dispersed, appearing in small clusters at Bedlar's Green, and along a large common at Woodside Green. Many of the houses and farmhouses are listed. Linear development along Takeley Street in the north is an exception to this settlement pattern, although many of the houses are listed. Vernacular buildings within the character area are typically colour-washed plaster or timbered, thatched roofs, or with flintwork and red brick.

Views and perceptual influences

5.194 The arable landscape in the south is relatively open, with northerly views framed by small pockets of woodland, and backdropped by Hatfield Forest. Within Hatfield Forest, there is an intimate and enclosed character, and long distance views are more limited. Near settlements, roadside vegetation and pockets of smaller woodland also limit views.

5.195 There are no large-scale structures or developments which impact on the rural character of views. In views from the more open landscape to the south, there are occasional views towards Hatfield Broad Oak and its church spire. Telegraph poles are evident throughout the landscape, however do not overly detract from the otherwise rural landscape.

5.196 Tranquillity is moderate throughout, with impacts from larger settlements and major roadways outside the character area, including the M11. Within Hatfield Forest there is a strong experience of both dark skies and tranquillity, although this lessens in the north. The A120 and Stansted Airport produce significant light pollution which spills into the character area from the north. Flights taking off from Stansted Airport are a common intrusion within the landscape, although the noise is muffled within Hatfield Forest.

Key landscape qualities and sensitivities

5.197 The most valued attributes of this LCA, which would therefore be most sensitive to change are summarised as:

- Nationally important Hatfield Forest, an important survival of a medieval forest with wood pasture.
- A sense of historic integrity resulting from relatively unchanged woodland management of Hatfield Forest.
- Dispersed settlement pattern of historic farmsteads, wooded village greens and twisting, often sunken rural lanes.
- Enclosed and intimate character within Hatfield Forest, which contrasts with the more open character of the southern arable fields.

Pressures and forces for change

- Agricultural intensification leading to further loss or fragmentation of semi-natural habitats, now limited to the hedge network and woodland blocks.
- Expansion of horse grazing close to settlement with fields subdivided into paddocks by fences.
- Recreational pressures at Hatfield Forest.
- Pressure from increased traffic on rural lanes impacting local levels of tranquillity and erosion of verges.
- Development pressure on the edge of existing settlements outside of the area, especially Hatfield Heath, and Takeley, which may be detrimental to rural landscape character and the sense of tranquillity.
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings on the higher ground, which may be visually intrusive.
- Drive for more renewable energy generation leading to demand for wind turbines and solar farms either within or visible from the LCA.
- Noise and air pollution from close proximity to Stansted Airport.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including higher average temperatures and drier summers, wetter winters, more frequent winter storms and flooding leading to:
- Changes in woodland / tree species composition due to the spread of pests/ pathogens, (particularly phytopthora pathogens and ash die-back), including a loss of mature and veteran trees. This could also impact native hedgerows.
- Loss of woodland /trees due to wind-throw and of dieback in drought prone locations.
- Spread of non-native and invasive species such as giant hogweed.
- Changes in cropping and land use as a response to climate change impacting the character of the farmland.
- Drought conditions leading to crop failures, and reduced productivity changing the character of the farmed landscape.
- Changes to seasonal flooding and flash floods, and an increasing demand for flood defence activity. This could create more physical habitat degradation and introduce potentially detracting features.

Landscape Guidelines

The overall strategy for Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the ancient and ecologically important Hatfield Forest. Protect the relatively undeveloped and tranquil character of the area. In the south seek to integrate new development and strengthen landscape patterns through reinforcing hedgerow boundaries and connecting adjacent woodlands.

Protect and conserve

- Protect and conserve existing semi-natural habitats, including ancient and semi-natural woodlands and hedgerows.
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges. Avoid unsympathetic highways works, including lighting and inappropriate road upgrades.
- Protect the sparsely settled, tranquil character of the landscape.
- Ensure that important heritage assets (including within Hatfield Forest, and farmhouses and cottages outside) are appropriately managed to avoid their loss or degradation.
- Protect the dispersed medieval settlement pattern of hamlets and farms.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their contribution to landscape character.
- Conserve the rural character of historic farmsteads as features of the agricultural landscape.
- Conserve dark skies by limiting unnecessary lighting along narrow lanes/ road junctions and associated with new development.

Manage

- Manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland through traditional woodland management techniques as important landscape, historical and nature conservation sites. Where opportunities arise, encourage woodland planting to link fragmented sites.
- Strengthen and enhance the traditional pattern of the landscape by augmenting fragmented hedgerows using native species.
- Manage and expand the area of land available for arable field margins, and ensure these are protected from agricultural inputs to adjacent crops.
- Manage and expand the areas of unimproved grassland.
- Encourage sensitive management and screening of existing horse grazing and related activities; seek to enhance the visual appearance of grassland managed as horse paddocks.
- Manage the recreational use of the landscape, along PRoW and within Hatfield Forest. Manage the numbers of visitors arriving by car to Hatfield Forest.
- Manage visual and audible intrusion of road traffic, particularly where the B183 crosses the area, including through roadside tree planting.

Plan

- Plan tree planting and woodland creation appropriate to landscape character, which is sympathetic to Hatfield Forest. Use climate hardy species and follow 'Right Tree, Right Place' principles.
- Enhance landscape character and local biodiversity by creating new hedgerows and grasslands, as part of a wider network of connected habitats.
- Ensure that plans for modern farm buildings are sensitively located and their impacts on the landscape mitigated through careful design and deciduous tree planting.
- Use planning and design guidelines to resist urbanisation in this very rural landscape. Any new development should utilise traditional materials and building styles.
- Plan to incorporate green infrastructure links to contribute to nature recovery networks, enhance landscape character and provide sustainable opportunities for travel, access and recreation.

Character Area A2 - Stort River Valley

Key characteristics

Geology, soils, topography and drainage

- A shallow river valley drained by the upper course of the River Stort.
- The landform is gently rolling with occasional steep river valley slopes.
- The mixed underlying geology gives rise to fertile loamy and clayey soils.

Land use and field patterns

- A landscape dominated by intensive arable agriculture. Some mixed farming is located on lower slopes and the valley floor with horse grazing close to settlements.
- A small- to medium-scale regular field pattern. Fields are well-enclosed by hedgerows with hedgerow trees, tree belts, and woodland blocks.

Trees and woodland cover

- Scattered woodland cover with small mixed woodland copses, tree belts and woodland hangers. Woodlands are often associated with historic parklands, with a cluster of ancient woodlands near Birchanger.
- The riverbanks are well-vegetated with shrubs and trees, creating an intimate character.

Semi-natural habitats and biodiversity

- Deciduous woodland, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats along the Stort, often designated as Local Wildlife Sites, provide variety within the intensively farmed landscape.
- Little Hallingbury Marsh (SSSI) along the Stort is important for local biodiversity.

Historic landscape character

- The historic field pattern is dominated by pre-18th century irregular fields, linear greens and former common fields. Estate parklands are also scattered across the area.
- Historic villages, many designated as Conservation Areas, scattered farmsteads, moated sites and halls reflect the River Stort's historic importance as a site for settlement and industry.
- Locally distinctive building styles and materials including colour-washed plaster, thatched roofs, and some mellow red brick create a strong local vernacular.

Settlement, transport pattern and rights of way

- A well-settled landscape, with settlement concentrated in the south around Stansted Mountfitchet and Birchanger. On the valley sides to the north, the settlement pattern is more dispersed, with small villages and hamlets, often along linear greens.
- The valley provides an important transportation route. The railway, M11, and busy trunk roads cross the south. These contrast with small, often sunken lanes with species-rich verges in the north.
- A good network of footpaths includes the promoted route of Harcamlow Way, Three Forests Way and Flitch Way.

Views and perceptual qualities

- Continuous views are afforded down the valley from higher ground. Elsewhere the landscape is more enclosed by woodland and hedgerows.
- The river is often hidden by vegetation within the landscape, with views only possible from properties on its banks, at bridging points or fords.
- The north is more tranquil and rural, due to its distance from the M11, Stansted Airport and the larger settlements in the south and adjacent areas. Electricity pylons cross the landscape north of Manuden.

5.39 This area is characterised by scattered farmsteads, medieval moated sites, and small villages and hamlets set along linear greens or small lanes that demonstrate the river's historic importance as a site for settlement and industry.

5.40 The historic villages of Great Hallingbury, Hazel End, Manuden, Bentfield Green and Clavering feature clusters of listed buildings and are designated as Conservation Areas. The settlement pattern varies. Nucleated villages include Manuden, and Clavering, while Hazel End, Little Hallingbury and Great Hallingbury are linear. Stansted Mountfitchet, which is excluded from the LCA, has expanded to the south into the river valley.

Views and perceptual influences

5.45 In the rolling valley landscape the density of the hedgerows, copses and tree belts/woodland hangers results in a semi-enclosed landscape, with vegetation framing views. From high ground there are open and continuous views along the slopes and across the river valley in the north. Views of the

river valley are channelled by trees or development in the centre and south Airport. The settlement edge of Stansted Mountfitchet is visible across the farmlands from the north.

5.46 The narrow and heavily wooded river valley floor in the south has an enclosed and intimate character. There are local views along the river floor of wet meadows and tree-lined riverbanks at Gaston Green.

5.47 Church spires appear as occasional landmarks above wooded skylines. The church at Manuden is visible across the floodplain pasture from the Harcamlow Way. The hillfort of Wallbury Camp is also a landmark feature in the landscape.

5.48 The character of the landscape varies between the relatively tranquil and more rural north, with larger settlements and transport links concentrated in the south around Stansted Mountfitchet and the Hallingburys.

5.49 Stansted Airport is a major influence on the character of the eastern part of this area. The buildings and tower can be seen from the eastern river valley slopes. The sound of aircraft is almost constant. The M11 / A120 junction and service station south of Birchanger, Stansted Airport and urban fringe development including sewage works on the edge of Bishop's Stortford create a more suburban character.

5.50 Noise from the M11, A120, A1060, B1256 and the B1383 (all in the south of the area) disrupt rural tranquillity. Away from these trunk roads and the Stansted flight path, tranquillity is moderate and there is a greater experience of dark skies to the north of the area.

Key landscape qualities and sensitivities

5.51 The most valued attributes of this LCA, which would therefore be most sensitive to change are summarised as:

- Ancient and semi-natural woodland, grassland and wetland habitats scattered across the farmed landscape.
- The intimate character of the valley floor, with small linear fields of arable farmland, fringed by wet pasture and unimproved wet grassland.
- The settlement pattern of historic villages, often located around greens, farmsteads, moats and halls that reflect the historic importance of the River Stort.
- Twisting, sometimes tree-lined, lanes, often of ancient origin.
- Recreational values of promoted public rights of way providing access within the landscape.
- The semi-enclosed character of the valley due to hedgerows, tree belts and woodlands that frame views across and out of the area.

Pressures and forces for change

- Agricultural intensification leading to further loss or fragmentation of semi-natural habitats, now limited to the hedge network, riverside wetlands and woodland blocks.
- Intensification has also led to past loss of hedgerows and decline in hedgerow management.
- Expansion of horse grazing close to settlement with fields subdivided into paddocks by fences.
- Potential for pollution of the river, marshland and ditches from fertilizer and pesticide run-off from the surrounding valley sides and farmland plateau.
- Invasive species within the river and banks, including Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam altering the plant composition of the river banks.
- Development pressure on the edge of existing settlements, including Stansted Mountfitchet and Bishop's Stortford, which may be detrimental to rural landscape character.
- Pressure for increased traffic on narrow and minor lanes impacting local levels of tranquillity and erosion of verges.
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings on the higher ground, which may be visually intrusive.
- Visual intrusion of road traffic in the floodplain landscape, particularly where the M11 and the A1060 cross the area.
- Drive for more renewable energy generation leading to demand for wind turbines and solar farms either within or visible from the LCA.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including higher average temperatures and drier summers, wetter winters, more

frequent winter storms and flooding leading to:

- Changes to seasonal flooding and flash floods, and an increasing demand for flood defence activity. This could create more physical habitat degradation and introduce potentially detracting features.
- Changes in woodland / tree species composition due to the spread of pests/ pathogens, (particularly phytopthora pathogens and ash die-back), including a loss of mature and veteran trees. This could also impact native hedgerows.
- Loss of woodland /trees due to wind-throw and of dieback in drought prone locations.
- Spread of non-native and invasive species such as giant hogweed.
- Changes in cropping and land use as a response to climate change impacting the character of the farmland.
- Drought conditions leading to crop failures, and reduced productivity changing the character of the farmed landscape.
- Loss of mature trees within parkland landscapes due to increased storms.

Landscape Guidelines

The overall strategy for Stort River Valley LCA is to enhance the rural character of the farmed landscape with its historic villages. Seek to conserve inter-valley and cross-valley views and strengthen landscape patterns by integrating urban fringe elements, conserving semi-natural habitats and restoring hedgerows and tree cover.

Protect and conserve

- Protect and conserve existing semi-natural habitats, including ancient and semi-natural woodland, hedgerows, grasslands and wetland habitats.
- Conserve and restore historic hedgerow pattern and restore gaps in hedgerows.
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges. Avoid unsympathetic highway works, including lighting and inappropriate road upgrades.
- Ensure that important heritage assets (including Wallbury Hill Camp and Stansted Castle) are appropriately managed to avoid their loss or degradation.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their contribution to landscape character, including those within Great Hallingbury, Hazel End, Manuden, Bentfield Green and Clavering Conservation Areas.
- Conserve the intimate character of the floodplain by appropriate planting of bankside trees.

Manage

- Manage ancient and semi-natural woodland through traditional woodland management techniques as important landscape, historical and nature conservation sites. Where opportunities arise, encourage woodland planting to link fragmented sites.
- Strengthen and enhance marginal riverside habitats such as marshland and pasture, reed beds and off-stream wetlands. Manage pesticide and fertilizer run-off from surrounding farmland.
- Encourage sensitive management and screening of existing horse grazing and related activities; seek to enhance the visual appearance of grassland managed as horse paddocks.
- Manage the recreational use of the landscape (along PRoW) which provides informal access on linked routes through farmland.
- Manage visual and audible intrusion of road traffic, particularly where the M11 and the A1060 cross the area, including through roadside tree planting.

Plan

- Enhance landscape character and local biodiversity by a programme to create new hedgerows, grasslands and wetlands, as part of a wider network of connected habitats.
- Plan to extend riparian woodland and other wetland habitats along the River Stort and the brooks to form green corridors to contribute to landscape character and nature recovery networks.
- Plan tree planting and expansion or new woodland creation where appropriate to landscape character. Use climate-hardy species and follow 'Right Tree, Right Place' principles.
- Enhance connections between existing ancient woodlands to increase habitat connectivity and enhance landscape character.
- Plan for future development on settlement edges, particularly Stansted

Mountfitchet and Bishop's Stortford. Any new development should incorporate green and blue infrastructure links to contribute to nature recovery networks, enhance landscape character and provide sustainable opportunities for travel, access and recreation.

- Ensure any future residential expansion on the valley sides is small-scale, respecting the historic settlement pattern of dispersed villages and traditional vernacular.
- Ensure that plans for modern farm buildings are sensitively located and their impacts on the landscape are mitigated through careful design and deciduous tree planting.
- Use planning and design guidelines to resist further urbanisation, particularly in the less settled landscape in the north. Any new development should utilise traditional materials and building styles.

Uttlesford SANG and Country Park

Scoping & Strategy development

Uttlesford District Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

June 2024

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1.1	Final report	H Liddle H Ward J Baker H Shayler	H Liddle	M Parkhill	06-24

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Introduction

1.1 LUC has been commissioned by Uttlesford District Council (UDC) to undertake a study to assess the requirements for the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGs) for the forthcoming new Local Plan.

1.2 Expected future growth will require the provision of new open space to meet the needs of the current and future population. In accordance with guidance from Natural England (NE), Uttlesford District Council is expected to take a range of measures to mitigate recreational pressure on Hatfield Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR). A key aspect of recreation mitigation for Hatfield Forest will be the provision of SANGs, which need to be of a suitable size, in a suitable location and provide visitor characteristics that could draw people away from using Hatfield Forest. It is recognised that small areas of amenity space within development sites, whilst suitable for everyday use, will not provide a sufficient visitor experience to act as SANGs and a strategic approach across a wider area is required. This study assesses the suitability of potential SANGs provision associated with proposed site allocations in the new Local Plan (Reg 19) within the Zone of Influence of Hatfield Forest.

A ‘Zone of Influence’ (ZoI) has been established by Natural England through extensive visitor surveys at Hatfield Forest to determine the distance that 75% of visitors to the forest will travel. This is an established method to determine triggers for mitigation required for different designated sites which are impacted by recreational pressure. The ZoI has been set at 11.1 km for Hatfield Forest, which encompasses a large proportion of the south and west of Uttlesford.

1.3 The Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBIS) 2023 also addresses the need to provide suitable large areas of public open space that meet the needs of the growing population as well as helping to ease pressure on Hatfield Forest. It identifies two opportunity areas as potential locations that could perform the function of a Country Park and meet Natural England (NE) Country Park Criteria. The opportunity areas identified are:

- Southern Boundary of Saffron Walden.
- West of Great Dunmow, Easton Park, at the previously proposed garden community site.

1.4 This study provides a high level scoping assessment and next steps to bring these sites forward as potential new open spaces and in accordance with NE criteria.

Aims of the study

1.5 The study aims to support the Council in providing Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) to mitigate against increasing recreational pressure on Hatfield Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR). The Council also has an aspiration to deliver one or more Country Parks (that will meet Natural England criteria) to help to address shortfalls in access to natural green space in the district. The report is intended to set out a high level assessment which will support the Council and other stakeholders in decision making, site planning and future stages of project development. The study:

- Sets out the likely SANGs capacity / quantity requirements over the new Local Plan period (using the proposed allocated sites as the future scenario).
- Provides a baseline review of each area / site allocation, identifying key considerations for future delivery of significant new public open space.
- Assesses the suitability of potential SANGs sites against established SANGs criteria.

- Assess the potential SANGs quantity / capacity at each site against the likely requirements (based on established Natural England guidance).
- Provides high level scoping of two opportunity areas for the delivery of future Country Parks.
- Identifies opportunities to deliver a range of wider benefits and functions through the development of new open space and enhanced landscape in both areas (e.g. flood alleviation, active travel, nature recovery etc.).
- Provides a high-level assessment of potential delivery mechanisms, ongoing stewardship arrangements and levels of funding that may be required.

1.6 Uttlesford District Council Officers and Natural England Advisors were consulted during the development of the report.

Uttlesford context

1.7 Uttlesford District is a rural district situated in the northwest of the County of Essex. Notable settlements include the historic market towns of Saffron Waldon and Thaxted, as well as important local centres including Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. These, and numerous smaller villages are set within the wider agricultural landscape.

1.8 The wider landscape is predominantly Farmland Plateau, comprising elevated, gently rolling landscapes of medium and large scale enclosed arable fields. These landscapes are bisected by river valleys and feature pockets of woodland, including semi-natural and ancient woodland. In the north, the chalk upland areas provide more distinctive landform, with some panoramic views across the open arable landscape.

1.9 The district takes in the headwaters of the three separate river catchments – Great Ouse, North Essex and Thames. The primary watercourses within Uttlesford are the Chelmer, Pant and two Chalk Streams, the Cam & Stort.

These are characterised by settled gently sloping valley sides and an intimate wooded character on the valley floor. These rivers, and their tributaries are important ‘blue corridors’ through the district and offer aquatic and wetland terrestrial habitats.

1.10 Despite the rural nature of the district, designated sites within the district are limited. There are twelve Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), just over half of which are in ‘favourable’ condition. **[See reference 1]** Most of these are woodlands, with the exception of Ashton Meadows SSSI which is managed as a hay meadow, and Debden Water SSSI which features a freshwater stream valley and associated grassland and woodland mosaic. Some sites remain in an ‘unfavourable’ condition, either without change or actively declining, predominantly due to agricultural practices that are not aligned with the ecological needs of these sites, such as inappropriate cutting/mowing and undergrazing, and issues with deer grazing and browsing.

1.11 Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) and priority habitats are dominated by deciduous woodland (including ancient woodland), as well as semi-improved grassland, and some floodplain grazing marsh and chalk streams. In addition, there is a uniformly distributed network of historic orchards, which are typically small in size. Connectivity between priority habitats is low, and many natural areas are fragmented. Special Roadside Verges (SRV) have been identified across the district, accommodating priority chalk grassland habitats. These linear habitats provide an important role in connecting grasslands within a landscape of agricultural intensification.

Hatfield Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve

1.12 Hatfield Forest is located in the south west of the district and is designated as both a SSSI and NNR. At over 400 hectares (ha), the site is a significant asset and provides important access to greenspace for many residents and visitors from further afield. The site comprises numerous habitats, including

ancient woodland, wood pasture, coppice, old grassland plains and wetlands. The mosaic of habitats supports a number of species, including veteran trees, invertebrates, fungi, lichen and breeding birds. Within Europe, Hatfield Forest has been identified as one of the best examples of a medieval forest.

1.13 A study into the adverse impacts of recreational pressure on this site was commissioned by the National Trust who own and manage the site **[See reference 2]**. This report concluded that the ZoI to capture 75% of visitors should be set at 11.1km which covers the southern and central areas of Uttlesford (including Great Dunmow but not Saffron Walden). As a result, Natural England are requiring Local Authorities within the ZoI to put in place strategic mitigation measures to limit recreational pressure on the site, particularly the risk of increased recreational pressure as a result of residential development. The National Trust have prepared a mitigation strategy containing Strategic Access and Management Measures at Hatfield Forest which new development will need to contribute towards as a tariff on individual new dwellings.

1.14 Guidance from Natural England makes it clear that a wider package of measures will be required to mitigate additional recreational impacts arising from new development. This should include alternative green space within the red line boundary of new developments, and for the largest allocations (or elsewhere as required), Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

1.15 The Council's 2024 Open Space Assessment identifies a shortfall in the provision of natural and semi-natural green space across the district, with Hatfield Forest forming a significant proportion of publicly accessible natural and semi-natural greenspace in the district. The provision of new natural and semi-natural greenspace is a priority for Uttlesford District Council and a proposal in the emerging Local Plan.

Types of ecological impacts arising from recreational use of Hatfield Forest

1.16 A range of pressures and impacts from visitor pressure have been identified at Hatfield Forest. The key impacts are associated with trampling along rides and thoroughfares, with damage spreading into woodland habitats along rides which have a significant impact on the features of greatest ecological importance on the site. Trampling has a range of negative impacts including:

- Vegetation damage (affecting species diversity, reduction in biomass, vegetation cover etc.)
- Soil compaction (resulting in changes to plant communities, reduction in water infiltration and gaseous exchanges)
- Vegetation damage and soil compaction at Hatfield Forest is resulting in loss of herb rich grassland, loss of ground flora within woodland, loss of ecotone and transitional habitats, damage to fragile woodland soils, associated fauna and decomposition cycles and damage to deadwood habitat.

Provision of SANG

1.17 Strategic solutions for addressing recreation impacts are in place in several locations associated with European designated sites (Natura 2000 Sites) - e.g. Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Whilst Hatfield Forest (SSSI & NNR) is not a European designated site, there are duties on Local Authorities in respect of SSSIs to further their conservation and enhancement under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. In addition, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires public authorities to 'have regard' to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. There is a specific obligation under section 28I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act for local authorities to notify Natural England where it is proposing to permit an operation likely to damage a SSSI (such as new development). Given the

significant recreational pressure identified at Hatfield Forest, which is set to increase with additional growth and development, Natural England have proposed a strategic solution to address current and future impacts.

1.18 The principles of delivering effective SANGs have been developed through application at several European designated sites (such as Thames Basin Heaths SPA). Guidance has been issued on criteria that sites will likely need to meet to deliver SANG. It is noted that whilst the Thames Basin Heath SPA is designated for different features than Hatfield Forest, guidance on SANGs previously published for Thames Basin Heaths may provide a useful comparison and starting point. Of particular note, guidance on SANG for Thames Basin Heaths sets out that:

'*The effectiveness of SANG as mitigation will depend on the location and design. These must be such that the SANG is more attractive than the SPA* (designated site) *to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA.'*

1.19 The available guidance does not address or preclude the other functions of green space. Other functions may be provided within SANG, so long as these do not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the designated landscape.

1.20 SANG may be created from:

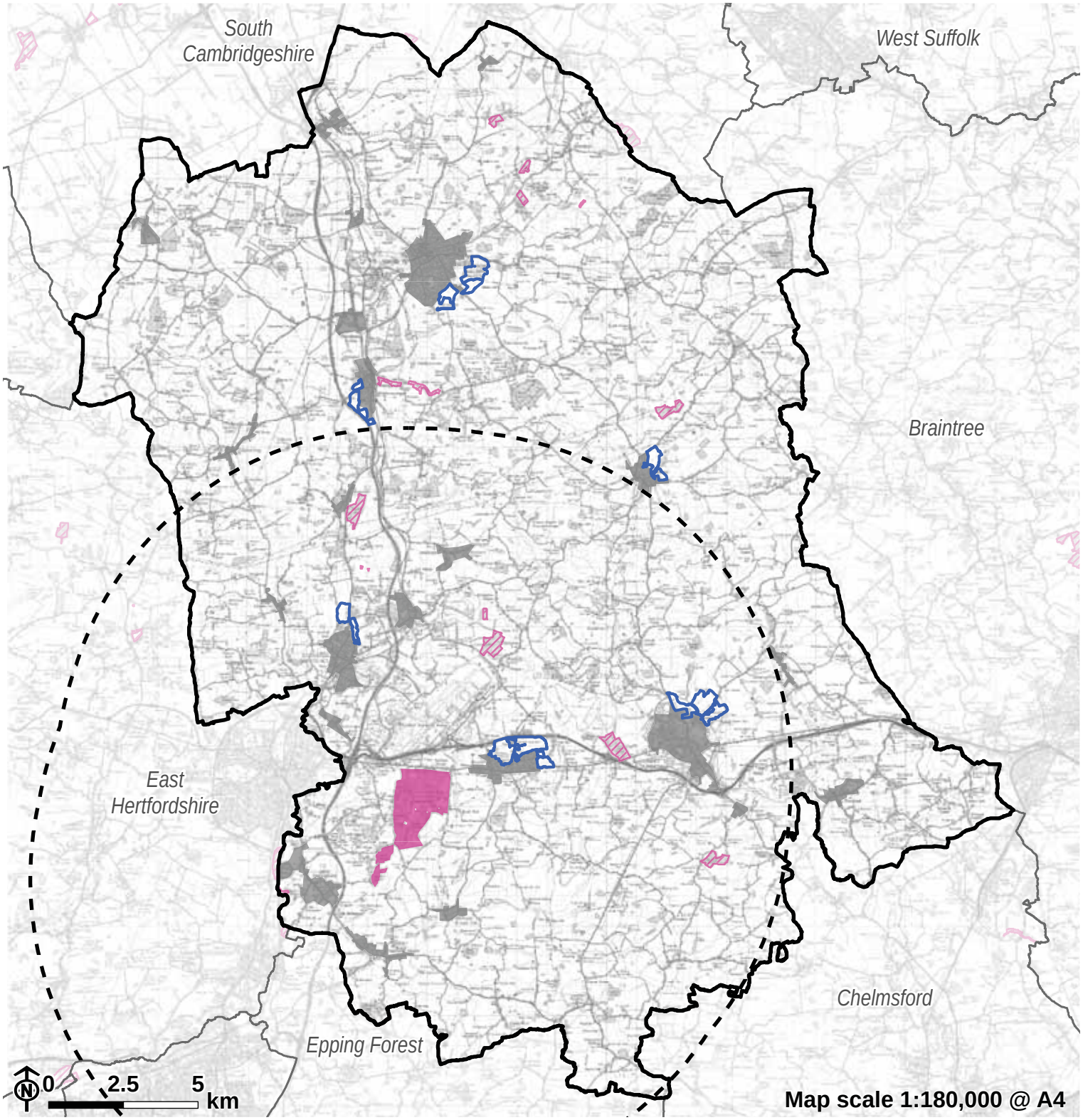
- Existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public.
- Existing open space which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the designated site.
- Land in other uses which could be converted into SANG
- The identification of SANG should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased

disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANG, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan.

1.21 Consideration of SANG requirements as part of the assessment in Uttlesford is set out later in the report.

1.22 Figure 1.1 shows the study area, opportunity areas, Hatfield Forest and the ZoI.

Figure 1.1: Study context



- Uttlesford District boundary
- Neighbouring local authority
- Settlement
- Reg 19 Uttlesford site allocation
- Hatfield Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Other SSSI
- Hatfield Forest zone of influence

Wider benefits that can be delivered as part of SANGs and other open space in Uttlesford

1.23 Uttlesford declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019 and committed to achieving net-zero carbon status in Council assets by 2030. The Uttlesford Climate Crisis Strategy (2021-2030) **[See reference** 3**]** recognises that the biodiversity and climate crisis are intertwined, and that nature targets can positively contribute towards climate targets. In October 2019, Essex County Council committed to invest £1 million in tree planting, over the next five years as part of the Essex Forest Initiative. **[See reference** 4**]**, **[See reference** 5**]**. This included planting 375,000 trees, over 150ha of land. Uttlesford has benefited from and supported this scheme through tree planting with a range of partners in the district and there may be opportunities to build on this as part of the delivery of new open space.

1.24 Sustaining high levels of biodiversity in Uttlesford is essential to building climate resilience into ecosystems and landscapes. Ensuring connectivity between habitats is also important, as recognised by the Lawton Review **[See reference** 6**]**, and embedded into the Environment Act 2021 and subsequent Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which aim for the creation of ‘more’ habitats, ‘bigger’ habitats (expanding on existing core sites) and ‘better’ habitats (improving the quality of existing core sites).

Nature Recovery Networks

NRNs in England aim to create a connected network of habitats to support wildlife, increase biodiversity, and promote ecological resilience across the landscape. LNRSs are the regional plans that outline how local areas will

contribute to the wider NRN goals. LNRSs are a statutory requirement, and involve collaboration among local organisations, businesses, and communities to identify key areas for conservation and enhancement. Essex County Council are the Responsible Authority for delivering the LNRS for Greater Essex. **[See reference 7]**, **[See reference 8]**.

1.25 Given the fragmented nature of important habitats in Uttlesford, SANGs could potentially serve as critical ecological connectors and will help to respond to Uttlesford's declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency **[See reference 9]**. They can bridge the gaps between isolated habitats such as the ancient woodlands, chalk grasslands, and river valley systems, enhancing overall landscape permeability. This increased connectivity facilitates wildlife movement across the district, which is crucial for maintaining healthy, resilient ecosystems.

1.26 To this end, SANGs can be an important contributor towards the implementation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). Although the County LNRS will be published towards the end of 2024, proactive development of SANGs aligns with the anticipated objectives of these strategies by enhancing ecological networks and improving access to natural spaces. This forward-looking approach ensures that the establishment of SANGs not only mitigates immediate pressures on designated sites but also positions Uttlesford to integrate with broader biodiversity and conservation goals set forth by the LNRS. SANGs can be strategically located and designed to augment local biodiversity. By incorporating a variety of habitat types — from woodlands to wetlands — these greenspaces can support a wide range of species, including those of local conservation concern. This not only helps in creating more extensive and ecologically diverse habitats but also aids in achieving 'more, bigger, better' habitat networks.

1.27 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is now mandatory for development under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). New development is required to deliver a BNG of at least 10% which means that a development will result in

more and better quality natural habitat that was there before development. BNG can be delivered on-site (within the redline boundary), off-site or as a last resort by buying statutory biodiversity credits. Local authorities can set out requirements for development for deliver more than 10% BNG through planning policy.**[See reference** 10**]** Uttlesford District Council Regulation 18 Local Plan (Core Policy 40) sets out that development will likely be required to demonstrate a minimum of 20% net gain in biodiversity.

1.28 SANGs also offer a unique platform for community engagement and environmental education. By providing accessible natural spaces, they encourage public interaction with nature, fostering greater appreciation and understanding of local biodiversity and conservation issues. Educational programs and interpretative trails within SANGs can also highlight the ecological roles of different species and habitats, promoting stewardship among local residents.

1.29 In line with Uttlesford's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon status by 2030 and the declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency **[See reference** 11**]**, SANGs contribute to climate resilience. Greenspaces play a crucial role in carbon sequestration, urban cooling, and managing hydrological cycles, which can mitigate the impacts of climate change at the local level. Moreover, well-designed SANGs and other open space can provide flood mitigation benefits, particularly within river valleys and sites adjacent to water courses.

Structure of the report

1.30 The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides an assessment of expected SANG requirements over the new Local Plan period.
- Chapter 3 identifies SANG opportunity areas at each site allocation (bespoke SANG) and provides an assessment of SANG capacity at each of the proposed site allocations within the ZoI.

- Chapters 4 to 6 provide a dossier for each proposed site allocation. This includes:
    - A baseline review of SANG opportunity areas to identify constraints and opportunities.
    - A high level SANG opportunity plan to establish to what extent each SANG opportunity area may be able to meet SANG quality guidelines.
    - A SANG quality criteria checklist for each site.
    - Chapter 7 summarises the status of Land East of Highwood Quarry with regards SANG requirement (a 1200 home consented scheme that will also be expected to provide SANGs)
- Chapter 8 & 9 provide a baseline review and recommendations for the Easton Park and Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity areas.
- Chapter 10 & 11 provide a summary of next steps, including delivery mechanisms and outline delivery costs.

Chapter 2

SANG requirements for Uttlesford

2.1 Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) work by providing alternative locations for recreation to divert trips away from a more sensitive site. It is recognised that a SANG will not be able to reproduce the unique features of Hatfield Forest. The SANGs approach aims to provide easily accessible semi-natural green space near to where people live that is attractive and provides a destination for a range of recreational activities. The outcome is intended that a proportion of visitors that would have visited a site (e.g. Hatfield Forest) use the SANG instead. Guidelines for the creation of SANGs have been provided by Natural England (most recently in 2021), provided in **Appendix A**. The SANGs approach has been informed by evidence gathered by Natural England in rural areas (such as SANGs associated with the Thames Basin Heaths SPA).

SANG capacity

Quantity

2.2 The need for accessible natural greenspace is set out in Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework which proposes a minimum standard of 3 hectares (ha) of accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 residents (3ha/1,000). The GI Framework goes on to state that a higher standard of 8ha/1,000 is typically used as a standard for SANG.

2.3 A recently published report by Natural England that collates evidence on approaches to SANG by different local authorities **[See reference** 12**]** illustrates that a degree of flexibility has been applied with regards to the quantity of SANG provided. For example, in some rural areas, a standard higher than 8ha/1,000 (up to 16ha/1,000 in some locations) may be used, whereas in urban

areas 8ha/1,000 may be used as the starting point but where this cannot be achieved, it is recognised that a suite of measures can divert a percentage of visits in the same way as 'traditional SANG' (described as a 'toolbox approach'). SANG networks have historically been created in other areas (e.g. associated with Thames Basin Heaths SPA area) which would comprise network of smaller open spaces that can form a continuous route or provide longer circular walks (e.g. than may be possible on an individual site).

2.4 Natural England have not currently proposed or agreed specific quantity standards with authorities that will need to provide SANGs for Hatfield Forest. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that a minimum of 8ha/1,000 will be required from new development. This figure has been used as a benchmark for the purposes of this study.

Discounting for existing use

2.5 As set out in the introduction, SANG may be created from:

- Existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public.
- Existing open space which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the SPA.
- Land in other uses which could be converted into SANG.
- The identification of SANG should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANG, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan.

2.6 Where SANGs are proposed at sites where there is existing public access this must be taken into account and 'discounted' from the SANG calculations; reducing the capacity of the proposed SANG and therefore requiring a greater quantity per 1,000 residents. Local authorities have agreed several different approaches to discounting existing site use from proposed SANGs. This may include a detailed assessment of existing annual visits to calculate residual capacity and area available (e.g. out of a 8 ha / 1,000 requirement). Where access only relates to existing public rights of way, the area of these can be excluded from quantity calculations (length of route times by an appropriate assumed width – e.g. 1.5 m). There are several instances on potential SANG sites where this may be required such as Harcamlow Way which passes near Warish Hall at Takeley.

2.7 Existing nature conservation interest also needs to be taken into account and work may need to be undertaken to ensure additional usage will have no adverse effect and the site can accommodate additional use. The potential SANG sites being considered as part of this study are not currently publicly accessible open space but are all agricultural land, although some have public rights of way crossing them. Boundaries of proposed SANGs will need be defined and confirmed as part of the final designs for each site and where needed any existing site use (e.g. through the discounting of areas of existing footpaths etc.) will need to be clearly set out within these proposals.

Location of SANG

2.8 In order to be effective, SANG should be delivered within the ZoI of the public open space that is experiencing high adverse impact from visitors, in Uttlesford's case, Hatfield Forest. Natural England provides guidance on access catchments to apply to SANG to understand which communities (residential areas) and new development will have easy access to proposed sites. Only development sites within the catchments of a specific SANG could be allocated to that SANG (i.e. be seen to 'service' that development as SANG provision). Developer contributions towards a SANG could only be provided by development within its catchment. This is primarily based on the size of the SANG, although where a SANG does not include a car park the catchments will

always be 400m. Natural England SANG catchments are shown in **Table 2.1** below. Guidance states that for all sites larger than 4 ha there must be adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of the site (and site subject to mitigation requirements).

2.9 All potential SANG sites considered as part of this study would be bespoke SANG (i.e. SANG intended to service a specific development). If all proposed dwellings are not within 400m of the associated SANG (measured as a direct line 'as the crow flies' distance), a car park will need to be provided.

Table 2.1: SANG catchments

SANG size	Catchment
Sites over 2ha without a car park (any size)	400m
2 to 12 ha	2km
12-20 ha	4km
20+ ha	5km

2.10 As set out in the recently published report by Natural England **[See reference** 13**]**, triggers for mitigation in terms of the number of dwellings on any given development site have varied from area to area. As an example, the requirements in the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework sets out that developments of less than 10 dwellings do not need to be within a specified distance of a SANG, but there needs to be enough SANG available within the local authority area overall.

Site quality requirements

2.11 Natural England 2021 (updated) SANG guidance sets out a site quality checklist for a SANG. This forms the basis of the site suitability assessment for each potential SANG location. Whilst the criteria were originally developed for mitigation of recreational pressure at the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, the guidance provides the most useful available guidance and reference point.

‘Must haves’

1. Parking on all sites larger than 4 ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only). Assume a minimum of 1 parking space per hectare.

2. Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km.

3. Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly signposted.

4. Access points appropriate for the particular use the SANG is intended to cater for.

5. Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and / or footpath.

6. Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.

7. Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of walking routes.

8. Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced.

9. Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion of artificial structures.

10. If larger than 12 ha then a range of habitats should be present.

11. Access unrestricted – plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead.

12. No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc.). NE look at a maximum decibel limit of 60, before requiring discounting of SANG area.

‘Should haves’

13. Clearly sign posted or advertised in some way.

14. SANG should have leaflets and / or websites / social media advertising their location to potential users.

‘Desirable’

15. It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead.

16. Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANG.

17. It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

18. It is desirable that SANG provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water is encouraged and desirable on sites. However large areas of open water cannot count towards capacity.

19. Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a view point, monument etc within the SANG.

2.12 As set out in Natural England guidance, weight is given to those SANGs which meet the quality criteria. If proposed SANGs do not meet established criteria, these will be assessed on a case by case basis and will need to be agreed with the competent authority and Natural England. Proposals will need to demonstrate equivalent effectiveness of mitigation being provided. Shortfalls in SANG criteria should be offset by other complementary means, such as an elevated provision rate, size or high quality features.

2.13 Where features are not relevant to the current condition and use of the proposed areas for SANG, baseline site information will be used to identify any specific constraints which may preclude criteria being met. Sites being considered will need to go through a detailed design process in the future and design work for proposed SANGs will need to reflect the criteria set out above. Further detail on Natural England guideline for the creation of SANGs are included within **Appendix A**.

Wider benefits

2.14 Recent research by Natural England into SANG provision notes the importance and value of exploring links between mitigation solutions and wider environmental benefits. Opportunities for maximising wider environmental / social benefits when delivering the proposed SANG sites have also been considered. This includes links between SANGs and wider access management, active travel, Nature Recovery, Biodiversity Net Gain and flood risk mitigation etc.

Estimating SANG quantity requirements for new development

2.15 In order to be effective, an appropriate quantity of SANG will need to be delivered in line with the level of development coming forward in the district (i.e

the number of dwellings and expected number of new residents / population uplift).

2.16 Only development within the ZoI will be required to provide or make a financial contribution towards the provision of SANG. A review has been undertaken of site allocations proposed within the Uttlesford Draft Local Plan, identifying those within the ZoI.

2.17 The quantity of required SANG is calculated based on the additional number of residents expected from new development. The number of residents expected from each allocated development site has been calculated by multiplying the number of expected dwellings by an average occupancy rate (2.4 people per dwelling for residential C3 use). SANG requirement for each site has been calculated as follows:

1. Identify the number of dwellings per site.

2. Estimate the population yield (no. of residents) per development site
   [no of dwellings x 2.4 (average occupancy)]

3. Estimate the SANG requirement
   [no of residents x 0.008 (8 ha / 1,000)]

2.18 Parsonage Green (considered alongside the Church End East site allocation for the purposes of this study) includes proposals for care facilities (falling within C2 development category). Natural England will need to agree a bespoke calculation for occupancy depending on the type of accommodation. To take a cautious approach and reduce the risk of underestimating the expected population yield, a 2-person occupancy rate per bedroom has been applied to care facilities.

2.19 Table 2.2 provides an assessment of SANG requirements over the new Local Plan period. **Figure 2.1** shows the location of site allocations and a summary of SANG requirements per allocation.

2.20 As shown in the table and figure below four key site allocations are considered as part of the 'future scenario' for development within the ZoI over the new Local Plan period. Based on available information at the time of writing the expected number of units to be delivered within the ZoI equates to 4,020. This includes the consented development at 'Land East of Highwood Quarry' (2,820 excluding the consented scheme). This equates to around 9,648 additional residents and a SANG requirement of around 77.2 ha overall (54.1 ha excluding the consented scheme).

Table 2.2: Estimated SANG quantity requirements over the new Local Plan period

Site allocation*	Expected dwellings	Estimated population	Estimated SANG requirements @ 8 ha / 1,000
Church End East / Great Dunmow**	884	2,122	17.0 ha
Takeley / Little Canfield	1,546	3,710	29.7 ha
Stansted Mountfitchet	390	936	7.5 ha
East of Highwood Quarry***	1,200	2,880	23.0 ha
Total (including consented scheme)	**4,020**	**9,648**	**77.2 ha**
Total (Excluding consented scheme)	**2,820**	**7,704**	**54.1 ha**

*Only those within Hatfield Forest Zone of Influence
**Including ‘Parsonage Green’ (which includes care home facilities)
***Consented scheme

2.21 It should be noted that the Takeley allocation includes a recently consented scheme of 40 units that falls within the Master Plan area of interest for the strategic allocation and hence is included in the calculations.

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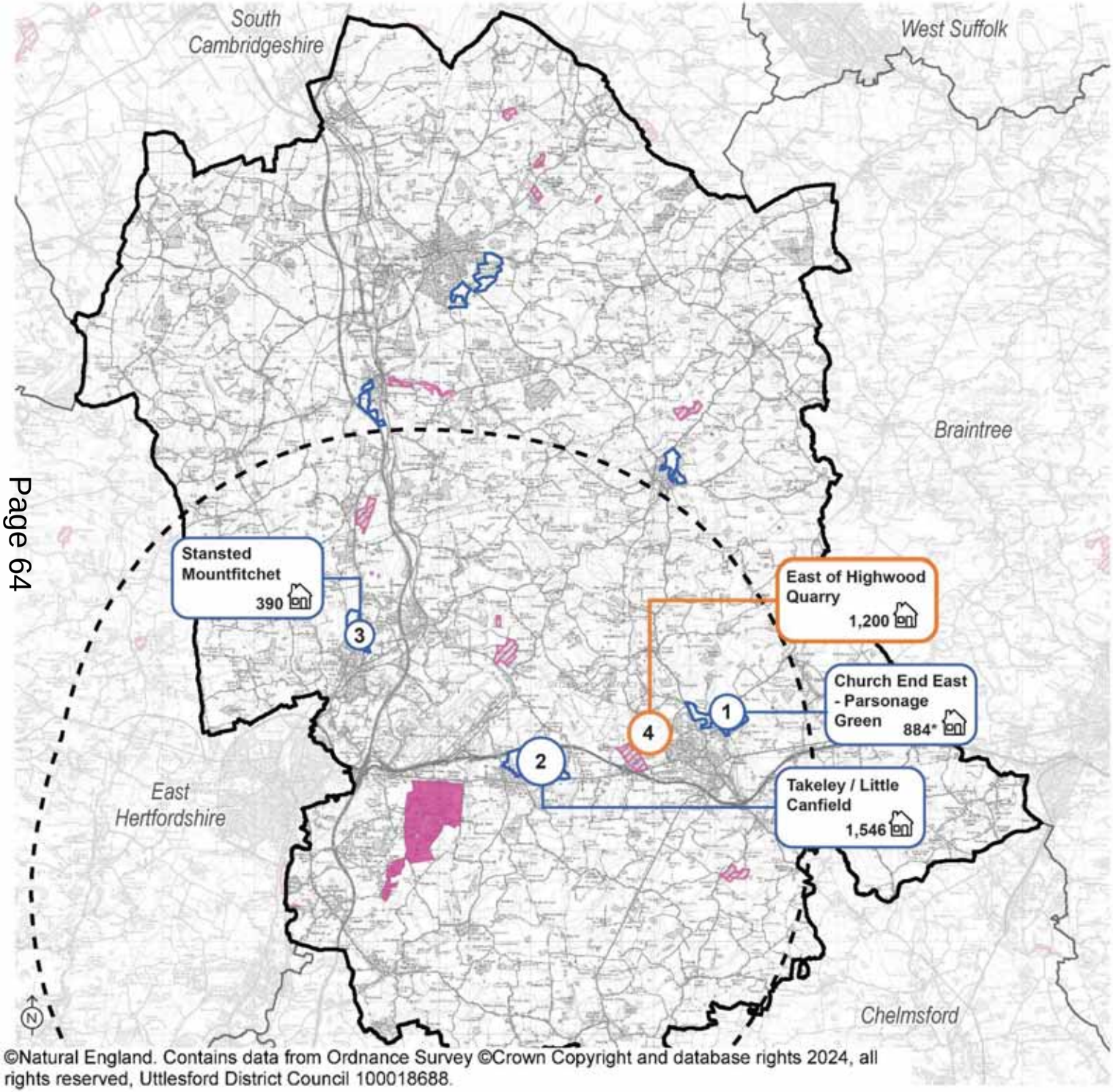
Figure 2.1: SANG quantity requirements



Legend

- Uttlesford District Boundary
- 11.1km Hatfield Forest Zone of Influence (ZoI)
- Hatfield Forest SSSI & NNR
- Other SSSI
- Site allocation

Local Plan development sites within ZoI

- Consented
- Reg 19 allocation

Local Plan development sites within the ZoI

Site	Expected dwellings	Estimated pop.**	SANG (ha) @8ha/1,000
1	884*	2,122	17.0 ha
2	1,546	3,710	29.7 ha
3	390	936	7.5 ha
4	1,200	2,880	23.0 ha
Grand total	4,020	9,648	77.2 ha

*884 dwellings (C3 residential) inc. 60 unit care home (C2 residential)

** For the purposes of this assessment a 2.4 person multiplier has been applied to each C3 residential dwelling. For the purposes of this assessment the C3 care home facility is estimated to have 120 residents.

The Takeley allocation includes a recently consented scheme of 40 units that falls within the Master Plan area of interest for the strategic allocation and hence is included in the calculations.

Chapter 3

Potential SANG sites: capacity assessment

3.1 The following section sets out a high level SANG capacity assessment of land associated with site allocations (in the ZoI) within the draft Local Plan. This provides a quantity assessment of SANG opportunity areas at each site allocation against the SANG quantity requirement that will likely be required from each site allocation; indicating the capacity for each site allocation to meet its own SANG needs. All sites are currently predominantly in agricultural use. Three out of the four sites assessed have public rights of way crossing the area. The scenario being considered currently assumes that SANGs would be closely located and linked to a specific site allocation (bespoke SANG).

3.2 One of the sites, East of Highwood Quarry, has outline consent and an assessment of the quantity of open space that has been proposed as part of the planning application (as set out within the Design and Access Statement) has been used to inform the capacity assessment. The final design will be expected to define a suitable area that meets SANG criteria in consultation with Natural England.

3.3 An assessment of each site is set out in the figures below. The assessment currently comprises a high-level capacity / quantity assessment. Further work will need to be done to assess site suitability with regards to the SANG quality criteria. An assessment of SANG quality can only be fully undertaken once designs for each site are submitted as part of the proposals for each site.

3.4 The quantity requirements set out below are based on the information available at the time of the assessment. Provision of SANG quantity will need to be assessed as more detailed design information becomes available. It is recommended the developers engage with Natural England via the

Discretionary Advice Service early in the design process to ensure that SANG requirements are met.

3.5 Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the findings by site. **Figure 3.1** to **Figure 3.4** provides a summary for each site and indicates the SANG opportunity areas being considered.

Table 3.1: Estimated SANG requirements compared to potential areas identified

Site allocation	Expected dwellings	Estimated population @ 2.4 residents per dwelling	Estimated SANG requirements @ 8 ha / 1,000	Estimate of total area of potential SANG	Difference (+ -)
Church End East / Great Dunmow	884	2,122	17.0 ha	34.6 ha	**+17.6 ha**
Takeley / Little Canfield**	1,546	3,710	29.7 ha	33.4 ha	**+3.7 ha**
Stansted Mountfitchet	390	936	7.5 ha	8.6 ha	**+1.1 ha**
East of Highwood Quarry	1,200	2,880	23.0 ha	23.0 ha*	**+0 ha**
Total	**4,020**	**9,648**	**77.2 ha**	**99.6 ha**	**+22.4 ha**
Total (excl. East of Highwood Quarry)	**2,820**	**7,704**	**54.1 ha**	**76.6 ha**	**+22.5 ha**

*The figure is currently unknown and not set out within the current proposals. Based on the information within the Design and Access Statement it is assumed for the purposes of this assessment that there is sufficient capacity within the red line boundary of the development site to meet SANG requirements.

**It should be noted that the Takeley allocation includes a recently consented scheme of 40 units that falls within the Master Plan area of interest for the strategic allocation and hence is included in the calculations.

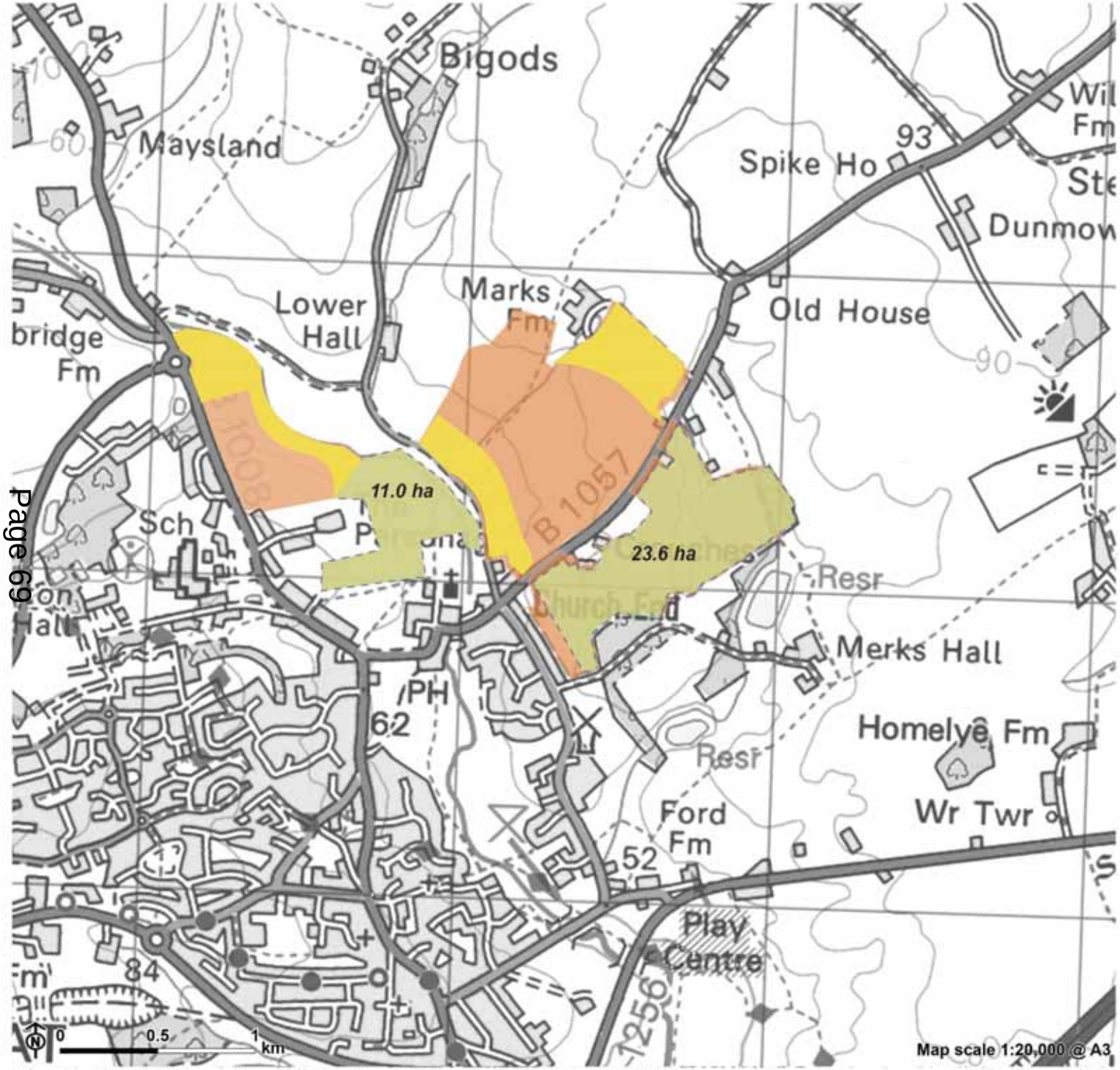


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Figure 3.1: Church End East - Great Dunmow: SANG capacity

Legend

- Site allocation
- Potential SANG site
- Other potential open space

Estimated SANG requirements

Expected dwellings	Estimated pop.	SANG (ha) @8ha/1,000
884	2,122	17.0 ha

Estimated SANG capacity

SANG requirement	Potential SANG site	Difference (+ -)
17.0 ha	34.6 ha	+17.6 ha

12772_001_Reg18/Fig X: Reg 18 Housing Allocation 28/03/2024EB:Horton_K

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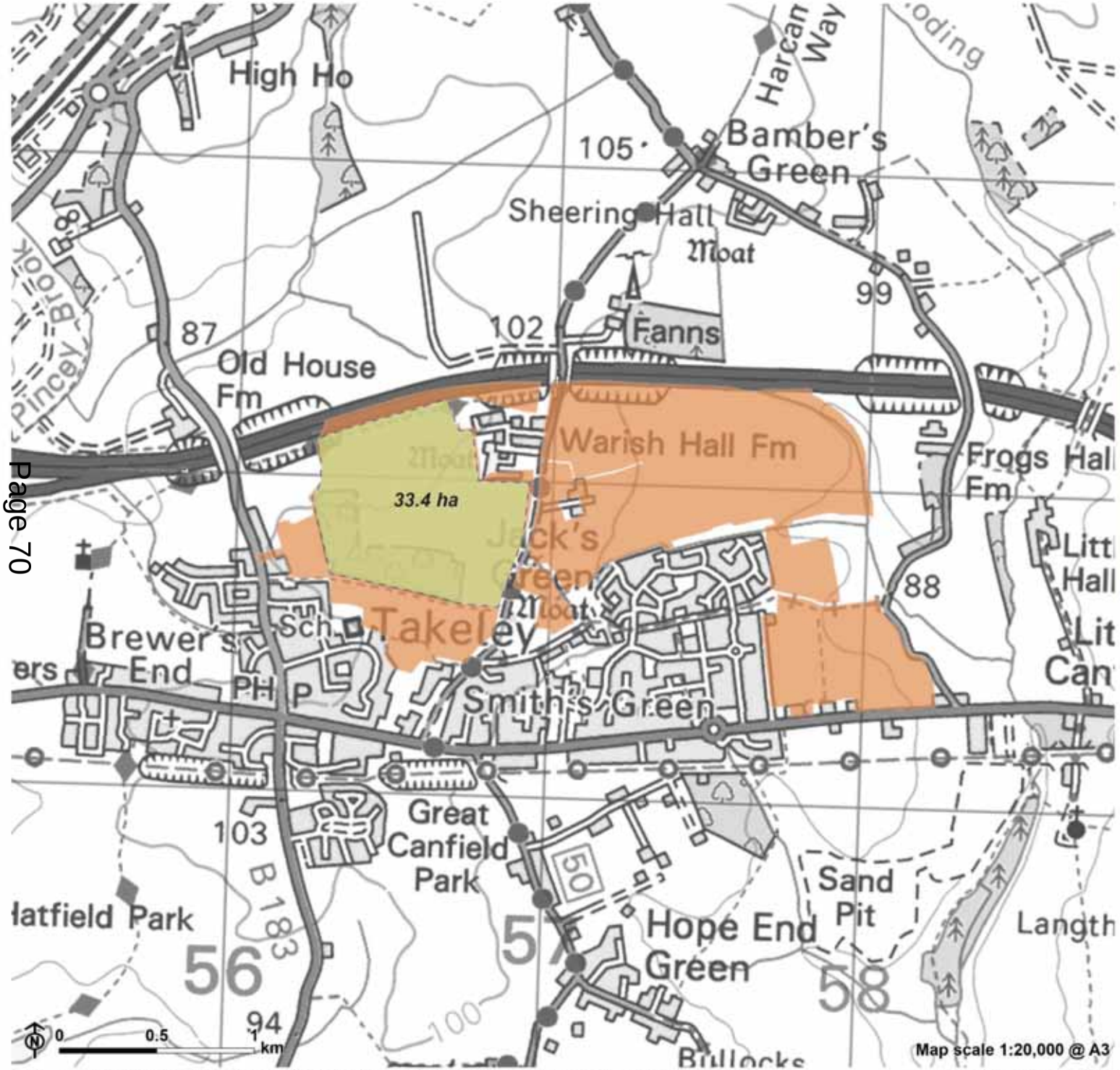
Figure 3.2: Takeley / Little Canfield: SANG capacity assessment



Legend

- Site allocation
- Potential SANG site

Estimated SANG requirements

Expected dwellings	Estimated pop.	SANG (ha) @8ha/1,000
1,546	3,710	29.7 ha

Estimated SANG capacity

SANG requirement	Potential SANG site	Difference (+ -)
29.7 ha	33.4 ha	+3.7 ha

The Takeley allocation includes a recently consented scheme of 40 units that falls within the Master Plan area of interest for the strategic allocation and hence is included in the calculations.

12772_001_Reg18/Fig X: Reg 18 Housing Allocation 28/03/2024EB:Horton_K

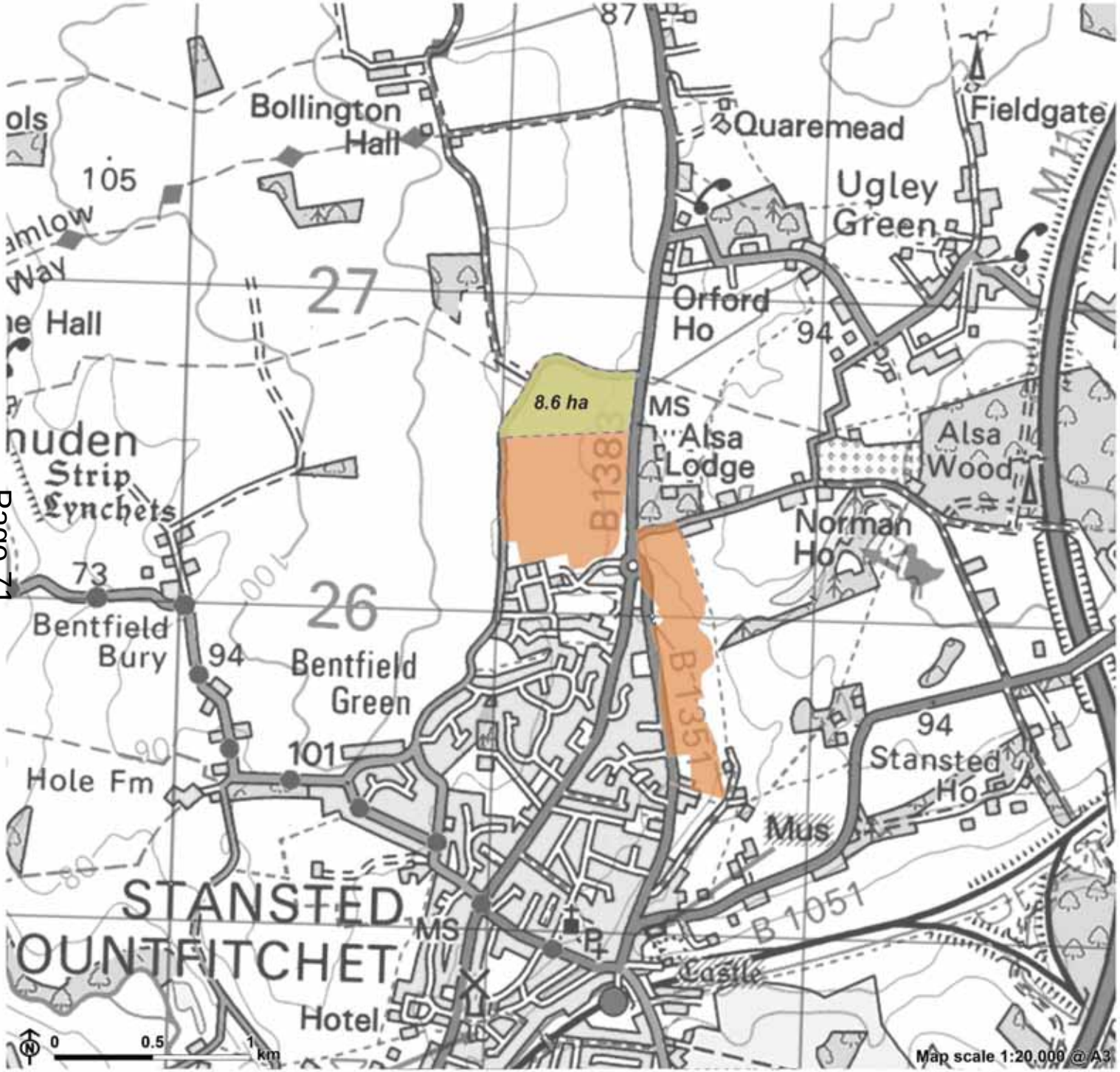


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Figure 3.3: Stansted Mountfitchet: SANG capacity assessment

Legend

- Site allocation
- Potential SANG site

Estimated SANG requirements

Expected dwellings	Estimated pop.	SANG (ha) @8ha/1,000
390	936	7.5 ha

Estimated SANG capacity

SANG requiremen	Potential SANG site	Difference (+ -)
7.5 ha	8.6 ha	+1.1 ha

Map scale 1:20,000 @ A3

12772_001_Reg18/Fig X: Reg 18 Housing Allocation 28/03/2024EB:Horton_K

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Figure 3.4: East of Highwood Quarry: SANG capacity assessment

Estimated SANG requirements

Expected dwellings	Estimated pop.	SANG (ha) @8ha/1,000
1,200	2,880	23.0 ha

Estimated SANG capacity

SANG requirement	Min. likely SANG capacity	Difference (+ -)
23.0 ha	23.0 ha	+0.0ha

Notes

The open space available for SANG provision is not currently set out within proposals. The DAS provides a figure of around 86 ha of open space within the red line boundary.

Specific SANG areas will need to be defined on future plans to demonstrate how proposed areas will meet SANG quality requirements. The open space quantity provided in the DAS may encompass some incidental open space, sports provision, school grounds, other public realm, green corridors in residential areas and amenity areas.

For the purposes of this assessment (and based on the information available in the DAS), it is expected that there is sufficient capacity within the red line boundary to meet SANG requirements.

Chapter 4

Church End East and Parsonage Green – baseline & SANG quality assessment

4.1 The following section provides a dossier for Church End East to assess the suitability of areas to deliver SANG provision. This section provides:

- A baseline review under several subject areas to identify constraints and opportunities.
- An opportunity plan. This is conceptual and sets out the key principles / interventions that will likely need to be implemented to meet SANG requirements on site (further detailed design will be required).
- A SANG quality checklist to set out the extent to which the site could meet SANG requirements in the future (following enhancement).

Context and summary

4.2 The proposed development at the site allocation East of Church End incorporates areas of agricultural land to the north-east of Great Dunmow. This comprises an area to the north of the B1057, and a separate but adjoining site, Parsonage Green, to the east of the B1008. These areas are considered as two separate but adjoining site allocations in the new Local Plan. Two areas are being considered as potential SANG; one to the south of B1057 and one directly north of St Mary's Church. Whilst these areas are separate they could be connected by active travel routes passing through connecting opening spaces. The baseline review considers both SANG opportunity areas together. A separate SANG quality checklist has been undertaken for the SANG opportunity area at Parsonage Green.

Environmental considerations

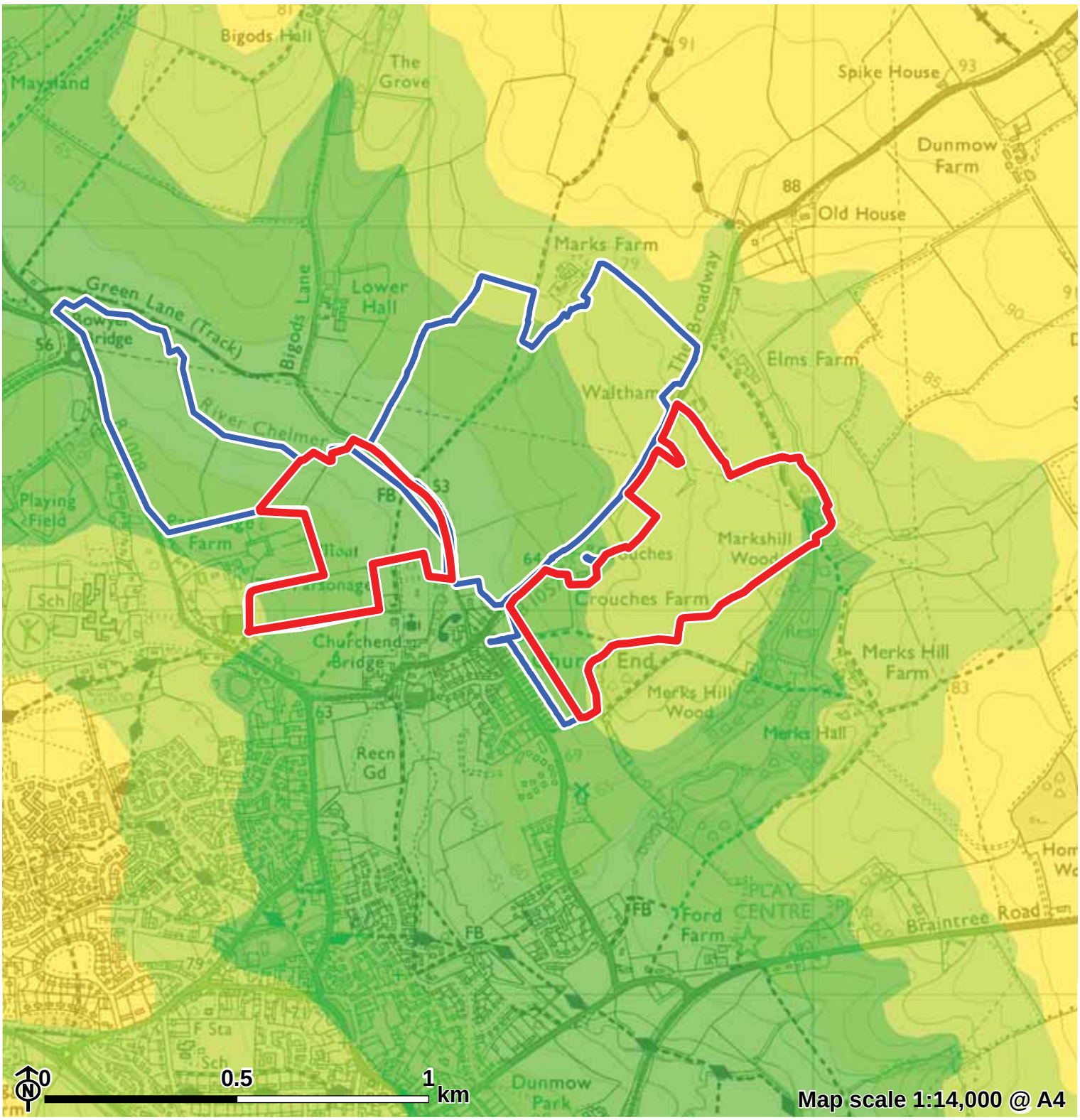
Landscape

4.3 Uttlesford's 2023 Landscape Character Assessment (2023) identifies several different landscape character types which are subdivided into landscape character areas (LCAs). LCA's are discrete geographic areas that fall within a landscape character type but have recognisable local identity and character. The provision of SANGs, through the creation of new habitat areas, provides the opportunity to enhance and re-enforce local landscape character. The design of SANGs should be informed by the Landscape Guidelines set out in Uttlesford's Landscape Character Assessment. The proposed SANG site is within LCA A4: Upper Chelmer River Valley. This LCA comprises arable farmland within the narrow valley of the River Chelmer. The landscape is characterised by gently undulating landform, broken up by small woodland blocks on the valleys sides and riverside trees on the valley floor. The proposed SANG site is characteristic of the higher valley sides in the east (at just over 80m AOD) and the valley bottom in the west (at around 50m AOD) (see **Figure 4.1**). Large-scale, grade 3 (good-moderate) arable farmland, bounded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees, dominate the site (see **Figure 4.2**).

4.4 The Great Dunmow conservation appraisal highlights the importance of views from the junction of Beaumont Hill and the Causeway towards the open countryside to Church End and beyond. Significant woodland establishment within SANG may alter the background of this view, but this would be less significant than any changes west of Church End. In addition, views towards the tower at St Mary's Church should be retained as far as possible.

4.5 The Uttlesford LCA notes that Stansted airport, along with the M11 and the A120, have the greatest modern influence on landscape character. Whilst flight paths may be a detracting feature, they will affect Hatfield Forest to a similar extent. Familiarity and the ubiquity of views of flights to and from the airport means this should not impact the use of the site as a SANG.

Figure 4.1: Topography - Church End East and Parsonage Green



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Height above sea level (m)

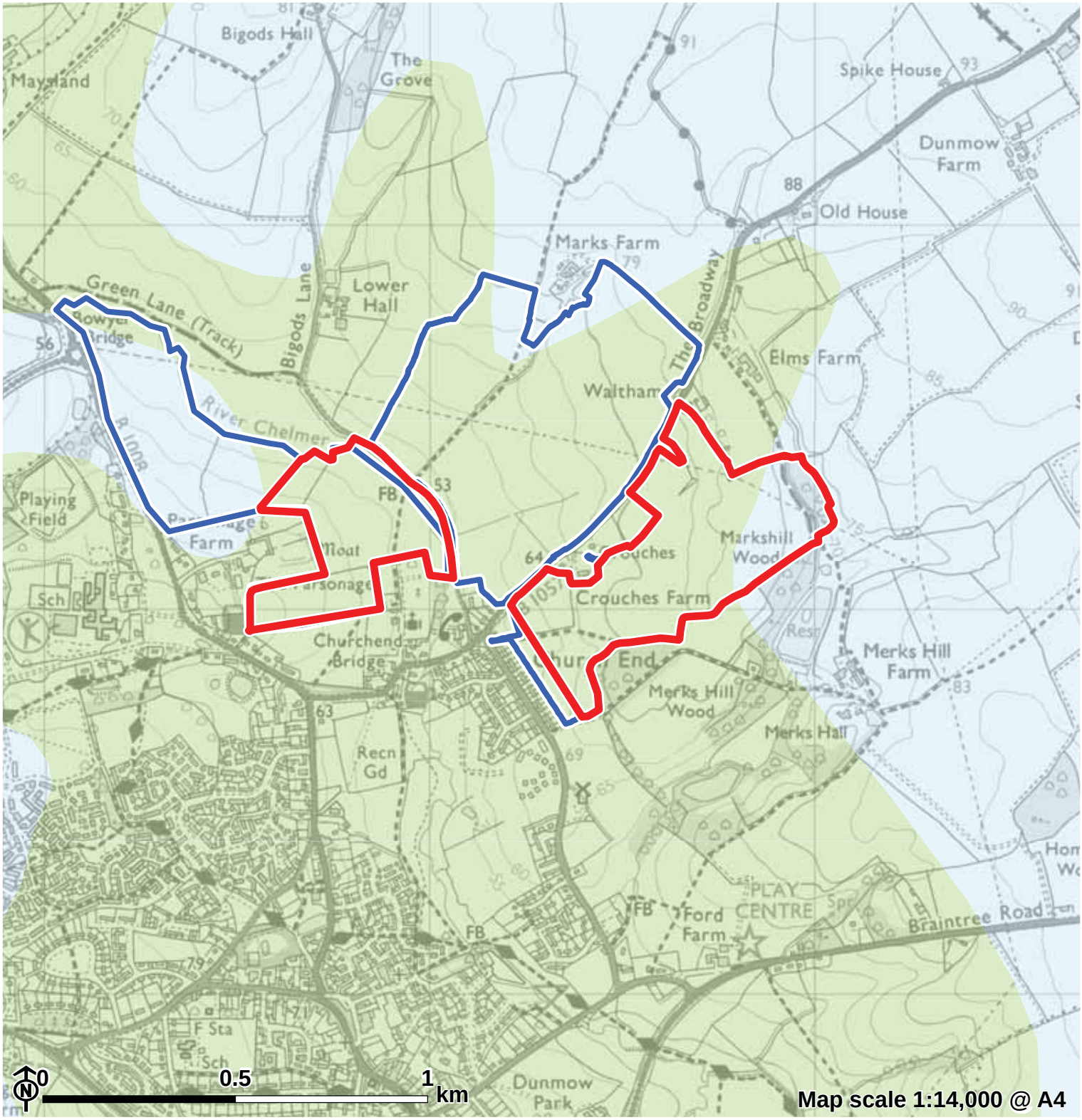
48 - 60

61 - 72

73 - 83

84 - 95

Figure 4.2: Agricultural Land Classifications - Church End East and Parsonage Green



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 2

Grade 3

Biodiversity

4.6 The proposed SANG site is predominantly arable, presenting limited initial biodiversity value. It primarily supports farmland birds, particularly in its western section, which is part of an area recognized as important for Arable Assemblage Farmland birds **[See reference** 14**]** and may require targeted conservation efforts. The existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees along field boundaries provide crucial connectivity across the agricultural landscape, facilitating movement and habitat linkages for various species. Hedgerows also provide carbon sequestration and their enhancement and replacement where possible should be a priority.

4.7 The site is strategically located within a network of Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), including Hoflands Wood, Frederick's Spring, Parsonage Downs, and Merks Hall. This positioning enhances its potential as a stepping stone for wildlife moving through the agricultural matrix. Targeted habitat creation on the site could significantly strengthen this network, promoting species movement and genetic flow. Notably, High Wood, lying within a 3 km buffer, is part of this network.

4.8 A block of deciduous woodland exists along the eastern edge of the proposed SANG, with additional woodland along the southern boundary, forming part of a larger woodland habitat to the south. These woodland blocks are identified with the Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) as Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat, adding significant biodiversity value and offering potential for habitat enhancement and connectivity.

4.9 Adjacent to the south-east boundary, parkland, woodland, and pond habitats at Merks Hall provide additional biodiversity interest. This includes ancient woodland, PHI deciduous woodland, and priority habitats for wood pasture and parkland. A portion of Merks Hall is designated as an LoWS.

4.10 The southern portion of the site falls within Natural England's Habitat Networks Network Enhancement Zone 2 (priority areas for habitat creation, land

management enhancement & Green Infrastructure to strengthen the network of existing habitats) **[See reference** 15**]**. The northwestern corner of the site is just outside of Network Enhancement Zone 2, which links the site to regional biodiversity networks. This area also includes Amber Zones for Great Crested Newts, highlighting the need to prioritise habitat creation and enhancement to meet conservation needs. These zones are critical for improving habitat quality and connectivity for various species, including amphibians.

4.11 The River Chelmer offers significant opportunities for riparian habitat enhancement. The Working with Natural Process (WWNP) Riparian Woodland dataset (which provides evidence and spatially prioritises locations for natural flood management interventions) **[See reference** 16**]**, identifies the area is suitable for woodland creation on woodland near flow pathways, which can help attenuate flooding and enhance freshwater habitats. Deciduous woodlands around the River Chelmer, identified as PHI, further increase the site's ecological integration.

4.12 Recreational use along the River Chelmer could lead to pollution from litter, dog waste, and runoff, degrading water quality and impacting riparian and aquatic ecosystems. This public right of way is currently well used and future access management will need to ensure additional use does result in environmental damage. Development must consider potential flooding impacts along the River Chelmer and integrate flood attenuation measures.

4.13 Parts of the site are within a B-Line that transverses Essex from east to west. This strategic inclusion in a pollinator corridor supports initiatives for targeted planting of nectar-rich plants, enhancing habitat suitability for pollinators, which are essential for ecosystem health and agricultural productivity.

4.14 Stansted airport is subject to Aerodrome Safeguarding, which is legal requirement under ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) and the UK CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) **[See reference** 17**]**. Aerodrome operators are statutory consultees to ensure that safe operation is not impacted by external development. A 13km wildlife buffer is in place for Stansted Airport, in which the

aerodrome will need to be consulted on any developments that have the potential to attract wildlife. Bird strikes are one of the aerodromes top risks and they are required under ICAO & CAA regulations to 'reduce the attractiveness of the area to birds/wildlife on and in the vicinity of the airport'. Biodiversity enhancements can still be undertaken if designed correctly. Aerodromes have a robust wildlife hazard management regime with regular patrols by dedicated personnel on the airfield and some will also undertake regular monitoring out to a radius of 13km from the airport. A range of different types of developments have the potential to increase bird strike, which includes but is not limited to:

- Areas of water; reservoirs, lakes, ponds, wetlands, SuDS.
- Nature reserves or bird sanctuaries.
- Large landscaping schemes with a high percentage of berry /fruiting species that could attract flocking birds in large numbers.
- Large areas of ground re-profiling that could attract birds in large numbers.

4.15 The Airport Authority will need to be consulted on the development of SANGs within Uttlesford to ensure the design and layout of the site is appropriate and mitigates any associated risk.

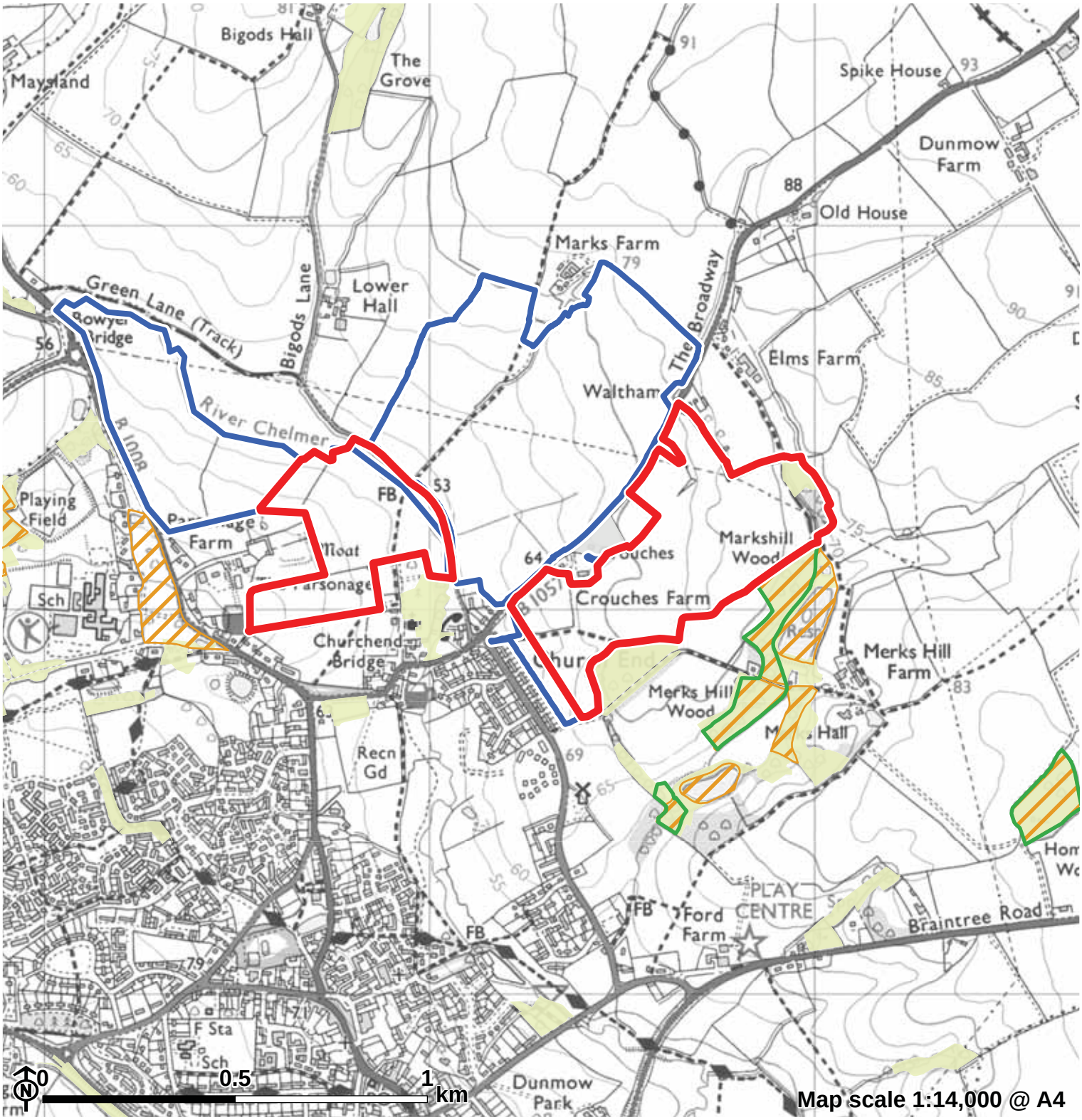
4.16 Key opportunities for biodiversity enhancement:

- Connect and buffer ancient woodland and deciduous woodland, a key priority for nature recovery in Uttlesford.
- Enhancement, replacement and gapping up of hedgerows is a key opportunity for biodiversity through habitat creation, carbon sequestration and broader habitat connectivity.
- Retain Ancient and Veteran Tree irreplaceable habitats.
- Wildflower meadows to provide connectivity and stepping stone habitat within the national B-Line network.
- Enhance riparian habitat along the River Chelmer and connect deciduous woodland upstream and downstream of the site.

- Ponds and wetlands to support amphibians, particularly Great Crested Newts, and other aquatic species.
- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to enhance floodplain woodlands and improve water management and biodiversity.

4.17 Figure 4.3 and **Figure 4.4** show key habitats and ecological opportunity areas.

Figure 4.3: Ecology and habitats - Church End East and Parsonage Green



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Non-statutory

Local wildlife site

Other

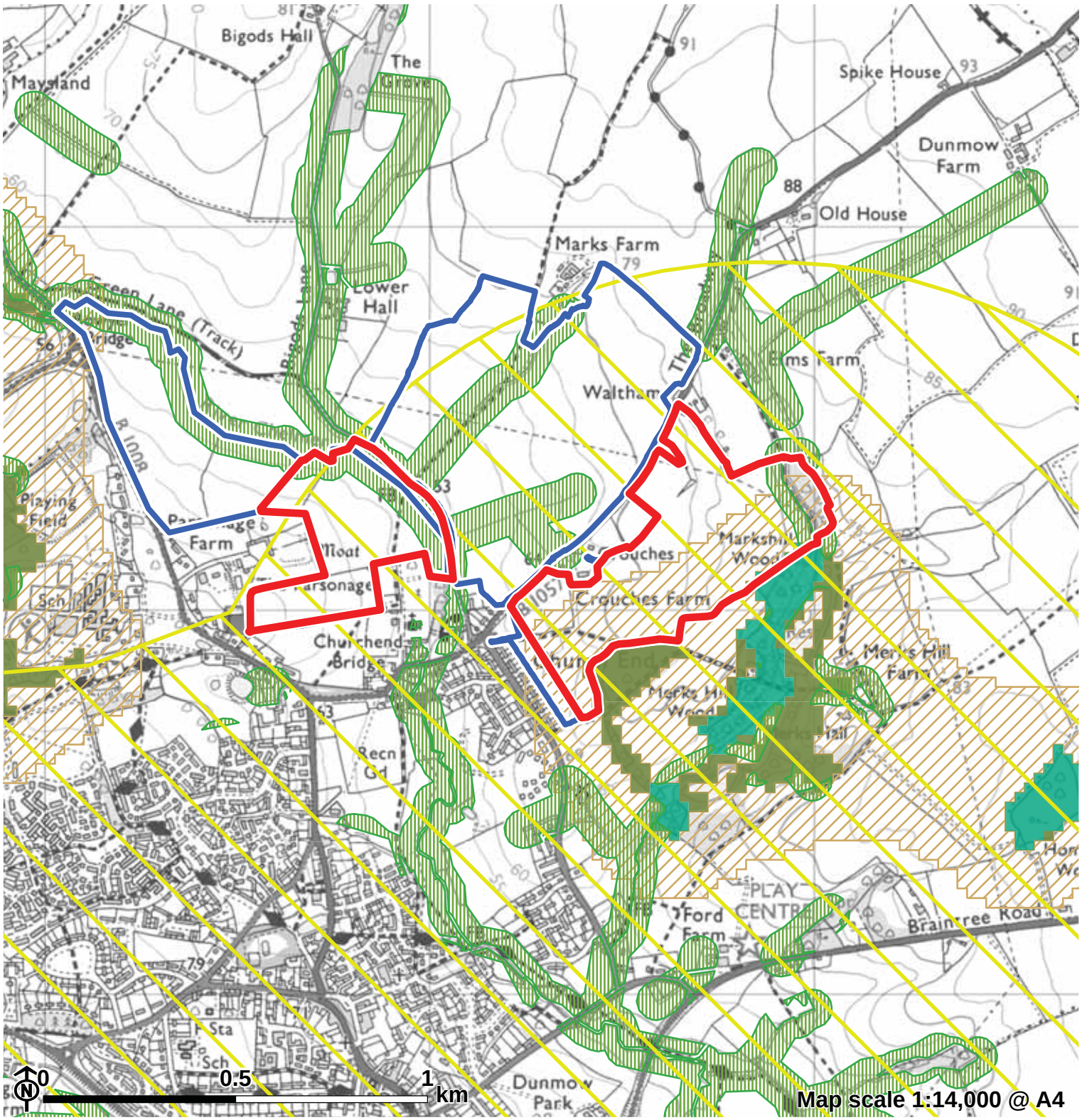
Ancient Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory

Deciduous woodland

No main habitat but additional habitats present

Figure 4.4: Ecological opportunities - Church End East and Parsonage Green



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- B-line*
- Riparian Woodland Potential

Habitat Network

- Ancient woodland
- Other priority habitat
- Network Enhancement Zone 2

*B-lines are networks of insect pathways which connect the wildflower-rich habitats of the UK.

Heritage

4.18 The proposed SANG site lies immediately east of Church End, a small village northeast of Great Dunmow. The northern part of the village forms the Church End conservation area. Church End was the original Saxon centre of the settlement but focus shifted south to the present day High Street in Great Dunmow. The church forms the central point of the conservation area and is a landmark feature within the landscape.

4.19 There are a number of Listed Buildings just out with the proposed SANG site. This includes the Crouches and Diamond Cottage, along the B1057, and Parsonage Barn to the west.

4.20 The design of landscaping, access routes, tree planting other vegetation should consider key views to ensure they are retained and to enhance the setting of key heritage assets.

In the southwest, much of the proposed SANG area is within a local Archaeological Site. There are additional Archaeological Sites close to the proposed SANG area, most notably immediately northeast of the proposed SANG near Elms Farm. Publicly available records are not available for this designation. This part of the site may need to be avoided by physical development or any notable ground breaking needed in association with formation of a new open space. It should be noted that planning consent for the site allocation will be conditioned with a requirement for archaeological surveys, including areas of proposed open space.

4.21 Figure 4.5 provides an overview of historic environment and heritage features.

Figure 4.5: Historic environment / heritage - Church End East and Parsonage Green

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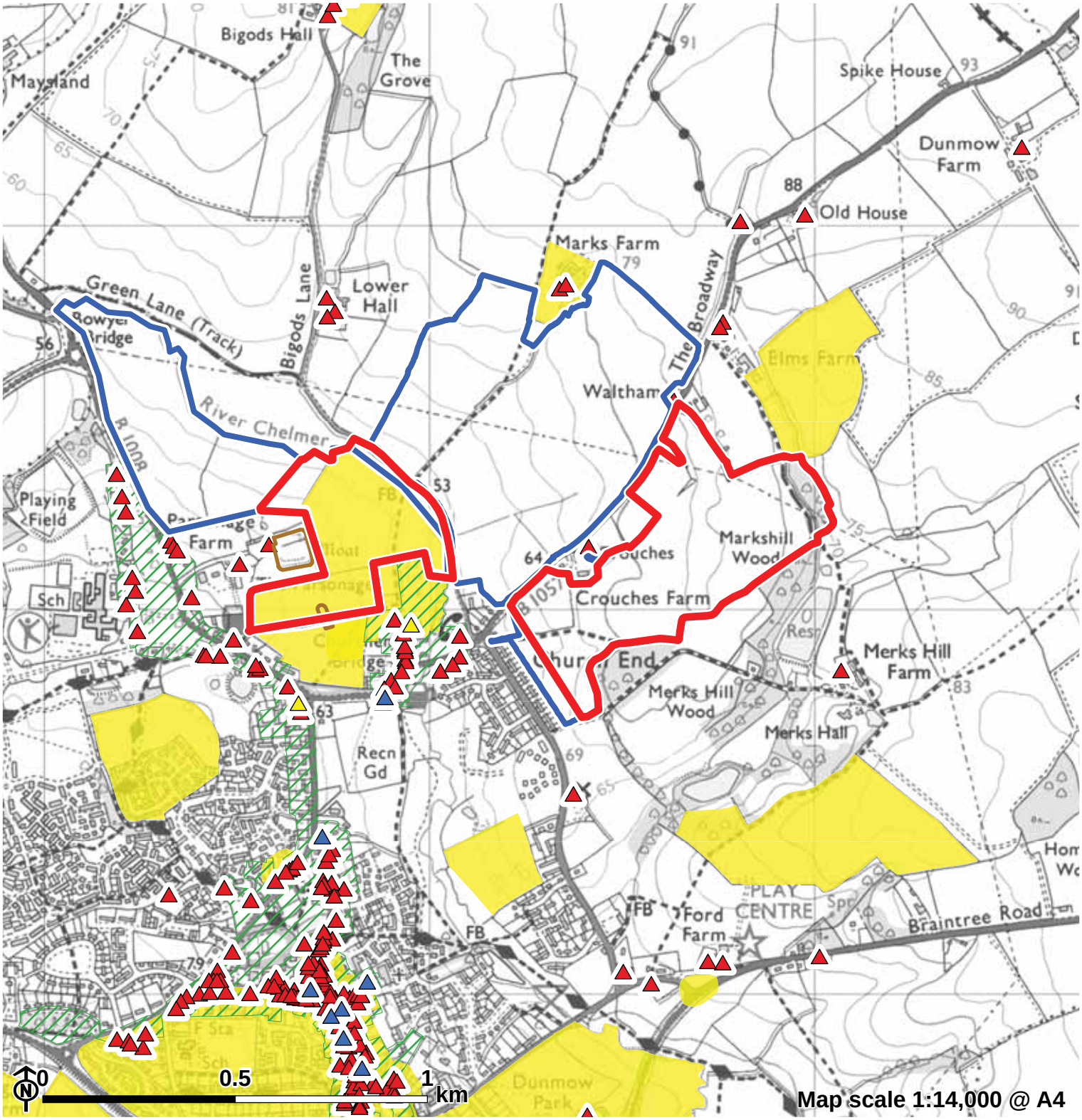


SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Statutory

Scheduled monument

Listed building (grade)

I

II*

II

Non-statutory

Archeaological Site

Conservation Area

Hydrology

4.22 The River Chelmer is located in the west of the proposed SANG area. This forms the northern boundary of the proposed western area, then meanders south, bisecting the proposed area just west of Bigods Lane. The River Chelmer is part of the Combined Essex Catchment. River enhancements as part of the delivery of a SANG should refer to the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) through the relevant catchment partnership; Essex Rivers Hub **[See reference** 18**]**.

4.23 The River Chelmer is classified as having Moderate ecological status within the Water Framework Directive (WFD), indicating that action is needed to achieve acceptable ecological condition **[See reference** 19**]**. The WFD assessment notes poor status for macrophytes, dissolved oxygen and phosphates. In addition, the last chemical assessment, in 2019, showed the River Chelmer as failing for a number of substances. Downstream of the proposed SANG area, the sewer storm overflow at Great Dunmow Sewage Treatment Works spilled 42 times, for a total of 392.42 hours over 2023, discharging into the River Chelmer.

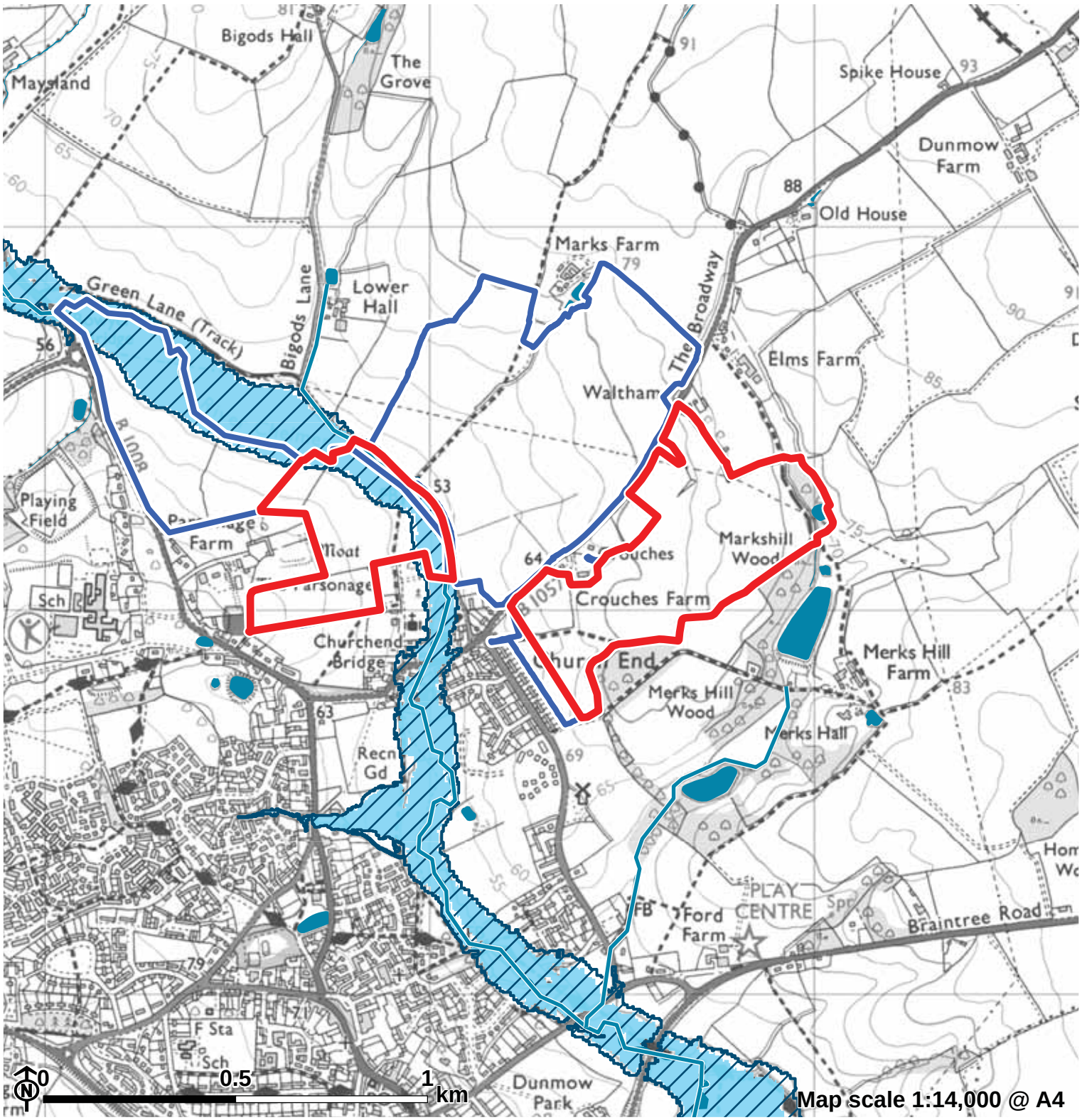
4.24 The Chelmer catchment has been identified as having high suitability for use of Natural Flood Management. Flood Zone 2 and 3 areas associated with this watercourse cover some sections of the proposed SANG in the east (Parsonage Green area). Some of these areas may be unusable during the winter months, reducing the viability of the SANG site as a suitable alternative space. The consideration of using raised boardwalk paths in these places could be explored to ensure good access at all times. Other access management measures and infrastructure may also need to be in place along the river to reduce the risk of erosion / degradation of river edge habitat.

4.25 Wetland habitat and other natural flood management / sustainable drainage interventions designed within the SANG could reduce the flood risk associated with the river Chelmer. In addition, wetland habitats, including reedbeds, can help filter water, improve water quality and increase carbon sequestration capacity. A change of land use from arable to habitat areas will

also likely be beneficial and could contribute to the sites Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.

4.26 Figure 4.6 shows the blue network and flood risk.

Figure 4.6: Blue network and flood risk - Church End East and Parsonage Green



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- Flood zone 2
- Flood zone 3
- Water body
- River

Access and connectivity

4.27 The proposed SANG site and its surrounds are accessed through existing public rights of way, which connect Church End and the eastern edge of Great Dunmow to the wider countryside. This includes rights of way along the southern and south-eastern edges of the western area of potential SANG, and north of Dunmow Cemetery. In the southeastern area, rights of way run along much of the perimeter, as well as through the southwestern corner, towards Merks Hill. This provides wider connectivity to Stebbing Park and Stebbing Brook in the east. There is the opportunity to link a proposed SANG into the surrounding PRoW network through Merks Hill and associated woodland and Great Dunmow Recreation Ground, creating a larger network of recreational greenspace.

4.28 Rights of way include sections of bridleway and further work will need to be undertaken to understand the level of use for horse riding. Design of a SANG in this location may need to provide separation between bridleways and dog walking areas to reduce risk of user conflict.

4.29 Other than the local public right of way network, there is limited connectivity through the National Cycle Network (NCN) or promoted long distance routes. The Flitch Way (NCN16) is approximately 1.3km to the south.

4.30 The proposed SANG site adjoins the B1008 in the west and B1057 in the east, providing potential opportunities for vehicular access to the proposed SANG. In addition, well signposted pedestrian and cycle access would be important to provide sustainable, healthy travel options. This may include links through Great Dunmow Recreation Ground, creating a green link to the SANG from Great Dunmow. Road safety at the B1057 will need to be considered and measures taken to ensure safe pedestrian access to the SANG area from the proposed dwellings to the north.

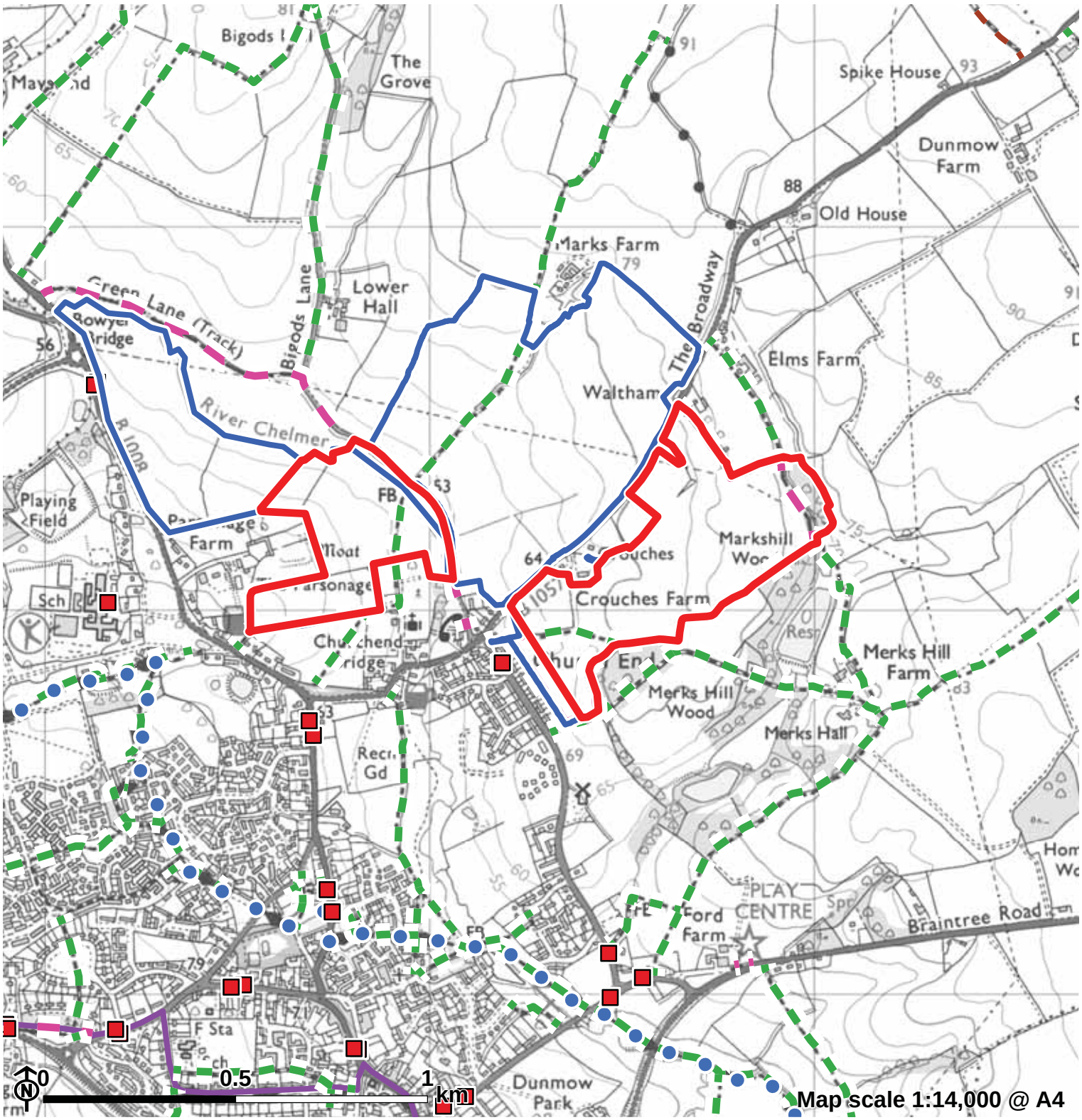
4.31 The nearest bus stop to the proposed SANG site is The Broadway, along St Edmunds Lane, providing services to Stebbing, and towards Great Dunmow,

Takeley and Bishops Stortford four times a day. It should be noted that development of this strategic allocation site requires enhancement to local bus services.

4.32 There is an overall lack of neighbourhood and local scale greenspaces within close proximity of existing settlements, although the Flitch Way to south and some natural and semi-natural green space within Great Dunmow Recreation Ground provides easy access to natural greenspace for some residents within Great Dunmow.

4.33 Figure 4.7 provides an overview of existing access.

Figure 4.7: Access and connectivity: Active travel and public transport - Church End East and Parsonage Green



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- National Cycle Network
- Bus stop

Public Right of Way

- Bridleway
- Byway
- Footpath

Long distance walking route

- Saffron Trail

Infrastructure and adjacent land use

4.34 Several low-voltage, overhead lines cross the proposed SANG site in both the western and south-eastern blocks. These may pose constraints to a potential direct access point from the B1008, particularly at the roundabout, and from the B1057. There may be additional implications for infrastructure and habitat creation which would need to be considered. The visual impact of these for the purposes of SANG use will likely be low and could be partially mitigated through careful siting and design of tree planting.

4.35 No oil or gas pipelines as mapped in the Uttlesford District Council external constrains map impact the proposed SANG site. However, the location of any other underground services would need to be considered when planning the location of vehicles access points, car parking, visitor facilities, tree planting or groundworks.

Summary of SANG opportunities

4.36 Figure 4.8 provides an indicative overview of SANG opportunities. The following interventions (or similar) will likely be required to meet SANG quality requirements. **Table 4.1** and **Table 4.2** provide an assessment of the SANG opportunities against Natural England SANG quality criteria. It is recommended that the developers engage with Natural England through the Discretionary Advice Service early in the design process to ensure that SANG proposals meet quality requirements.

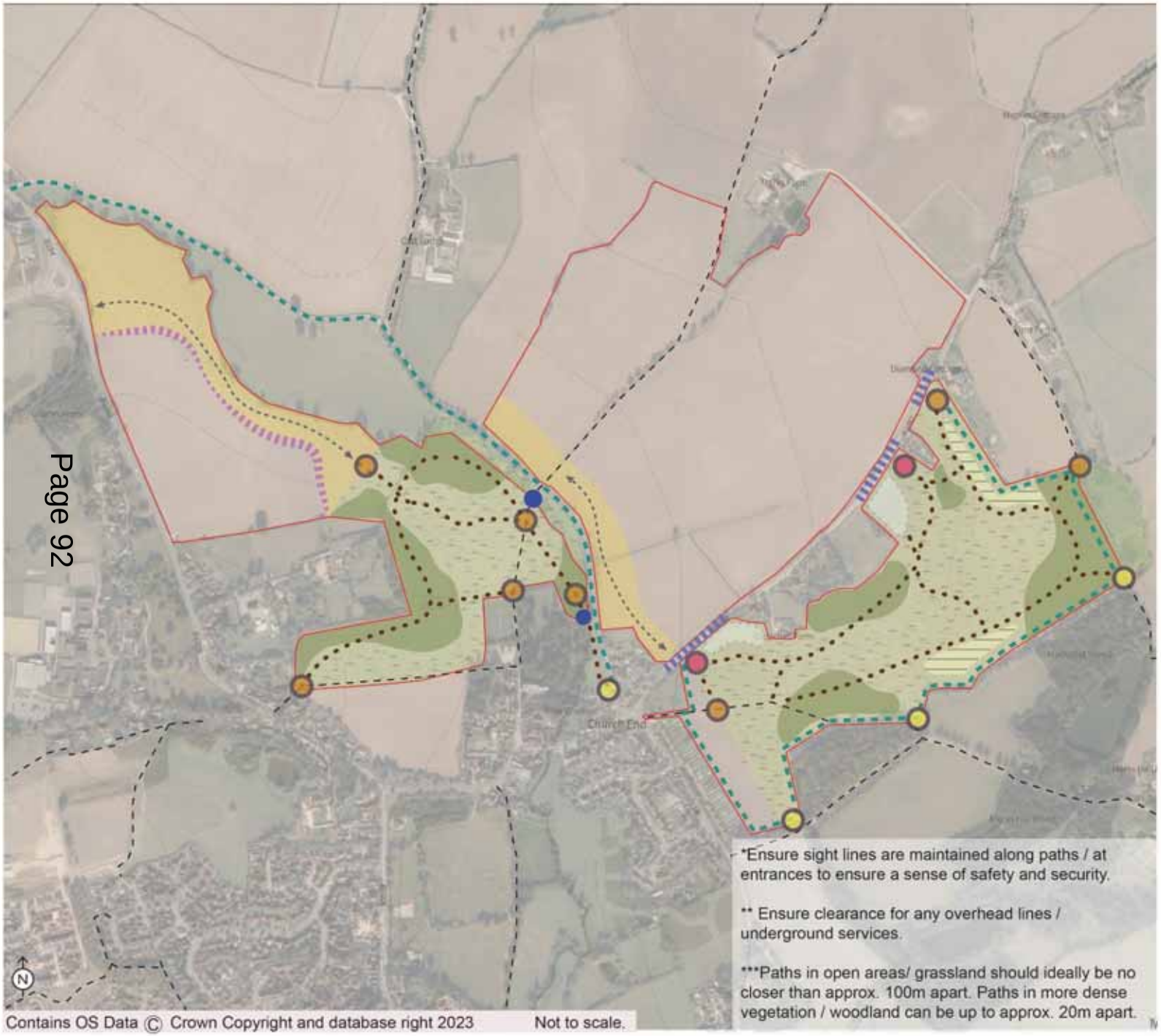


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Figure 4.8: Church End East: Indicative SANG Opportunities

Site Allocation Boundary

Indicative SANG areas

Potential SANG area. To include a range of habitats: rough grassland, trees, ponds where appropriate.*

Potential SANG extension (link / connection). Other natural green space that may not meet SANG criteria but can connect SANG areas and enhance SANG functionality.

Extend and strengthen existing woodland / tree cover or strengthen field boundaries.**

Buffer (planting / fencing) between new routes and existing bridleways to allow dogs off lead and reduce risk of conflict

Access

Public Right of Way (Footpath)

Public Right of Way (Bridleway)

Potential primary entrance / arrival opportunity / signage

Potential secondary / informal access

Potential vehicle / car park access

Potential new path network***

Potential car park

Road safety measures / crossing point

Potential connecting route

Improved river crossing

Other

Appropriate interface to limit influence of built development

Table 4.1: Church End East SANG quality criteria checklist - 'Must Haves'

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(1) Parking on sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m)	Currently no parking provision on site but no significant constraints on the provision of car parking. The site is larger than 4ha, and the full extent of the development area is not within 400m of the site so car parking would be required. Two potential locations for car parking have been identified with vehicle access from the B1057.	✓
(2) Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	Likely capacity for 2.3 km to 2.5 km circular route around the site. Alignment of routes will need to ensure around 100m separation between routes in open areas and 20m between routes within tree or scrub cover.	✓
(3) Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted.	No significant constraints on car parking provision. Car access to SANG areas will need to be considered as part of transport assessments undertaken as part of the associated development.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(4) Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for	New access points need to be created as part of the SANG. Primary access points to be located at the north adjacent to the new development to ensure easy access to new residents. Other informal access points could connect with existing PRoWs surrounding the site and the existing settlement.	✓
(5) Safe access route on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified. Design should ensure routes lead from parking area. Final design to ensure that road safety is considered at key pedestrian crossing points to ensure safe links to new development.	✓
(6) Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	No constraints to the provision of car parking identified within the site. Design should ensure routes lead from the parking area/s.	✓
(7) Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of the walking routes	Final design to ensure walking routes contain some open areas. All sections of routes within proposed or existing wooded or scrub areas to be planned and maintained to ensure sight lines into and along routes.	✓
(8) Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	Final design to ensure appropriate path network is provided. Some surfaced areas may be required, especially at entrance points, using appropriate natural materials (self-binding gravel or similar).	✓
(9) Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion from artificial structures	No significant intrusion from artificial structures. Additional planting along the B1057 should be considered to act as a noise and visual buffer, while preserving views to St Mary's Church. Buffer planting could also be	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
	considered between the site and existing development to the south west along St Edmunds Lane. Additional tree planting to take account of any overhead lines.	
(10) All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience	No significant constraints identified to provide a variety of new habitats on existing agricultural land. Suitable habitat creation opportunities include wildflower meadows, ponds and wetlands. There is also potential to enhance existing deciduous woodland.	✓
(11) Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	Capacity for the site to have unrestricted access in the long term. Further work will need to be undertaken to determine the level of use of the existing bridleway. Buffer planting or fencing may be required to reduce risk of conflict between dog walkers and horse riders to allow dogs off-lead.	✓
(12) SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells).	No nearby features likely to cause unpleasant intrusions.	✓

Table 4.2: Parsonage Green SANG quality criteria checklist - 'Must Haves'

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(1) Parking on sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m)	Currently no parking provision on site. The Parsonage Green SANG would be intended to service the development directly adjacent and would likely be within 400m of all associated dwellings. The site could form part of a network with the Church End East SANG area with suitable connecting routes for pedestrians. A potential car park location at the Church End East site is within 200m of a proposed pedestrian access point to the south.	✓
(2) Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	Capacity for a circular walk that will likely just fall short of 2km. Connections to the Church End East site would provide a route greater than requirements.	×
(3) Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted.	Car parking would be provided within adjacent Church End East SANG within 200m of the site. No significant constraints to providing car parking in the proposed areas. Car access to SANG areas will need to be considered as part of transport assessments undertaken as part of the associated development.	✓
(4) Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for	New access points need to be created as part of the SANG. Primary access points to be located at the south to connect to the Church End East site and to the north-east to connect to the development site.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
	Other informal access points could connect with existing PRoWs surrounding the site and the existing settlement.	
(5) Safe access route on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified at the Church End East site. Design should ensure routes lead from parking area to the Parsonage Green site. Final design to ensure that road safety is considered at the pedestrian crossing points between the sites and to the key pedestrian crossing points to ensure safe links to new development.	✓
(6) Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	No constraints to the provision of car parking identified within the Church End East site. Design should ensure circular routes in the Parsonage Green site are signposted from the parking area/s in the Church End East Site.	✓
(7) Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of the walking routes	Final design to ensure walking routes contain some open areas. All sections of routes within proposed or existing wooded or scrub areas to be planned and maintained to ensure sight lines into and along routes.	✓
(8) Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	Final design to ensure appropriate path network is provided. Some surfaced areas may be required, especially at entrance points, using appropriate natural materials (self-binding gravel or similar). Boardwalks may be required for routes along the north-east boundary of the proposed SANG which runs along the River Chelmer and is within flood zones 2 and 3 to ensure the paths remain useable during winter months.	✓
(9) Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion from artificial structures	No significant intrusion from artificial structures. There are nearby listed buildings and archaeological considerations but with careful design these are unlikely to significantly distract from a perception of a SANG in this location as semi-natural.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
	Additional planting along the boundary with the new development should be considered to act as a noise and visual buffer. Buffer planting could also be considered between the site and existing development to the south-west, while preserving views to St Mary's Church. Additional tree planting will need to take account of any overhead lines.	
(10) All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience	No significant constraints identified to provide a variety of new habitats on existing agricultural land. Suitable habitat creation opportunities include wildflower meadows, ponds and wetlands. There is also potential to enhance existing deciduous woodland and riparian habitats within the site. Further heritage advice would be required for any proposed tree planting and ground works within the archaeological site which covers a large area of the site.	✓
(11) Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	Capacity for the site to have unrestricted access in the long term.	✓
(12) SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells).	No nearby features likely to cause unpleasant intrusions.	✓

Chapter 4 Church End East and Parsonage Green – baseline & SANG quality assessment

Chapter 5

Takeley – baseline & SANG quality assessment

5.1 The following section provides a dossier for Takeley to assess the suitability of areas to deliver SANG provision. This section provides:

- A baseline review under several subject areas to identify constraints and opportunities.
- An opportunity plan. This is conceptual and sets out the key principles / interventions that will likely need to be implemented to meet SANG requirements on site (further detailed design will be required).
- A SANG quality checklist to set out the extent to which the site could meet SANG requirements in the future (following enhancement).

Site context

5.2 The site allocation is located to the north and east of Takeley and Little Canfield and is bounded by the existing settlement to the south, the A120 to the north and Bambers Green Road to the east. The mixed-use site allocations include proposals for 1,546 units with a population estimate of 3,710. These site allocations are in closest proximity to Hatfield Forest, c2km and well connected via road along the B1256. The Flitch Way (NCN16) to the south also provides reasonably easy access to a key recreational active travel route that also connects directly into Hatfield Forest.

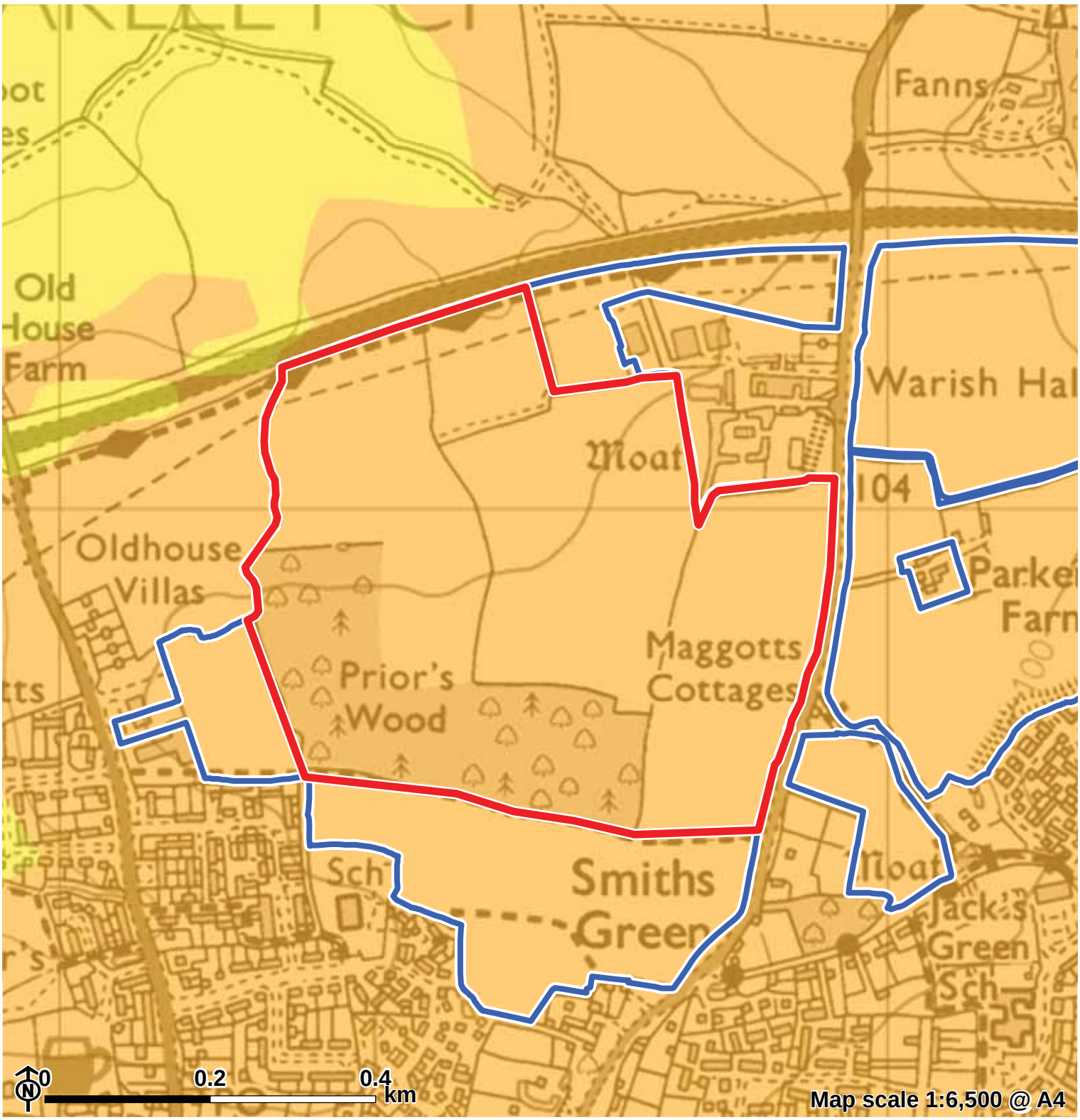
Environmental considerations

Landscape

5.3 As set out in Uttlesford's Landscape Character Assessment (2023), the site is within LCA B5: Broxted Farming Plateau. This LCA is characterised by gently undulating plateau farmland, with a strong sense of openness and long views across arable farmland. The opportunity area is comprised of several agricultural fields, surrounded by fragmented hedgerows with remnant trees and an area of ancient woodland, Prior's Wood, to the south. This is characteristic of this landscape type. The south of site is level with a gently declining gradient to the northwest providing views north to the open agricultural landscape, with an irregular field pattern and interspersed with other blocks of ancient woodland (see **Figure 5.1**)The agricultural land is classified as grade 2 (see **Figure 5.2**).

5.4 The original linear form of Takeley has now been altered by modern expansion to the south-west north of the Flitch Way, and in the north, bringing the northern edge of the settlement closer to the A120 and impacting on its historic character. Prior's Wood acts as a visual barrier between the majority of the opportunity area and Takeley and views to Little Canfield are obstructed by trees and hedges, facilitating a sense of rurality. Tree and woodland planting should be undertaken to protect, buffer and strengthen existing woodland on site.

5.5 The site is on close proximity to Stansted airport. Whilst flight paths may be a detracting feature, they will affect Hatfield Forest to a similar extent. Familiarity and the ubiquity of views of flights to and from the airport means this should not impact the use of the site as a SANG. Noise from A120 directly to the north is likely to act as a detracting feature and measures will likely need to be taken to mitigate against this through additional tree planting or other noise barriers.



SANG opportunity area

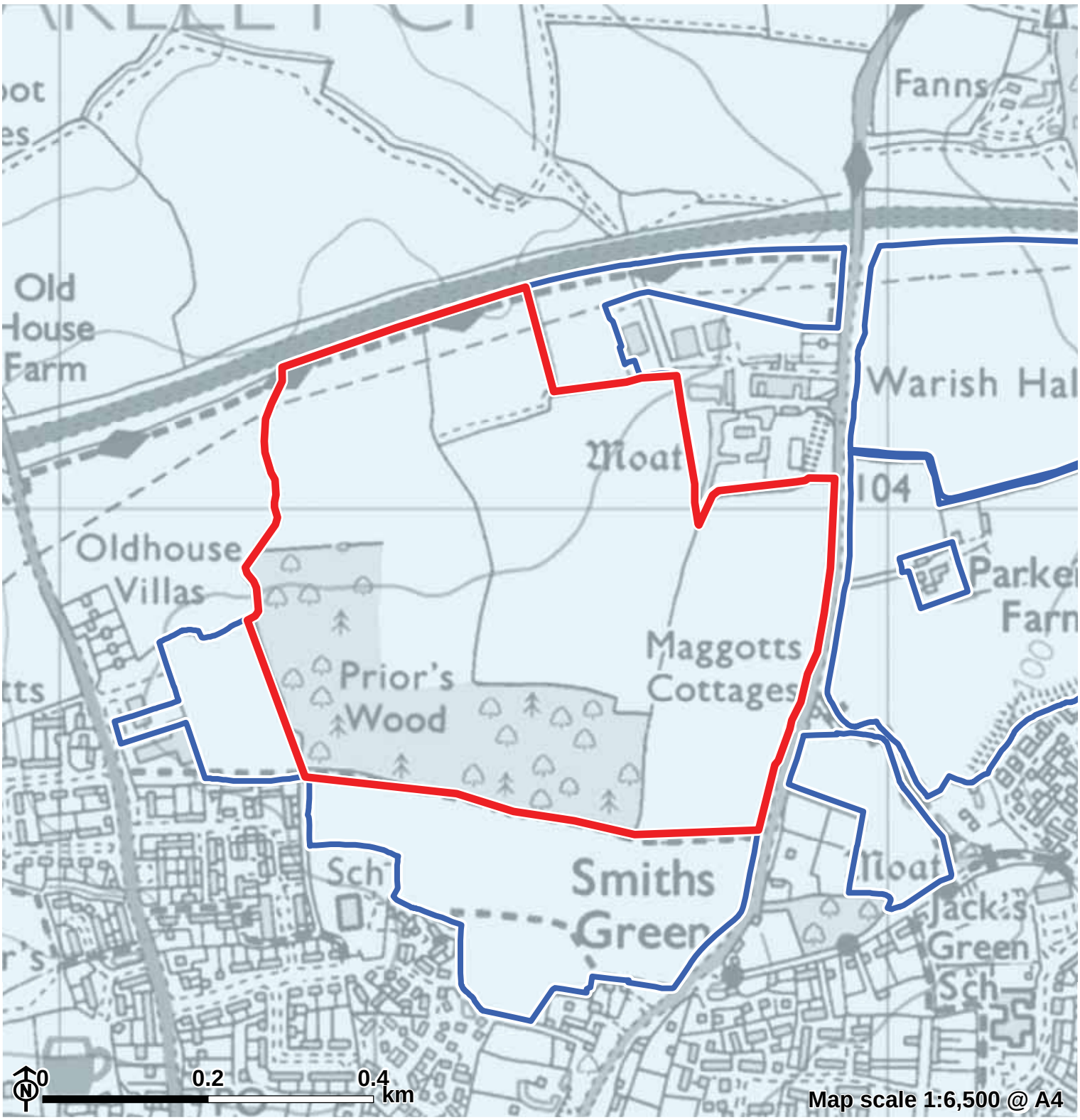
Development allocation

Height above sea level (m)

84 - 95

96 - 106

Figure 5.2: Agricultural Land Classifications - Takeley



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 2

Biodiversity

5.6 The majority of habitats within the opportunity area are arable, presenting limited biodiversity value, primarily supporting farmland birds. The site is 3 km from an area identified as important for Arable Assemblage Farmland birds **[See reference** 20**]**, indicating its potential role in regional avifaunal dynamics. Existing hedgerows with remnant trees provide landscape connectivity, although these are fragmented in places to facilitate agricultural access. Enhancing these hedgerows would improve habitat continuity, support a wider range of species and provide carbon sequestration. Their enhancement and replacement where needed should be a priority.

5.7 The site is located only c2km from Hatfield Forest, and in close proximity to Flitch Way LoWS, which connects with Hatfield Forest and High Wood SSSI, the latter being in unfavourable condition (see **Appendix C**). Although this situates the site as a key connector within the regional habitat network, careful design and management are essential to avoid recreational disturbance to these sensitive areas. The A120, running along the northern boundary of the site, acts as a significant barrier to habitat connectivity although the long distance Harcamlow Way runs along part of its southern side and crosses over from Smiths Green Lane. There is potential to develop Bambers Green Road as a sustainable travel route which could provide opportunities to implement urban greening measures and improve connectivity across the A120.

5.8 An area of deciduous ancient woodland, Prior's Wood, is located in the southwest of the opportunity area. Identified as a LoWS, Prior's Wood is recognized as an important woodland in the existing Local Plan and classified as primary habitat for ancient semi-natural woodland within the National Habitat Network Maps. There is a risk to the ancient woodland habitat from increased recreational pressure as a result of providing a SANG and increased access would need to be carefully managed with new paths preventing people from straying into the wider woodland. If incorporated into a SANG, the woodland would likely benefit from ongoing management and would need to be incorporated into an adopted SANG Management Plan.

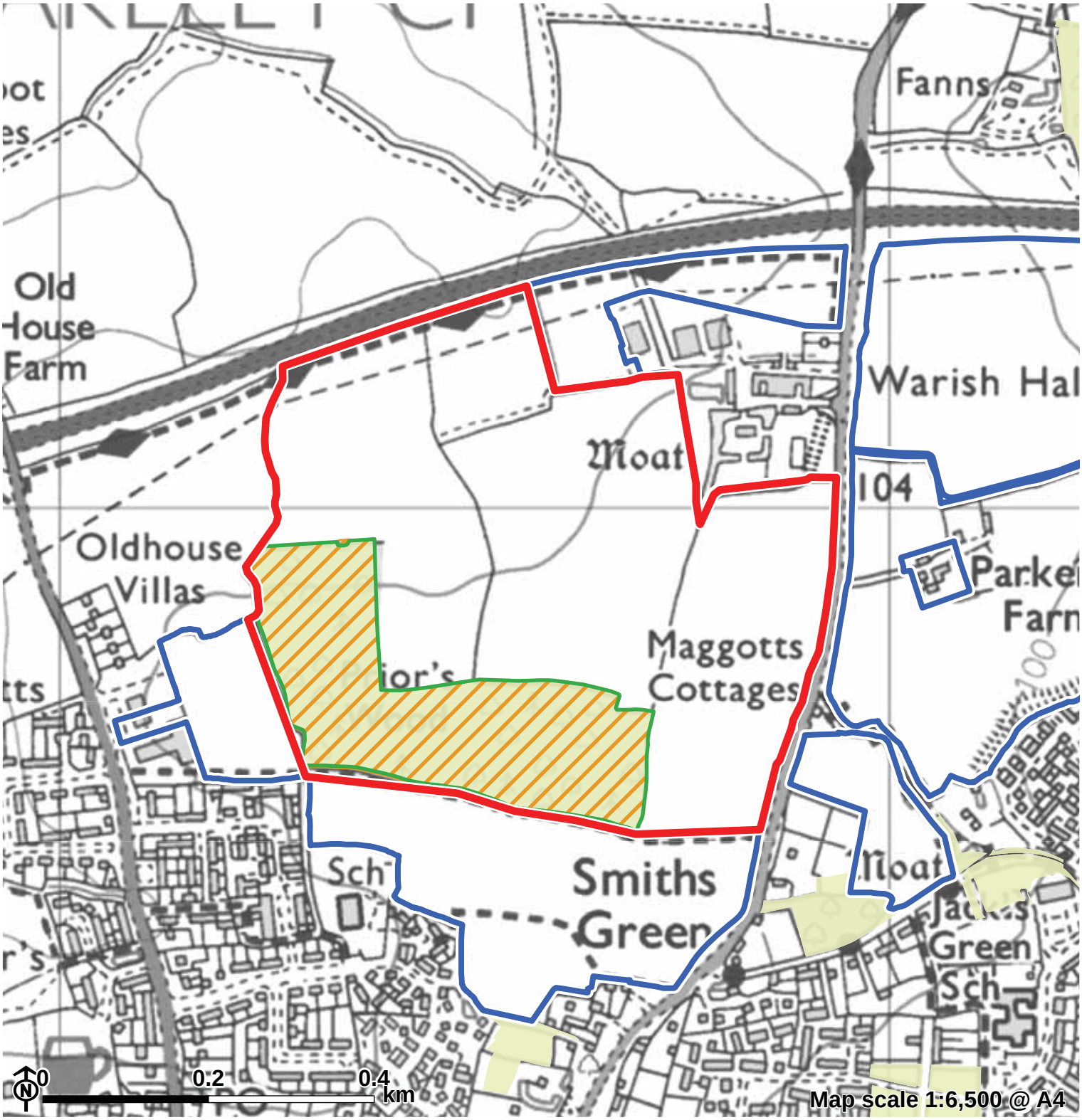
5.9 The remaining opportunity area is identified within Natural England's Habitat Networks as within Network Enhancement Zone 2 (priority areas for habitat creation, land management enhancement & Green Infrastructure to strengthen the network of existing habitats) **[See reference** 21**]**. Smaller pockets of priority deciduous woodland habitat to the southeast further enhance the site's ecological value.

5.10 The majority of the opportunity area is within an amber zone for Great Crested Newts, containing main population centres and critical connecting habitats that facilitate natural dispersal. This highlights the importance of prioritising habitat creation and enhancement in these areas to effectively meet the conservation needs of this protected species through the provision of wetland habitats.

5.11 The entire opportunity area lies within a Buglife B-Line, a crucial corridor for pollinators. Despite limited existing habitat to support pollinators, this underscores the need for targeted habitat creation, such as planting nectar-rich wildflowers and providing nesting sites to bolster pollinator populations and enhance ecosystem services.

5.12 As the site is within the 13km wildlife buffer that is in place for Stansted Airport, the Airport Authority will need to be consulted on any landscaping schemes which may have the potential to increase bird strike (in accordance with Aerodrome Safeguarding).

5.13 Figure 5.3 and **Figure 5.4** show key habitats and ecological opportunity areas.



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Non-statutory

Local wildlife site

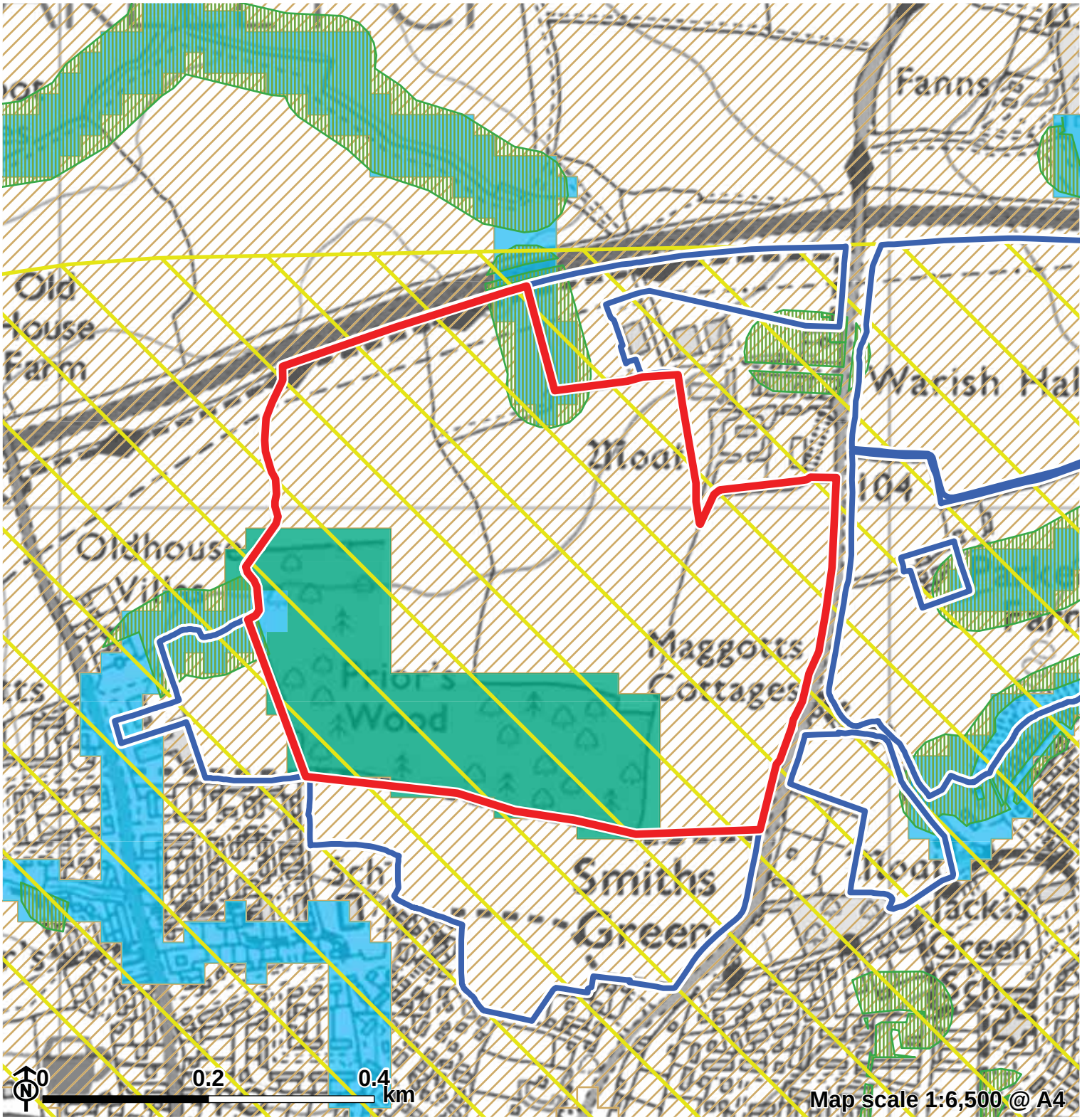
Other

Ancient Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory

Deciduous woodland

Figure 5.4: Ecological opportunities - Takeley



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- B-line*
- Riparian Woodland Potential

Habitat Network

- Ancient woodland
- Watercourses
- Network Enhancement Zone 2

*B-lines are networks of insect pathways which connect the wildflower-rich habitats of the UK.

Heritage

5.14 There are no listed buildings or designated heritage assets within the opportunity area. Immediately adjacent to the north-east of the site is Warish Hall and Moat Bridge, a late 13th century aisled hall house with 17th, 18th and 20th century alterations which is grade I listed building, scheduled monument and identified as an archaeological site. The scheduled monument is largely protected from view by trees and hedgerows which will help to prevent visual impacts on the scheduled monument and listed building.

5.15 There are several grade II listed residential buildings to the south along Smiths Green Lane, which reflects the previous function of the Green and a scattered linear settlement form on the rural edge of Takeley.

5.16 Moat Cottage sits at the south of this line of historic residences. A mid-16th Century Wealden House, it is a grade II* listed building and also an identified archaeological site.

5.17 Smiths Green Lane is a protected lane and there is the potential for a SANG to have an adverse impact on features and planting associated with the Lane, especially if there is increased vehicular use of the Lane for access. However, the local plan policy does not support this and provides for a sustainable transport route east-west across the allocated site including this potential SANG area which will afford direct non-car and public transport access. Enhanced planting of trees, hedgerows, banks, ditches and verges would be appropriate to protect the character of the Lane.

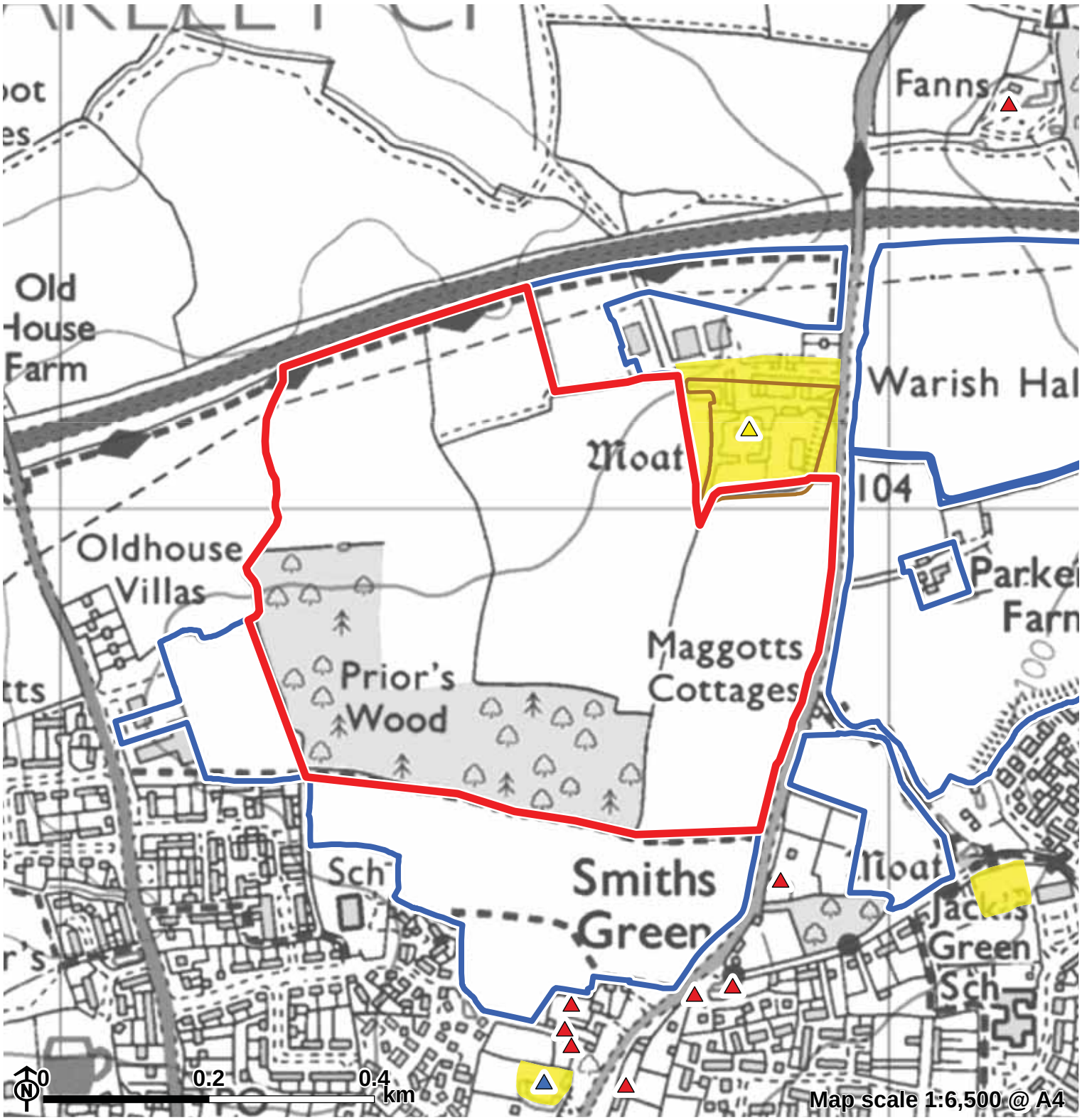
5.18 The site has the potential to contain prehistoric and Roman remains. These should be considered in SWOT analysis and management options for the whole site, including opportunities to influence SANG layout and design, and to interpret and raise awareness of the area's history and development.

5.19 The risk of significant impact as a result of setting change for these surrounding heritage assets is low due to the nature of SANG provision.

However, they highlight the longevity of occupation in this area. Any future development of the opportunity area should be informed by an understanding of the surrounding heritage assets and their sensitivities to surrounding development. The historic agricultural landscape character of irregular field patterns should be preserved by maintaining and strengthening existing hedgerows within the design of the SANG where possible.

5.20 Figure 5.5 provides an overview of historic environment and heritage features.

Figure 5.5: Historic environment / heritage - Takeley



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Statutory

Scheduled monument

Listed building (grade)

I

II*

II

Non-statutory

Archeaological Site

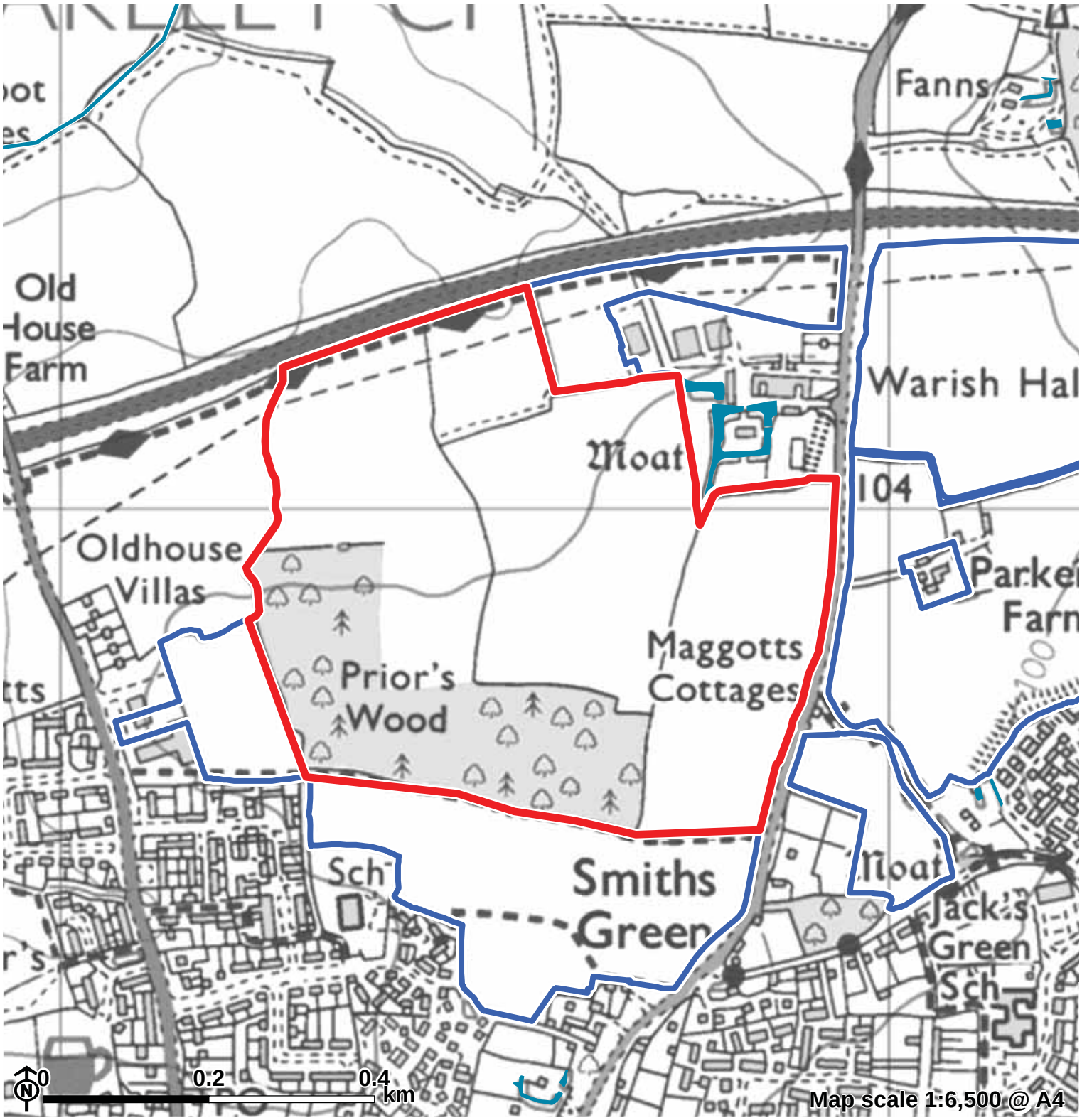
Hydrology

5.21 There are no water courses within the opportunity area and no recorded areas of flood risk. There is a moat at Warish Hall to the north east of the area.

5.22 The Working with Natural Process (WWNP) dataset (which provides evidence and spatially prioritises locations for natural flood management interventions) identifies the majority of the SANG opportunity area as having wider catchment woodland potential and is a medium priority catchment for the use of natural flood management **[See reference** 22**]**.

5.23 The site spans the Roding, Beam & Ingrebourne and the Upper & Middle Lea river catchments. The relevant catchment partnerships should be referred to when considering natural flood alleviation.

5.24 Figure 5.6 provides an overview of the blue network and flood risk.



SANG opportunity area
Development allocation
Water body
River

Access and connectivity

5.25 The opportunity area and its surrounds are very well connected by existing public rights of way. There are existing routes along the northern and southern boundaries which provide connections to Takeley and a connection south east to Little Canfield. The quality of these routes varies, with the north and south east routes well sign posted but the southern routes not clear and all routes are overgrown with vegetation.

5.26 The public right of way northern route overlaps with the Harcamlow Way providing connections to Dunmow Road and the Flitch Way, to the south via the Holy Trinity Church. To the north it traverses the agricultural landscape before meeting the River Chelmer and travelling along its banks to Thaxted.

5.27 The NCN50 travels along Smiths Green along the eastern edge of the potential SANG site providing cycle connections to Takeley and the Flitch Way to the south and Stansted airport to the north. The connections that the existing public rights of way, Harcamlow Way and NCN50 provide to the Flitch Way (NCN16) offers easy access to and from Hatfield Forest.

5.28 Smiths Green links rural areas to Takeley and Little Canfield, forming the eastern boundary of the opportunity area, but is a narrow country lane whose character will be protected by site policy to prevent enhanced vehicular access. Well signposted pedestrian and cycle access would be welcomed to provide active travel connections to a SANG.

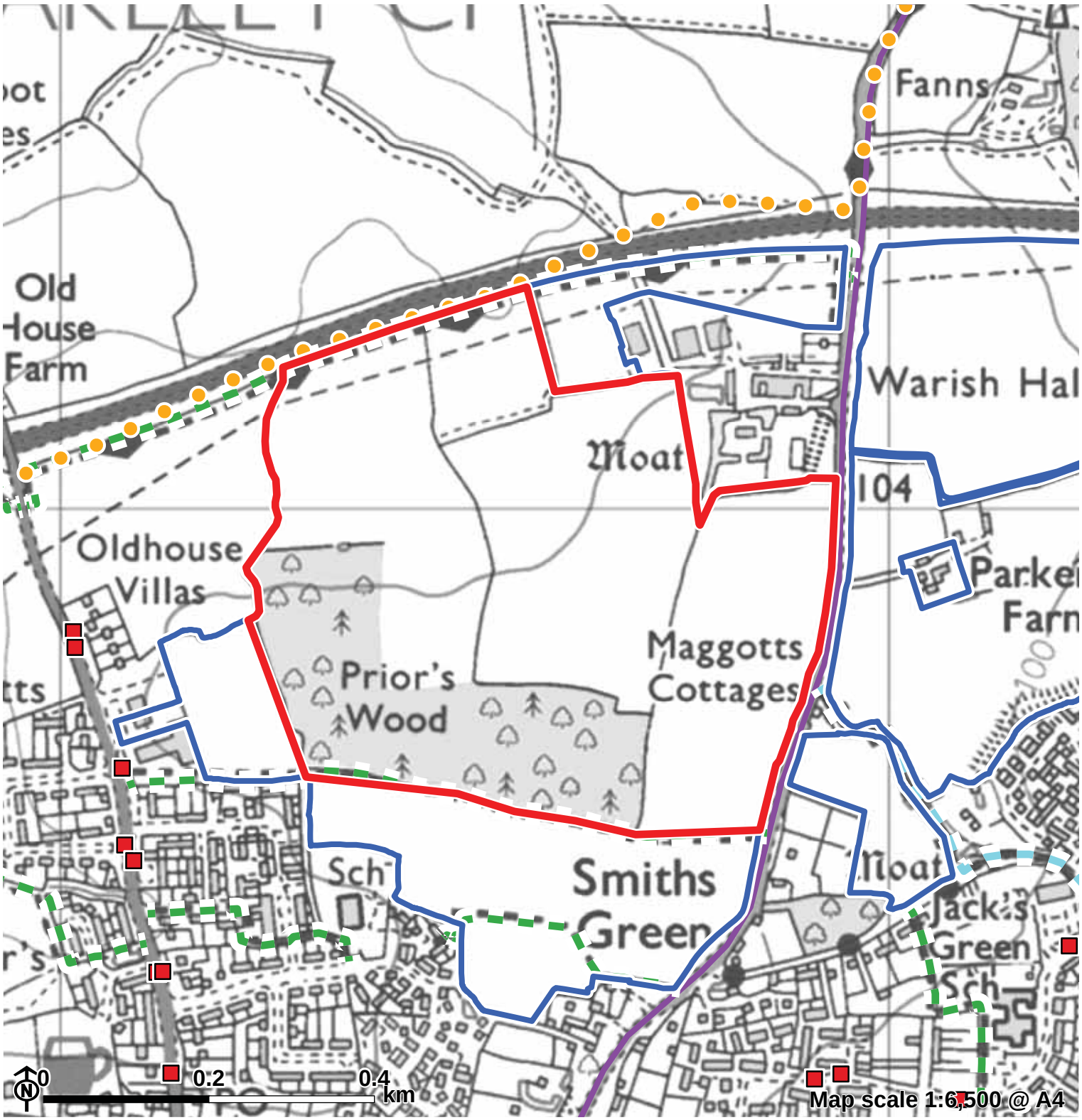
5.29 Local Plan policy provides for a sustainable transport route east-west across the allocated site including this potential SANG area which will afford direct non-car and public transport access. The final design of the sustainable transport route will need to be assessed and consultation with Natural England will need to be undertaken to ensure this does not detract from the use of the site as a SANG. The design should ensure this route is not intrusive and does not impact on the overall perception of the site as semi-natural. Other open space areas to the south of the potential SANG area (but within the site

allocation) may need to be considered to include within a revised SANG boundary (to the south of the proposed transport route) if it is deemed inappropriate for the SANG to be bisected by a surfaced sustainable transport route.

5.30 Given the proximity of the Flitch Way and Hatfield Forest the settlements of Takeley and Little Canfield have good access to larger natural greenspaces. However, there is a lack of neighbourhood scale greenspaces within close proximity of the settlements which a potential SANG in this area would help to provide for.

5.31 Figure 5.7 provides an overview of access and connectivity.

Figure 5.7: Access and connectivity: Active travel and public transport - Takeley



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- National Cycle Network
- Bus stop

Public Right of Way

- Footpath
- Restricted Byway

Long distance walking route

- Harcamlow Way

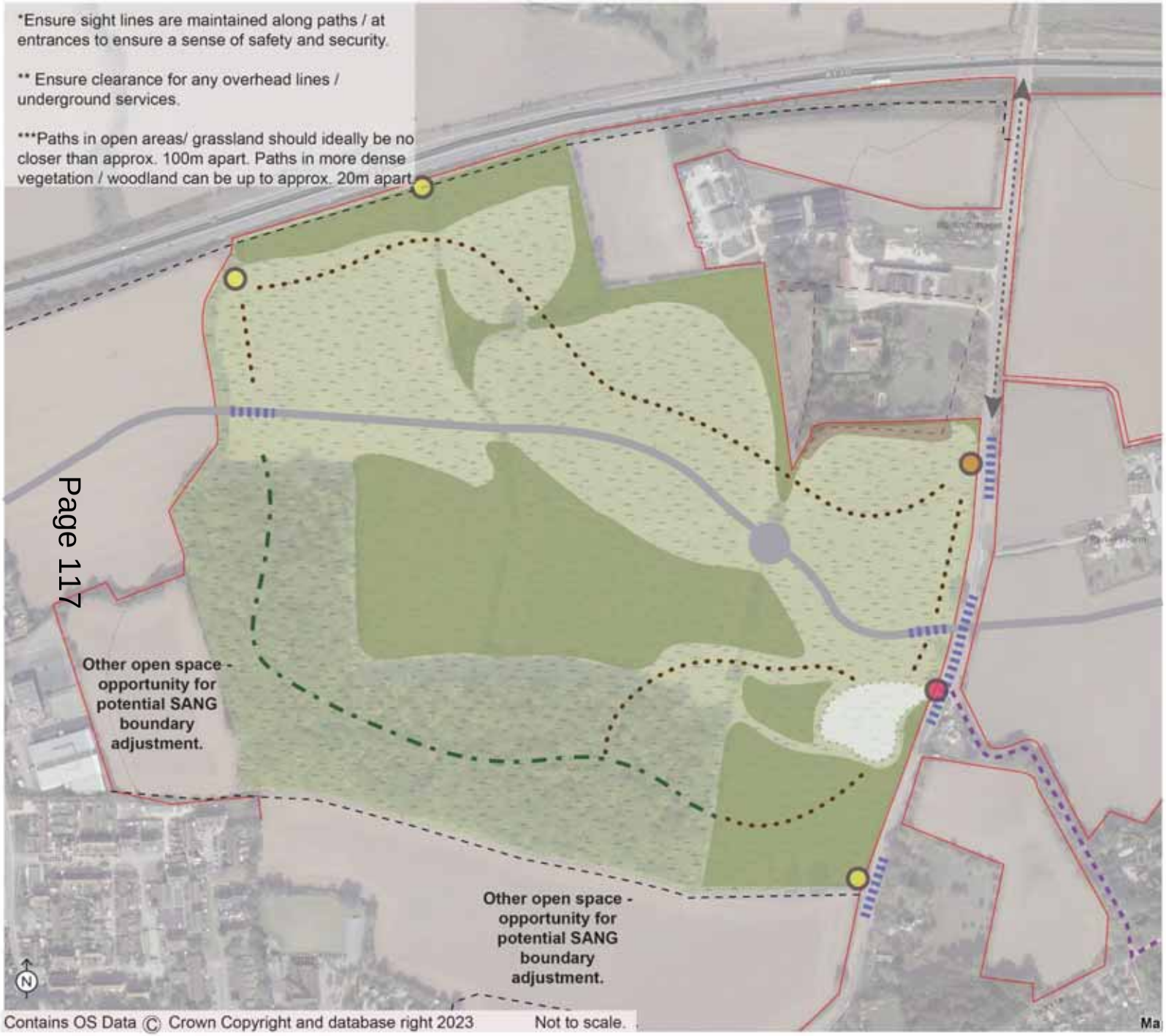
Infrastructure and adjacent land use

5.32 Some overhead lines are present along the northern boundary of the opportunity area which may pose constraints to additional tree planting or other noise mitigation for the A120, which may need to be set back from the boundary to the road further south.

5.33 There is a garage and MOT centre and meet and greet parking for Stansted airport located to the north east of the opportunity area. Potential noise and air quality impacts of this would need to be assessed and mitigated against as part of the final design.

Summary of SANG opportunities

4.26 **Figure 5.8** provides an indicative overview of SANG opportunities. The following interventions (or similar) will likely be required to meet SANG quality requirements. **Table 5.1** provides an assessment of the SANG opportunities against Natural England SANG quality criteria. It is recommended that the developers engage with Natural England through the Discretionary Advice Service early in the design process to ensure that SANG proposals meet quality requirements.



Uttlesford SANG Strategy
Uttlesford District Council

LUC

Figure 5.8: Takeley: Indicative SANG Opportunities

Site Allocation Boundary

Indicative SANG areas

Potential SANG area. To include a range of habitats: rough grassland, trees, ponds where appropriate.*

Extend existing woodland / strengthen field boundaries.**

Access

Public Right of Way (Footpath)

Public Right of Way (Restricted Byway)

Potential primary entrance / arrival opportunity / signage

Potential secondary / informal access

Potential vehicle / car park access

Proposed sustainable transport route. Appropriate design and interface with SANG to reduce potential intrusive influence.

Sensitive access through existing Ancient Woodland. Alignment and construction of path to protect existing habitat and to reduce disturbance.

Potential new path network***

Potential car park (Indicative area)

Road safety measures / crossing point

Potential connecting route. Including potential active travel route at Smiths Green to cross A120 towards Bambers Green.

Other

Scheduled Monument: Warish Hall moated site and remains of Takeley Priory

Table 5.1: Takeley SANG quality criteria checklist - 'Must Haves'

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(1) Parking on sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m)	Currently no parking provision on site. The site is larger than 4ha and the full extent of the associated development parcel is not accessible within 400m. Car parking will need to be provided to meet SANG requirements. This should be provided at a minimum rate of one car parking space per hectare of proposed SANG. No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified. Locate to avoid adjacent archaeological site and Scheduled Monument. Due to construction, further advice on heritage constraints may be required.	✓
(2) Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	Capacity for 2.3 km to 2.5 km routes through the site. Alignment to ensure around 100m separation between routes in open areas and 20m separation in woodland or scrub.	✓
(3) Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified. Car access to SANG areas will need to be considered as part of transport assessments undertaken as part of the associated development.	✓
(4) Access points appropriate for particular	Current public rights of way access points are not sufficient for primary access points. New access points need to be created as part of the SANG.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for	Primary access points to be located to ensure easy access to new residents from the east.	
(5) Safe access route on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified. Design should ensure routes lead from parking area. Final design to ensure circular routes connect to public rights of way at the perimeter of the site. Final design to ensure that road safety is considered at key pedestrian crossing points to ensure safe links to development in the east.	✓
(6) Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified (within the boundary of the SANG). Design should ensure routes lead from parking area.	✓
(7) Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of the walking routes	Final design to ensure walking routes contain some open areas and sight lines into and along routes within woodland are maintained. Sensitive tree and understory management may be required within the existing woodland to ensure sight lines are maintained.	✓
(8) Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	Final design to ensure appropriate path network is provided. Some surfaced areas may be required, using appropriate natural materials (self-binding gravel or similar). Routes through existing ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site will need to be aligned to protect existing habitats and to ensure trees are protected.	✓
(9) Perceived as semi-natural with little	No significant intrusion from any existing artificial structures. Buffer planting may be required to partially screen views of small areas of built development adjacent and the A120 to the north. Additional tree planting to take account of any overhead lines. The design of the	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
intrusion from artificial structures	proposed sustainable transport route will need to ensure it does not impact the overall perception of the site as semi-natural (with little intrusion from artificial structures).	
(10) All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience	The existing ancient woodland provides habitat interest which can be incorporated into the SANG area. No significant constraints identified to provide a variety of new habitats on existing agricultural land.	✓
(11) Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	Capacity for the site to have unrestricted access in the long term. The design will need to ensure boundaries to adjacent roads are secure. Capacity to provide defined off lead dog areas if required.	✓
(12) SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells).	Buffer planting, a noise bund or other intervention may be required to mitigate noise impact from the A120.	✓

Chapter 6

Stansted Mountfitchet – baseline & SANG quality assessment

6.1 The following section provides a dossier for Stansted Mountfitchet to assess the suitability of areas to deliver SANG provision. This section provides:

- A baseline review under several subject areas to identify constraints and opportunities.
- An opportunity plan. This is conceptual and sets out the key principles / interventions that will likely need to be implemented to meet SANG requirements on site (further detailed design will be required).
- A SANG quality checklist to set out the extent to which the site could meet SANG requirements in the future (following enhancement).

Context and summary

6.2 The associated site allocations (two separate site allocations in the new Local Plan) sit to the north of Stansted Mountfitchet in the southwest of Uttlesford District. These will incorporate up to 390 residential units and would have a SANG size requirement of 7.5ha. A SANG opportunity area 8.6ha in size has been identified to the north of these sites which, though is 1.1ha greater than the requirement, is still small in scale and is likely to pose challenges in providing all of the required features to meet SANG standards.

6.3 The site is within 6km of Hatfield Forest and well connected by road access via the B1383 and the A120. The public right of way network via Birchanger also provides a direct link but the length of the journey and the location of Stansted Airport and the M11 act as barriers to access.

Environmental considerations

Landscape

6.4 The area has a gently rising topography from 75m on the eastern boundary to 90m on the western boundary (see **Figure 6.1**). This provides a natural viewpoint from the western boundary to open farmland in the east, with a backdrop of ancient woodland at Alsa Wood and woodland at Aubrey Buxton Nature Reserve. Views to ancient woodland at Houghtey Wood are also offered to the north-west and are characteristic of the landscape type. The future use of the site should maintain some wider views from the highest ground at the west of the site, maximising views to the surrounding agricultural landscape. This will need to be balanced with the need to create a range of habitats, including tree planting, on the site to create interest and variety along a path network.

6.5 As set out in Uttlesford's Landscape Character Assessment (2023), the opportunity area is fully contained within Landscape Character Area B5: Broxted Farming Plateau. This LCA is characterised by gently undulating plateau farmland, with a strong sense of openness and long views across arable farmland. The current agricultural land is classified as grade 2 (see **Figure 6.2**).

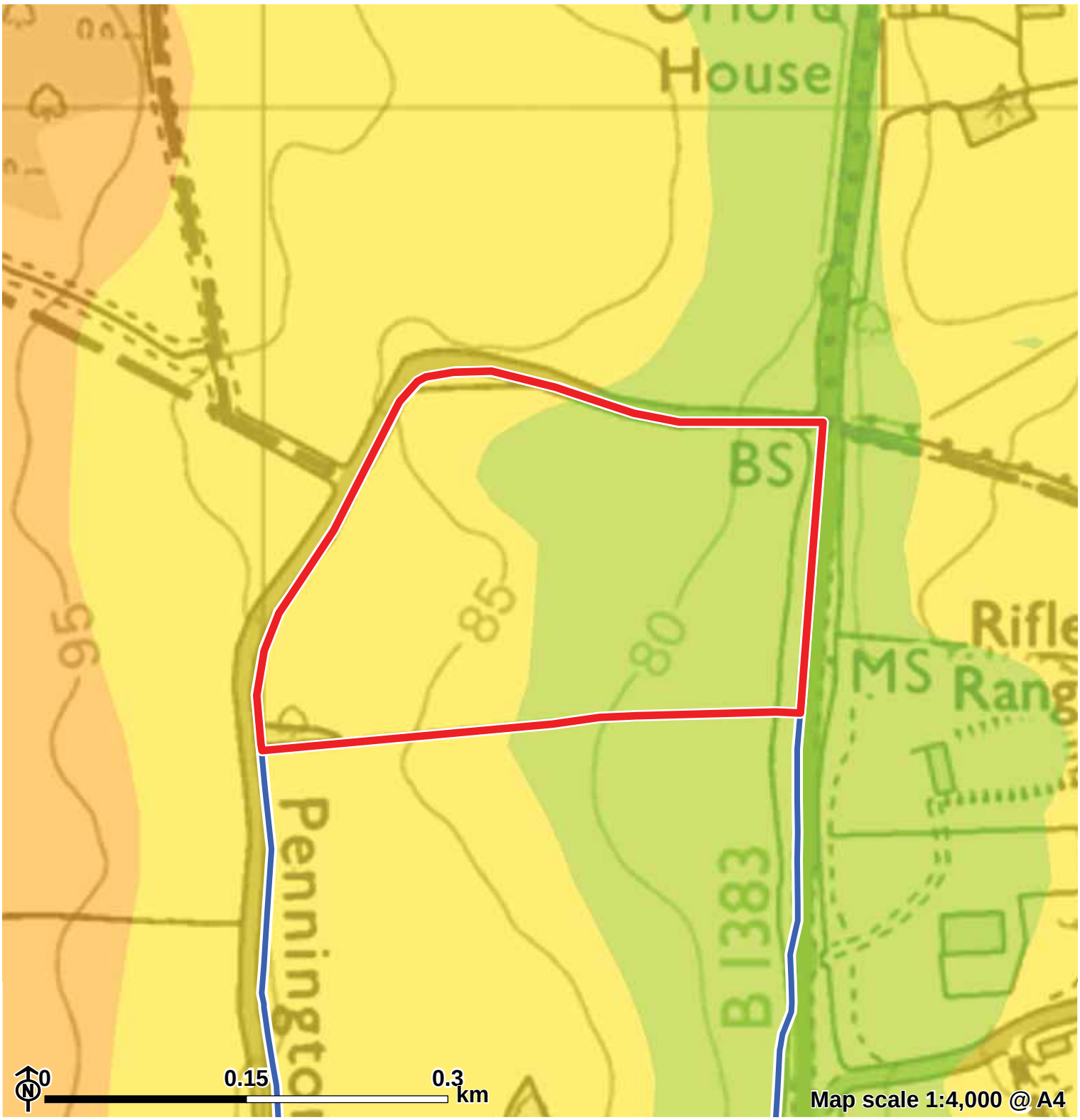
6.6 The potential SANG area is comprised of one arable agricultural field, with field edge ditches and the Ugley Brook along the Cambridge Road (B1383) edge. Fragmented hedgerows, with notable gaps along the B1383, means the opportunity area is afforded minimal visual or noise protection from the B138 in some areas. The replacement of hedgerows at the east of the opportunity area would help to improve the sense of tranquillity, reduce noise impacts from the road as well and reinforce the agricultural landscape character.

6.7 The site is located in close proximity to Stansted Airport to the south-east. This and the adjacent B138 reduces the sense of tranquillity to some degree. The Uttlesford LCA notes that Stansted airport (along with the M11 and the

A120) have the greatest modern influence on landscape character. Whilst flight paths may be a detracting feature, they will affect Hatfield Forest to a similar extent. Familiarity and the ubiquity of views of flights to and from the airport means this should not impact the use of the site as a SANG.

6.8 The M11 passes approximately 1.5km to the east of the opportunity area and is buffered by large blocks of woodland. It would not be considered intrusive or affect the function of the site as a SANG.

Figure 6.1: Topography - Stansted Mountfitchet



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

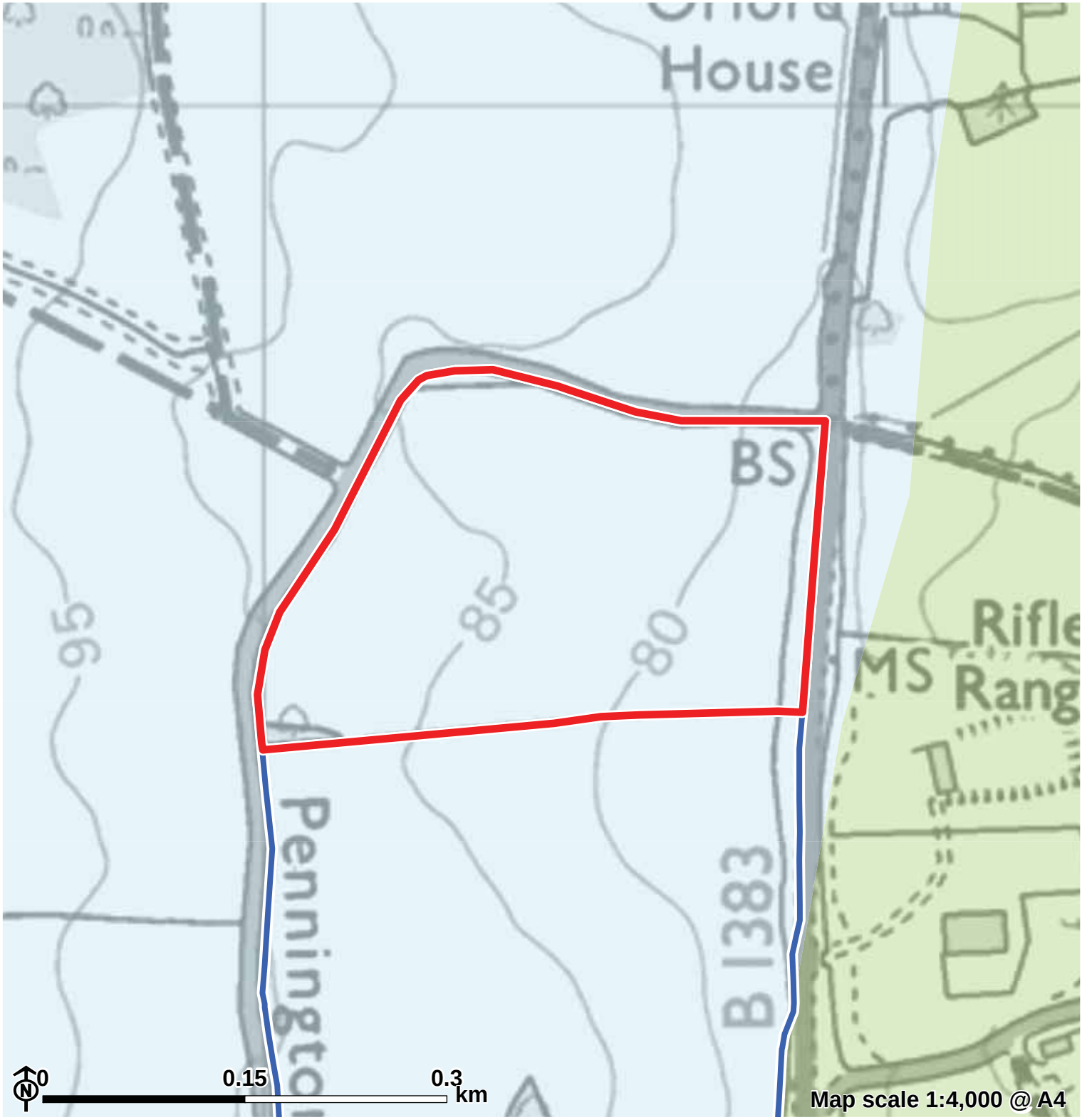
Height above sea level (m)

73 - 83

84 - 95

96 - 106

Figure 6.2: Agricultural Land Classifications - Stansted Mountfitchet



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 2

Grade 3

Biodiversity

6.1 The site is predominantly an agricultural field, exhibiting limited biodiversity primarily supporting farmland birds. The site is 4 km from an area identified as important for Arable Assemblage Farmland birds **[See reference** 23**]**, indicating a potential role in supporting regional avifaunal dynamics. Existing hedgerows and treelines enhance landscape connectivity, supporting the movement of species across the agricultural matrix. The hedgerows, banks, ditches and verges surrounding Pennington Lane were noted as being of high biodiversity value in a 2012 review of Uttlesford's protected lanes **[See reference** 24**]**.

6.2 Targeted habitat creation within the site could significantly help support the wider habitat network, enhancing its biodiversity value and connectivity.

6.3 The site is strategically located between two LoWS, forming part of a network that acts as stepping stones towards Quendon Wood SSSI, situated 2.5 km to the north. Quendon Wood is a well-preserved ancient coppice-with-standards woodland in favourable condition (see **Appendix C**). This network positions the site as a potential ecological corridor, facilitating species movement and gene flow between these habitats.

6.4 The vicinity includes several Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) areas, primarily deciduous woodland, with notable patches of ancient woodland such as Houghtey Wood, 300 meters from the site. The site has potential to enhance habitat connectivity and contribute to the resilience of local ecosystems by linking fragmented habitats and supporting a diverse range of species.

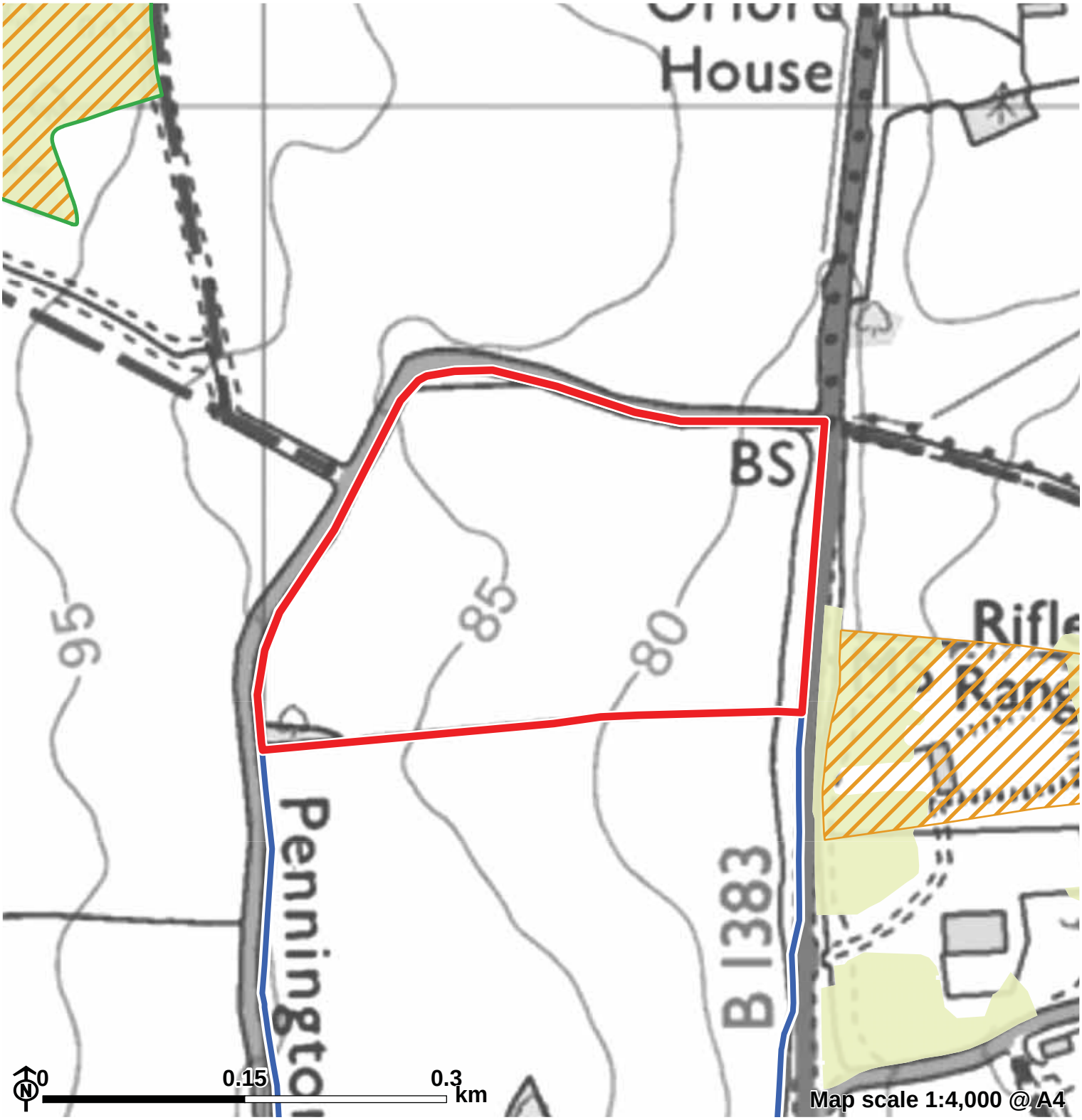
6.5 The site lies entirely within a B-Line running north to south, a strategic corridor for pollinators. Initiatives such as open area planting tailored for pollinators could enhance local biodiversity, supporting a wide range of species linked to agricultural productivity.

6.6 Ugley Brook, running along the site's eastern boundary, provides a natural connectivity feature. The brook's riparian zones offer significant potential for biodiversity enhancement.

6.7 As the site is within the 13km wildlife buffer that is in place for Stansted Airport, the Airport Authority will need to be consulted on any landscaping schemes which may have the potential to increase bird strike (in accordance with Aerodrome Safeguarding).

6.8 Figure 6.3 and **Figure 6.4** show key habitats and ecological opportunity areas.

Figure 6.3: Ecology and habitats - Stansted Mountfitchet



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Non-statutory

Local wildlife site

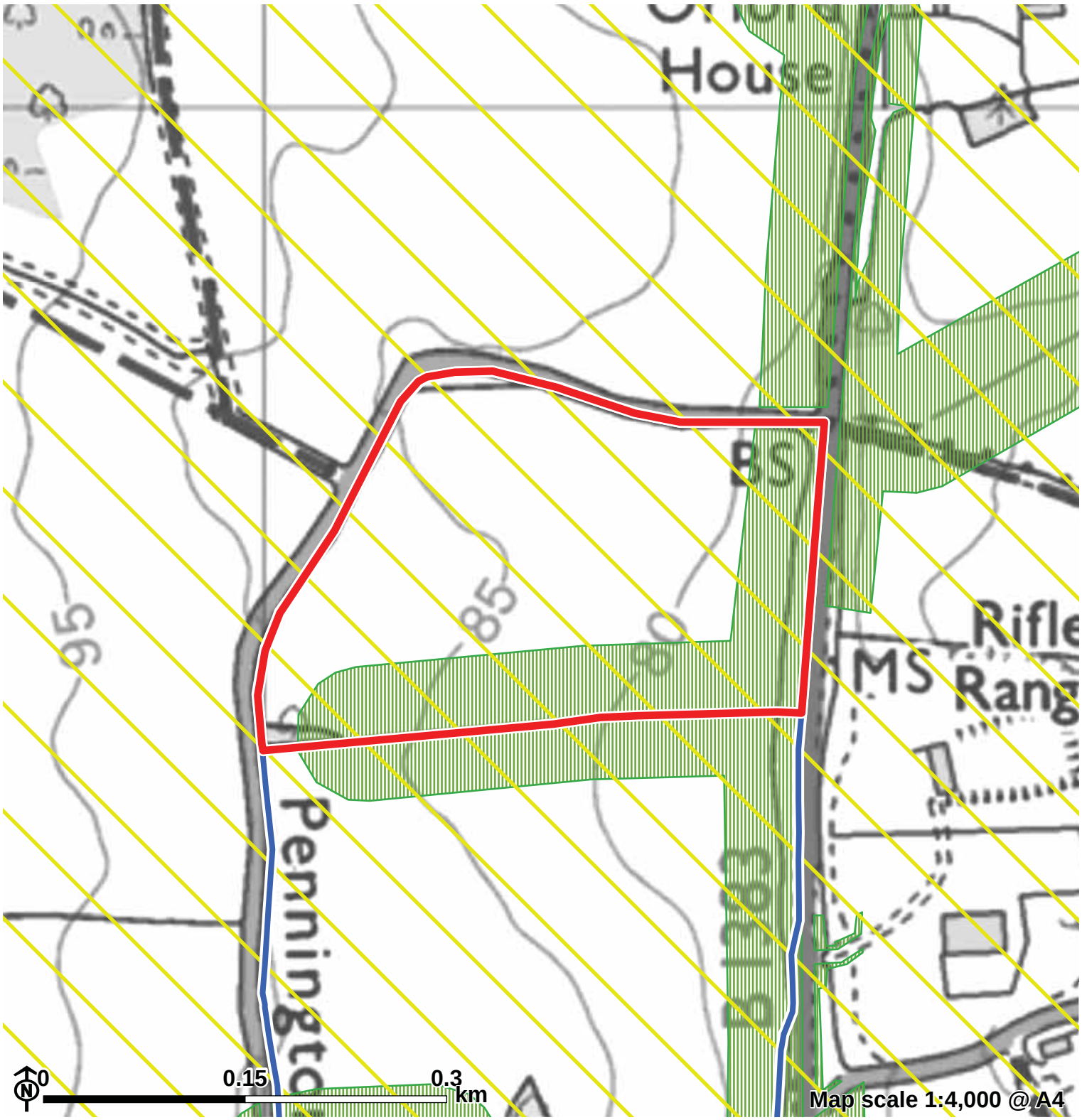
Other

Ancient Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory

Deciduous woodland

Figure 6.4: Ecological opportunities - Stanstead Mountfitchet



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- B-line*
- Riparian Woodland Potential

*B-lines are networks of insect pathways which connect the wildflower-rich habitats of the UK.

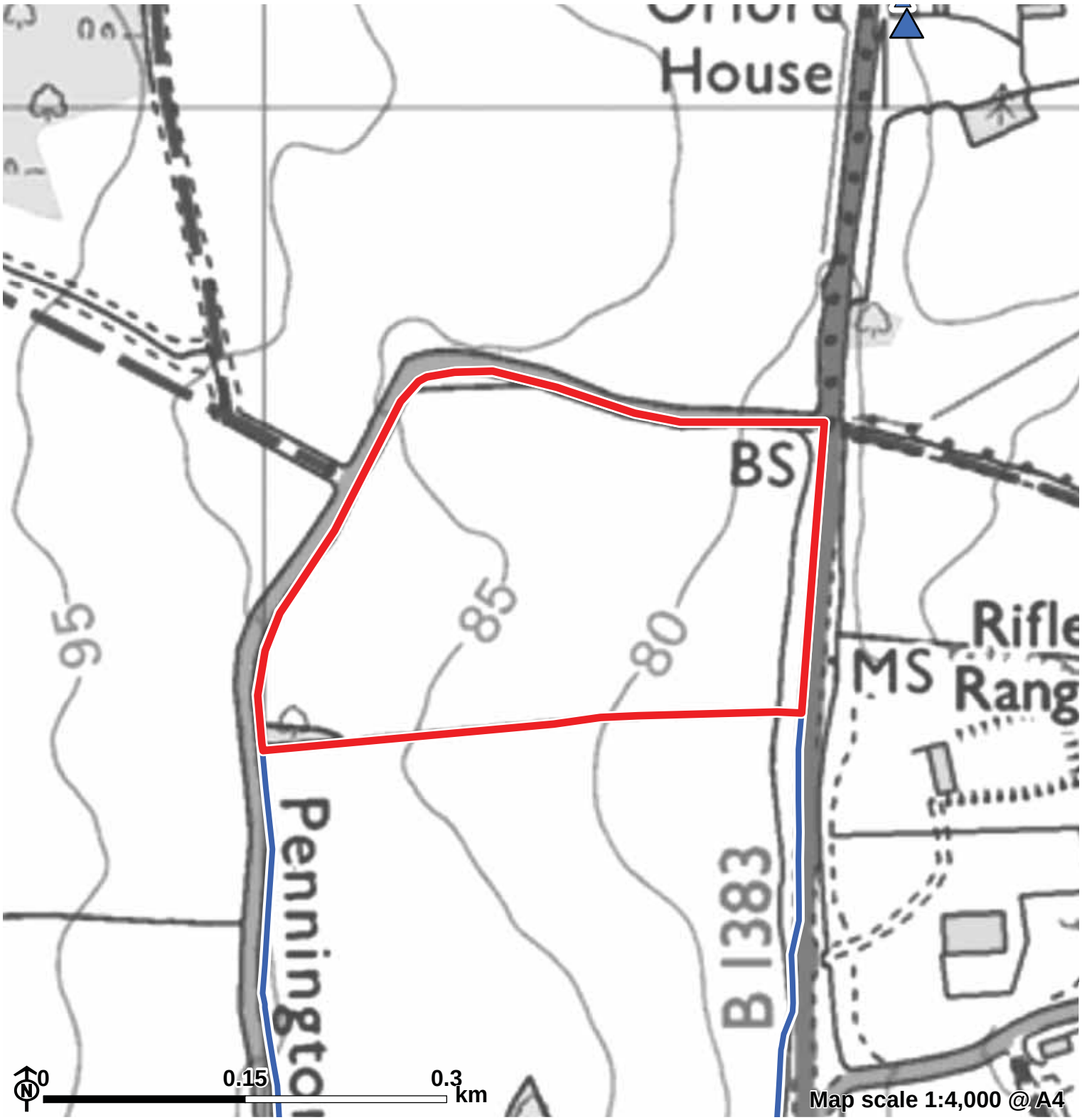
Heritage

6.9 There are no designated historic assets within the opportunity area. Pennington Lane which forms the northern and western boundary of the opportunity area is a protected lane. Consideration of this lane would need to be made to ensure there is no adverse effects on it and trees, hedgerows, banks, ditches and verges associated with the lane should be preserved and the existing intermittent views from the lane through the hedge line should be preserved.

6.10 Situated approximately 300m to the north-east of the opportunity area is Orford House, a grade II* listed red brick house built by the First Earl of Orford in circa 1700, several adjacent buildings including a cottage and garage block, a barn and a dovecote are grade II listed. To the south-east a range of L shaped barns associated with Alsa Lodge are also grade II listed.

6.11 Figure 6.5 provides an overview of nearby listed features.

Figure 6.5: Historic environment / heritage - Stansted Mountfitchet



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Statutory

Listed building (grade)

II*

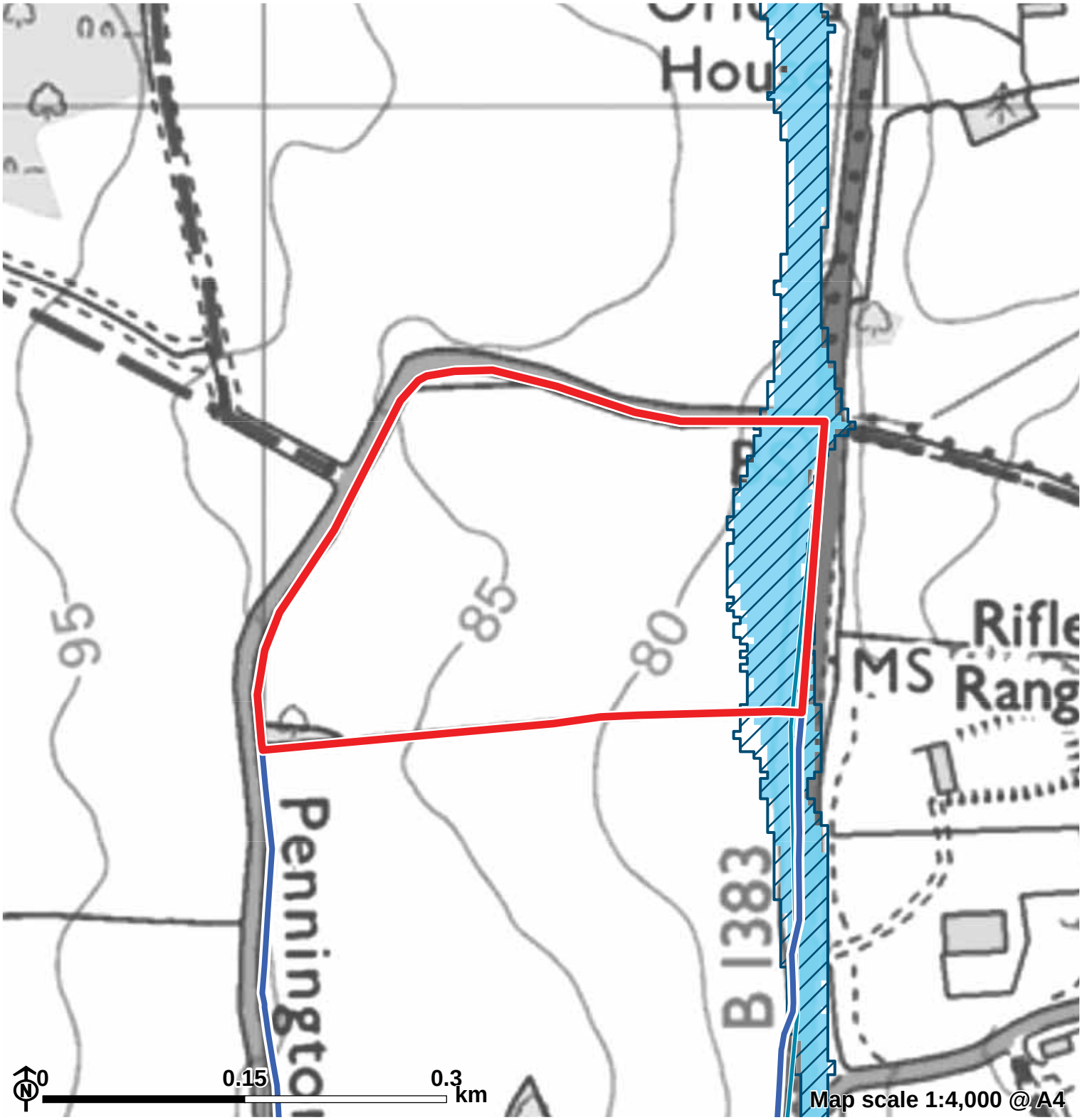
Hydrology

6.12 There is a minor watercourse (Ugley Brook) along the eastern boundary of the opportunity area. Areas surrounding this watercourse, stretching approximately 50m into the site are within flood zones 2 and 3. The most appropriate vehicle access point would be from the B1383 in this area and would need to be considered in the design of this access, car park and any associated visitor facilities.

6.13 The Working with Natural Process (WWNP) dataset (which provides evidence and spatially prioritises locations for natural flood management interventions) **[See reference** 25**]** identifies potential for riparian woodland creation along the east and south of the opportunity area. Opportunities for wider catchment woodland potential is identified in the south-west of the area and the whole opportunity area is identified as a medium priority area of catchments suitable for natural flood management. The site is within the Upper and Middle Lea River catchment. The Lea Catchment Partnership should be engaged and referred to if considering natural flood management solutions.

6.14 Figure 6.6 provides an overview of the blue network and surface water management issues.

Figure 6.6: Blue network and flood risk - Stansted Mountfitchet



- SANG opportunity area
- Development allocation
- Flood zone 2
- Flood zone 3
- River

Access and connectivity

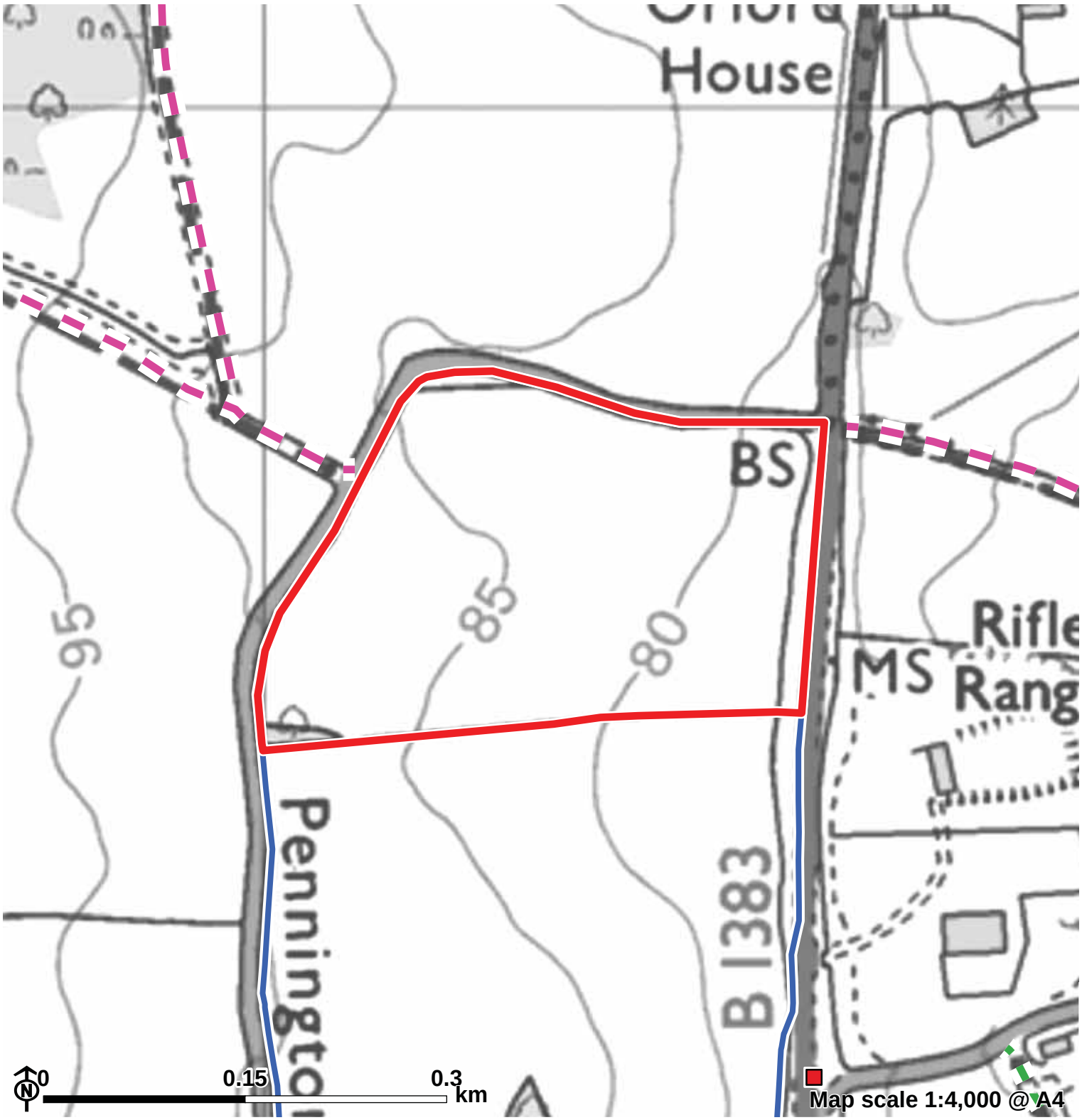
6.15 The opportunity area is well connected via the public right of way network to the north-east to Houghtey Wood and Manuden and to Alsa Wood and Aubrey Buxton Nature Reserve to the south-east. Clear signposting to footpaths would be useful. The public right of way network also provides a direct connection to the Harcamlow Way long distance route, approximately 600m north of the opportunity area. The opportunity area lacks public rights of way southwards to Stansted Mountfitchet, although Pennington Lane provides an informal safer walking and cycling route; there is a footpath alongside the B1383.

6.16 The 301 bus service stops approximately 200m south of the opportunity area providing a bi-hourly connection between Saffron Walden and Bishops Stortford via Stansted Mountfitchet. The train station at Stansted Mountfitchet is a 30 minute walk from the opportunity area. The B1383 provides a direct road connection into the centre of Stansted Mountfitchet, reaching the southern extent of the settlement within a 3 minute drive.

6.17 Not all new proposed dwellings the SANG is intended to service will be within 400m of the proposed SANG and a car park will need to be provided. The proposed development to the south will provide the opportunity to provide connecting north to south routes and could connect up public rights of way, the proposed SANG and local public open space (e.g. at Beech Close).

6.18 Figure 6.7 provides an overview of access and connectivity.

Figure 6.7: Access and connectivity: Active travel and public transport - Stansted Mountfitchet



SANG opportunity area

Development allocation

Bus stop

Public Right of Way

Bridleway

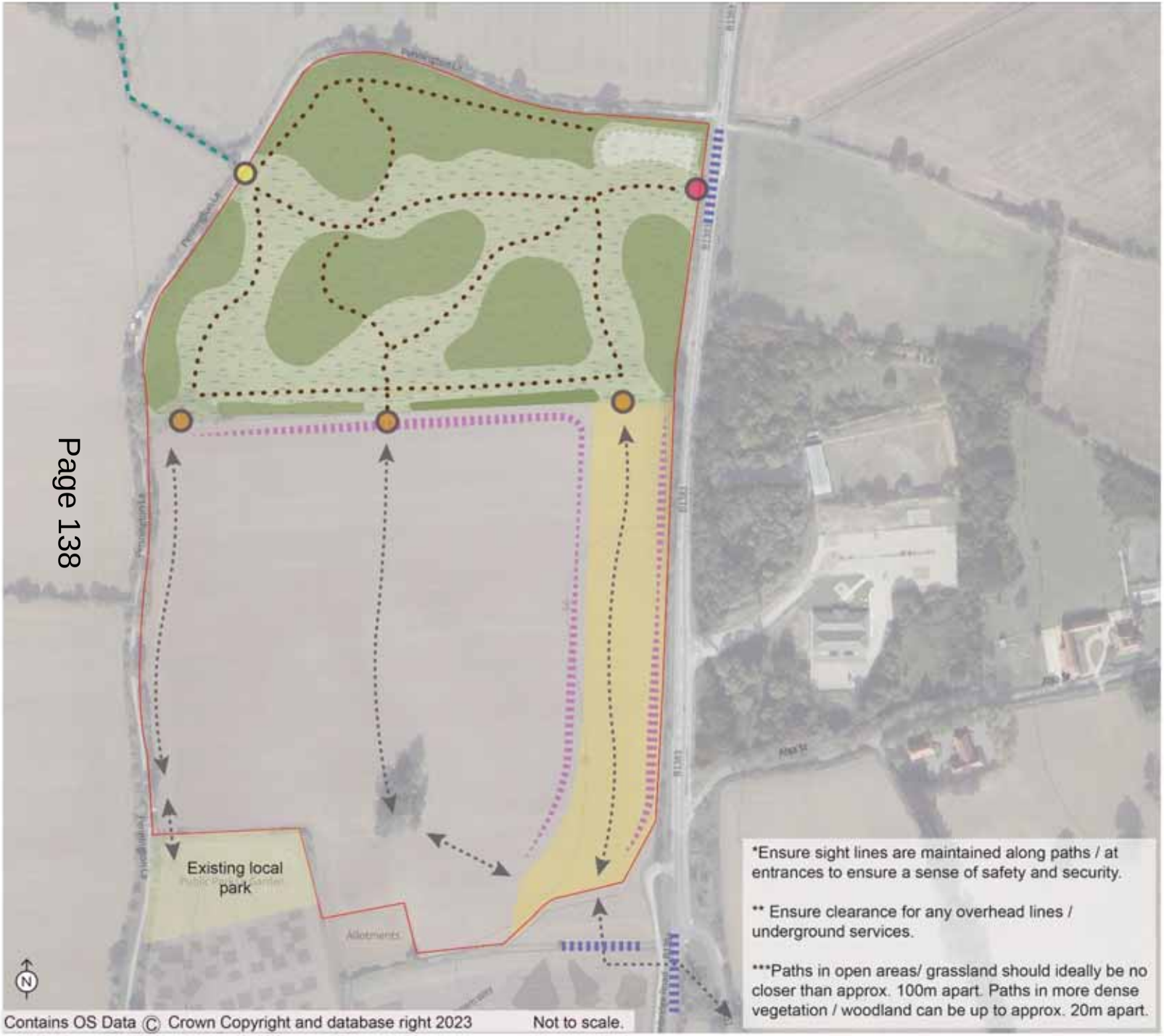
Footpath

Infrastructure and adjacent land use

6.19 There is no overhead infrastructure on the opportunity area or any incompatible adjacent land uses. The location of any underground services would need to be considered when planning the location of vehicles access points, car parking and any visitor facilities.

Summary of SANG opportunities

6.20 Figure 6.8 provides an indicative overview of SANG opportunities. The following interventions (or similar) will likely be required to meet SANG quality requirements. **Table 6.1** provides an assessment of the SANG opportunities against Natural England SANG quality criteria. It is recommended that the developers engage with Natural England through the Discretionary Advice Service early in the design process to ensure that SANG proposals meet quality requirements.



Uttlesford SANG Strategy
Uttlesford District Council

LUC

Figure 6.8: Stansted Mountfitchet: Indicative SANG Opportunities

Site Allocation Boundary

Indicative SANG areas

Potential SANG area. To include a range of habitats: rough grassland, trees, ponds where appropriate.*

Extend and strengthen existing woodland / tree cover or strengthen field boundaries.**

Potential SANG extension (link / connection). Other natural green space that may not meet SANG criteria but can connect SANG areas and enhance SANG functionality.

Access

Public Right of Way (Footpath)

Public Right of Way (Bridleway)

Potential primary entrance / arrival opportunity / signage

Potential secondary / informal access

Potential vehicle / car park access

Potential new path network***

Potential car park (Indicative area)

Road safety measures / crossing point

Potential connecting route. Including green link along SANG extension area and link to local park to the south.

Other

Appropriate interface / buffer to limit influence of built development and road

*Ensure sight lines are maintained along paths / at entrances to ensure a sense of safety and security.

** Ensure clearance for any overhead lines / underground services.

***Paths in open areas/ grassland should ideally be no closer than approx. 100m apart. Paths in more dense vegetation / woodland can be up to approx. 20m apart.

Table 6.1: Stansted Mountfitchet SANG quality criteria checklist - 'Must Haves'

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(1) Parking on sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m)	Currently no parking provision on site. The site is larger than 4ha, however, the full extent of the associated development parcel intended for use is accessible within 400m. Access to a car park would need to be from the B1383 or from the development site to the south to avoid negative impact on Penington Lane. The design of a vehicle access point and car park would need to consider and mitigate against flood risk at the east of the site. Due to construction, further advice on potential heritage constraints may be required.	✓
(2) Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	A circular walk of 2.3-2.5km can't be achieved within the space. A route of 1km – 1.5km is likely possible. Connection routes within a potential SANG extension area would increase the length of routes and improve access from the south but would not form part of a circular route. Alignment of paths will need to ensure around 100m separation between routes in open areas and 20m separation in woodland or scrub. The SANG will need to ensure an over provision of other aspects including a diverse mix of high-quality habitat areas to provide additional interest, seating areas with views, ponds etc to mitigate against not providing the minimum route length. Suitable areas or promoted paths / exercise areas specifically for dogs will be especially important.	×

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
	Further consideration should be given to connecting to nearby open spaces, active travel routes and public rights of way.	
(3) Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted	Car access to SANG areas will need to be considered as part of transport assessments undertaken as part of the associated development.	✓
(4) Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for	New access points will need to be created as part of the SANG. Primary access points to be located at the south, adjacent to the new development, to ensure easy access to new residents. Safe crossing points and off road active travel routes will need to be provided to provided easy access from the south areas of the development site. Other informal access points could connect with existing PRoWs to the west.	✓
(5) Safe access route on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath	No significant constraints for the provision of on-site car parking identified. Design should ensure routes lead from parking area. Final design to ensure circular routes connect to existing public rights of way to the west and to incorporate new signposting. The final design to ensure that road safety is considered at key pedestrian crossing points to ensure safe links to new development.	✓
(6) Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	Final design should ensure circular routes lead from parking area.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(7) Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of the walking routes	Final design to ensure walking routes contain some open areas. All sections of routes within proposed wooded or scrub areas to be maintained to ensure sight lines into and along routes.	✓
(8) Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	Final design to ensure appropriate path network is provided. Some surfaced areas may be required, especially at entrance points, using appropriate natural materials (self-binding gravel or similar).	✓
(9) Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion from artificial structures	Hedgerows and woodland should be reinstated along the B1383 on the western boundary to act as a noise and visual buffer where there are existing gaps.	✓
(10) All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience	Size of SANG is 8.6ha but no significant constraints identified to provide a variety of new habitats on existing agricultural land which could include wildflower meadows, ponds, enhanced hedgerows and deciduous woodland.	✓
(11) Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	Capacity for the site to have unrestricted access in the long term.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following SANG interventions (✓ ×)
(12) SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells).	No nearby features likely to cause unpleasant intrusions. Although buffer planting along the eastern boundary will likely be required to limit the influence of the adjacent road.	✓

Chapter 7

Land East of Highwood Quarry

7.1 1,200 homes have been consented at Land East of Highwood Quarry which will be delivered within the new Local Plan period. The development is in a broader area associated with Easton Park. A new country park within a wider Easton Park opportunity area was identified as an opportunity (opportunity 8) within the Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023). A Vision for a country park at Easton Park has also been put forward by a local campaign group Stop Easton Park (SEP). There may be an opportunity for a country park to come forward in this broad location in future which would need to provide good connections to the East of Highwood Quarry development and form part of an integrated network, alongside open space provided as part of the consented scheme.

7.2 The consent for East of Highwood quarry does not formally have any requirements associated with SANG provision but a revised, final layout and detailed design for the scheme (as required by the consent) is yet to be submitted. UDC and Natural England will expect the final design of the scheme to indicate an appropriate area of SANG provision that meets the Natural England SANG quality guidelines. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) for the consented scheme indicates that 86 ha of open space is provided within the development boundary, however this includes all areas of undeveloped land and will also be used to meet other policy requirements (e.g. for BNG, play space, public realm, access etc.).

7.3 It is beyond the Brief for this study to undertake a detailed review of SANG opportunities at East of Highwood Quarry. However, a review of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) indicates that there is likely to be capacity to provide sufficient SANG, in an appropriate location, to meet SANG requirements. Other obligations are set out within the Section 106 agreement for the scheme which could have some implications on the extent and location of SANG provision and how any SANG provision may be incorporated within the design. It recommended that the developers engage with Natural England through the

Discretionary Advice Service during the development of the detailed plans to ensure that proposals for SANG meet requirements.

7.4 Consideration should also be given to the Council's commitment to develop a country park in the Easton Park opportunity area in the future (see **Chapter 8**). Future open space in the Easton Park opportunity area would benefit from good access and landscape connectivity within and from the East of Highwood Quarry scheme.

Chapter 8

Easton Park opportunity area profile and baseline assessment

Context & summary of site history

8.1 The opportunity area is located broadly in the central southern area of Uttlesford, with London Stansted Airport to the west and the settlement of Great Dunmow to the east.

8.2 A new country park within the wider Easton Park opportunity area was identified as an opportunity (opportunity 8) within the Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023). A Vision for a country park at Easton Park has also been put forward by the local campaign group Stop Easton Park (SEP) as well as the Trustees of the Easton Lodge historic gardens and estate. There is still a long-term aspiration to provide new significant open space at the opportunity area in the future. Development and land use change at the site will be expected to contribute towards bringing forward a new open space at Easton Park. This will need to be informed by a detailed understanding of the heritage significance of the site and fit well with any proposed future development in this location.

8.3 The following section provides a high level baseline assessment of key constraints and opportunities at this general location.

Environmental considerations

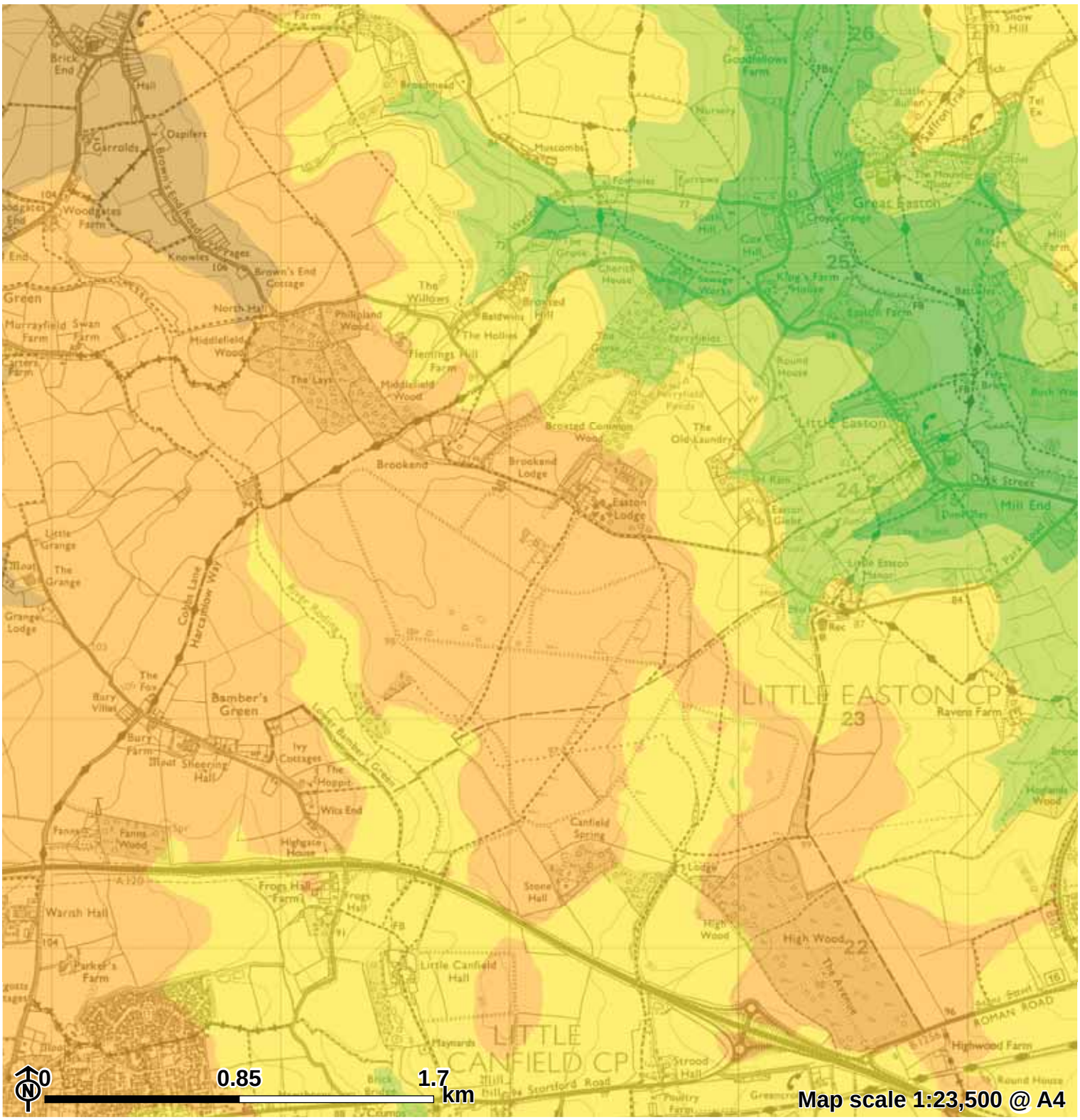
Landscape

8.4 As set out in Uttlesford's Landscape Character Assessment (2023), the majority of the opportunity area at Easton Park is within LCA B5: Broxted Farming Plateau. This LCA is characterised by gently undulating plateau farmland, with a strong sense of openness and long views across arable farmland. The opportunity area reflects these characteristics. Gently sloping arable land is higher towards the west (at just under 100m AOD) sloping towards around 80m AOD in the east (see **Figure 8.1**). Large scale, hedged field boundaries dissect the Grade 2 agricultural land which dominates the land use across the site (see **Figure 8.2**) though evidence of the previous wartime airfield uses are also apparent.

8.5 Several important views both within and outside of the site are noted, looking towards the village of Little Easton, mainly from the south across open countryside featuring the prominent historic water tower on the skyline. Views from country lanes towards heritage assets are particularly sensitive. **[See reference** 26**]**. The design of any future open space will need to protect and enhance any key views through appropriate tree planting, location of routes and creation of viewpoints.

8.6 Highwood quarry in the south east is a working quarry, which reduces the sense of tranquillity within the area. Dust from the quarry and noise associated with quarry workings and presence of large vehicles accessing the site may potentially negatively impact on the use of the site as open space without sufficient mitigation / buffering. End of use restoration requirements for the quarry will provide opportunities to enhance landscaping through appropriate incorporation of habitats and reinstatement of historic routes, tree pattern and field boundaries.

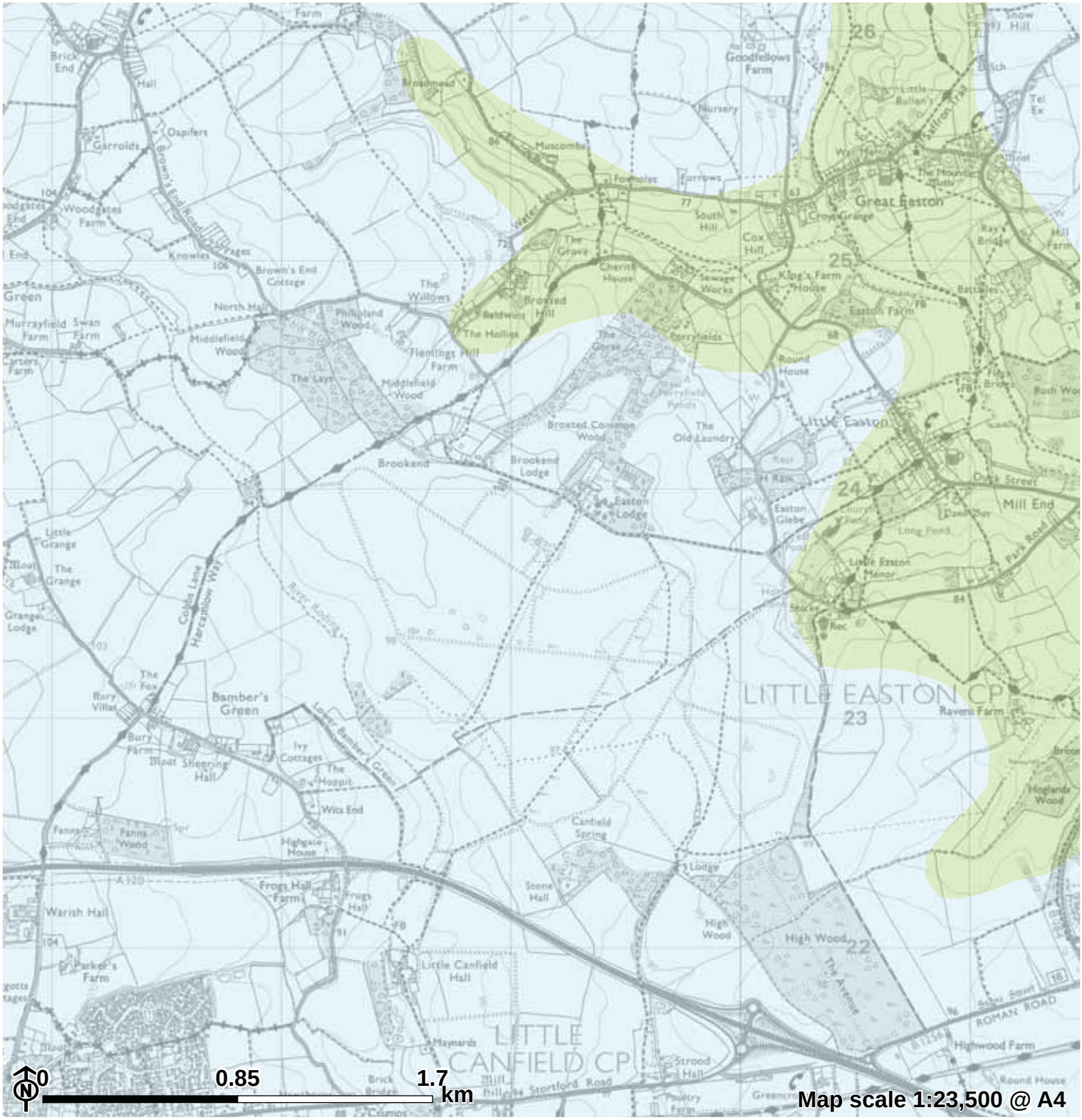
Figure 8.1: Topography - Easton Park opportunity area



Height above sea level (m)

- 48 - 60
- 61 - 72
- 73 - 83
- 84 - 95
- 96 - 106
- 107 - 118

Figure 8.2: Agricultural Land Classifications - Easton Park opportunity area



Agricultural Land Classification

- Grade 2
- Grade 3

Biodiversity

8.7 The majority of habitats within the opportunity area are arable, with limited biodiversity value, save for farmland birds which may require targeted conservation efforts. Before Easton Park can be considered as a country park a review of the existing habitats and species on site is required to consider their sensitivity to an increase in recreational access and means to avoid or mitigate negative impacts. Species reliant on open and undisturbed habitats include, for example, skylark.

8.8 Hedgerows forming field boundaries provide connectivity across the landscape. Scattered within and around the site, there are some important woodland blocks, including areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland, including Middlefield Wood in the north and High Wood in the south. Many of the woodland blocks in and around the opportunity area include those identified as priority habitat for deciduous woodland and those identified as Important Woodlands within the local plan. Ancient and Veteran Tree irreplaceable habitats are likely to be present throughout the area.

8.9 The opportunity area is part of the wider 'West Essex Forest and Woodland Cluster'; a project identified via The Big Green Internet **[See reference** 27**]**) and which is likely to be adopted into the Essex LNRS **[See reference** 28**]** which extends ambitiously from Epping Forest up to Thaxted.

8.10 The site is within the Hatfield Forest Zone of Influence. This highlights the potential of the site to support the ecological dynamics of Hatfield Forest, presenting the opportunity to expand the unique habitat types associated with this ancient forest.

8.11 Adjacent to the site, High Wood Dunmow SSSI contains mixed lowland deciduous woodland. The wood has been assessed by Natural England (as per NE survey criteria – see **Appendix C**) as being in 'unfavourable – no change' condition **[See reference** 29**]** partly due to forestry and deer browsing **[See**

reference 30**]**. The potential impact of increased recreational pressure must be assessed and specific measures to avoid impact on the SSSI implemented.

8.12 It would be beneficial to engage with the landowner at Highwood SSSI and Stone Hall to explore opportunities to improve habitat management and sensitive public access at existing areas of woodland.

8.13 Other nearby designations include two Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS): Little Easton Airfield and Middlefield Wood. The Little Easton Airfield site includes strips of wildflower grassland as well as some deciduous woodland with regionally scarce species including yellow rattle, tufted hair-grass and bush-grass. These benefit grassland species, such as insects, butterflies, small mammals and birds, providing them with food and shelter. The verges are also important in linking otherwise isolated areas of habitats, becoming 'wildlife corridors' allowing species to move between them.

8.14 Wood pasture is present in the north east, around Easton Lodge. This is identified as a core site for wood pasture and parkland within Natural England's Habitat Network. Surrounding this, much of the land within the northern section of the opportunity area is within Natural England's Habitat Networks Network Enhancements Zones 1 and 2 and the Network Expansion Zone. This indicates that locations within the broad area are either considered:

- Likely to be suitable for habitat recreation of particular habitat types (Network Enhancement Zone 1). In this case wood pasture and parkland.
- Possible areas for other types of habitat, land management enhancements or delivery of suitable Green Infrastructure (Network Enhancement Zone 2).
- Possible locations for connecting and linking up networks across a landscape (Network Expansion Zone).

8.15 The close proximity of the area to nearby ponds (e.g. Horse Pond, Weir Pond and Great Pond) may offer potential for strengthening the existing network of wetland habitats and which could also be considered as part of future quarry

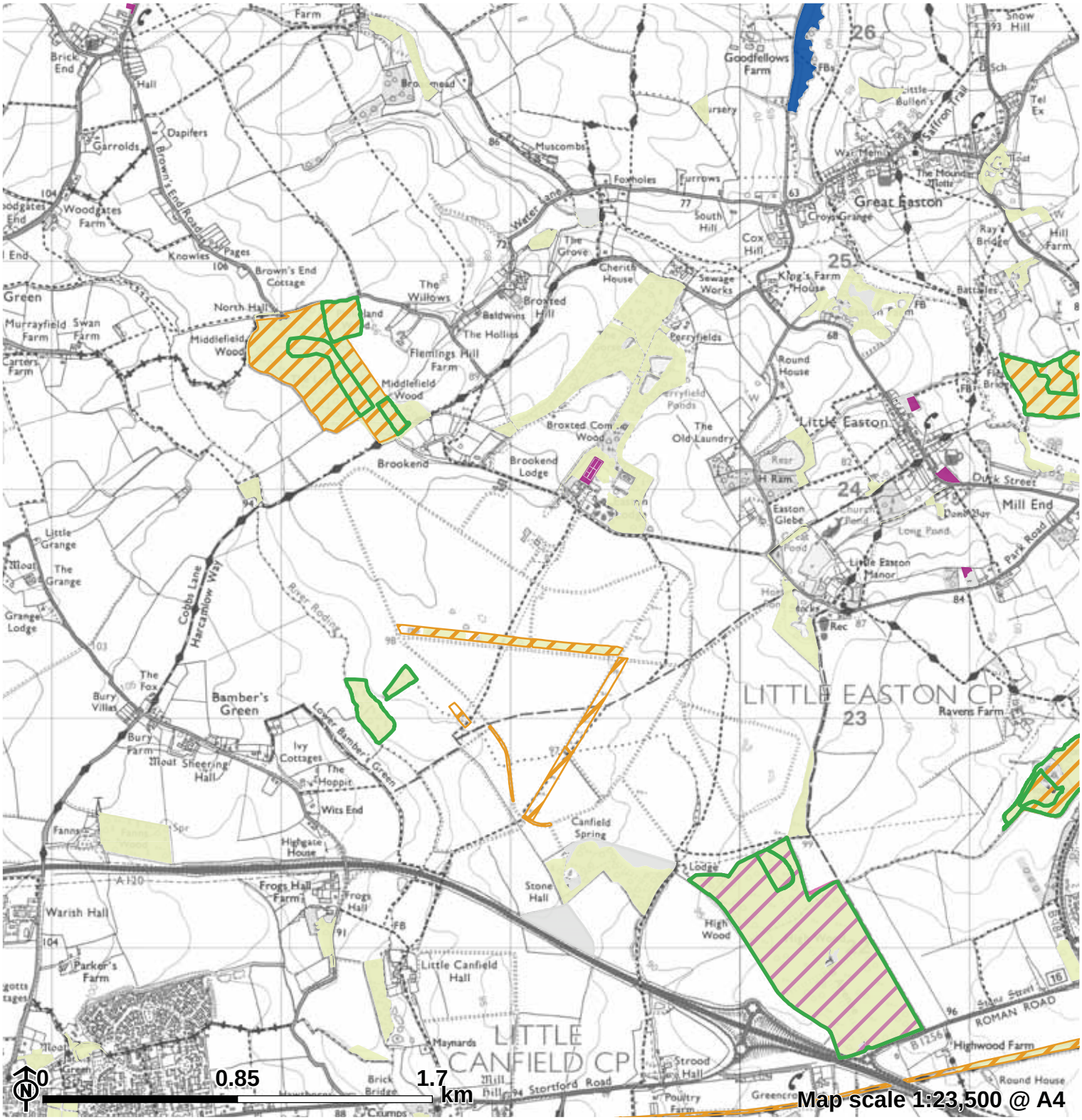
restoration plans. The River Roding flows within the western section of the broad area.

8.16 The Working with Natural Process (WWNP) dataset (which provides evidence and spatially prioritises locations for natural flood management interventions) highlights the potential of riparian woodland restoration in this area **[See reference** 31**]**. River enhancements should refer to the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) through the relevant catchment partnership; Essex Rivers Hub **[See reference** 32**]**.

8.17 As the site is within the 13km wildlife buffer that is in place for Stansted Airport, the Airport Authority will need to be consulted on any landscaping schemes which may have the potential to increase bird strike (in accordance with Aerodrome Safeguarding).

8.18 Figure 8.3 and **Figure 8.4** provide an overview of habitats and ecological opportunities.

Figure 8.3: Ecology and habitats - Easton Park opportunity area



Statutory

- Site of Special Scientific Interest

Non-statutory

- Local wildlife site

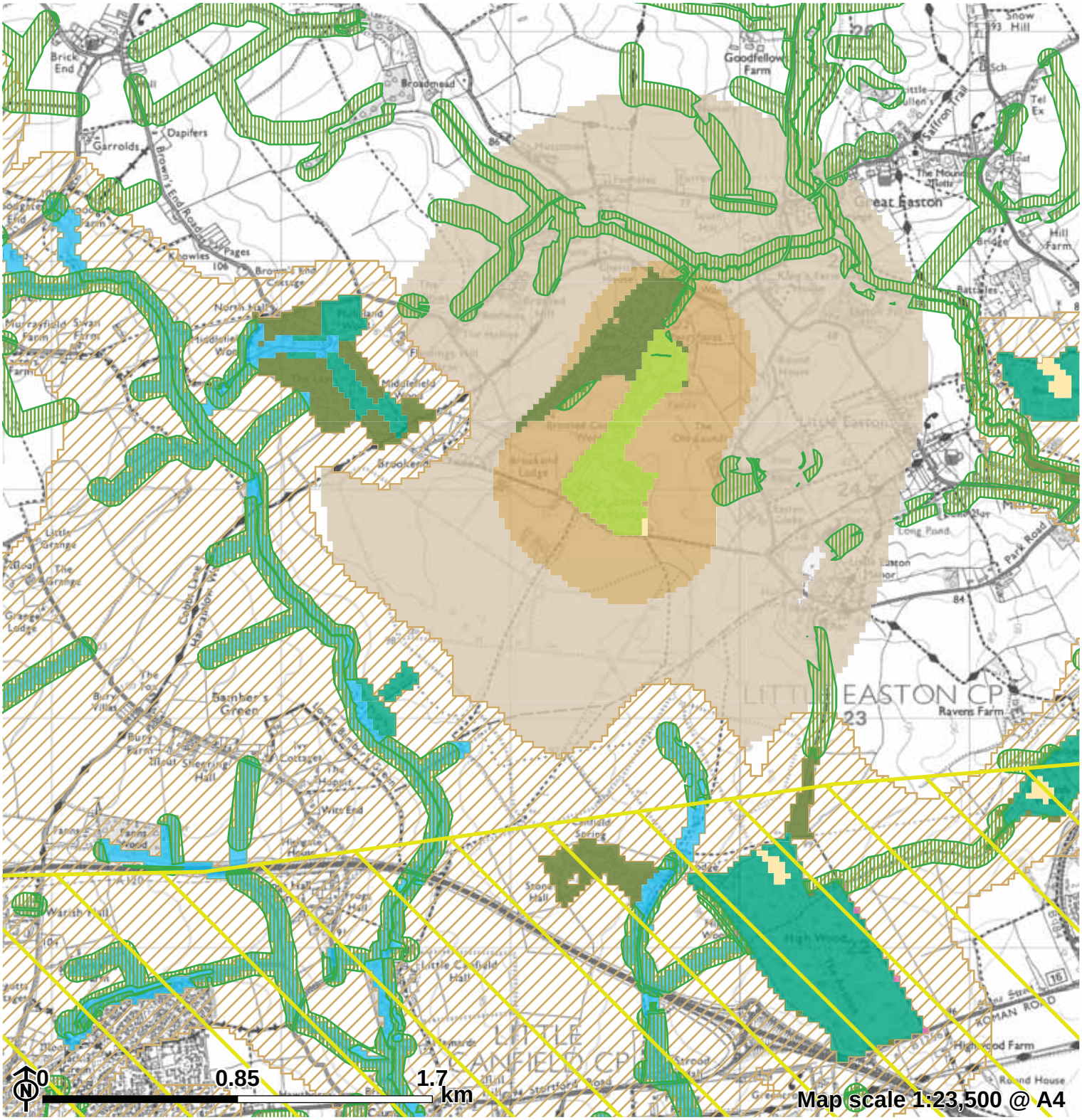
Other

- Ancient Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory

- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland
- No main habitat but additional habitats present
- Traditional orchard

Figure 8.4: Ecological opportunities - Easton Park opportunity area



- B-line*
- Riparian Woodland Potential

Habitat Network

- Ancient woodland
- Watercourses
- Wood pasture and parkland
- Other priority habitat
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Restorable Habitat
- Network Enhancement Zone 1
- Network Enhancement Zone 2
- Network Expansion Zone

*B-lines are networks of insect pathways which connect the wildflower-rich habitats of the UK.

Heritage

8.19 The broad opportunity area is focused on what was previously a parkland and designed landscape associated with Easton Lodge. Easton Lodge is a Victorian Gothic Style stately home that replaced an earlier Elizabethan mansion, which had itself replaced an earlier hunting lodge. The landholdings associated with the earlier buildings were extensive (10,000 acres) and in the 1700s the land from Easton Lodge in the north and the southern extent of High Wood (now SSSI) had been laid out in line with late 'Patte d'oie' design; the distinctive feature being tree lined avenues or paths that radiate out from a central point (suggestive of a 'goose foot' shape). Frances 'Daisy' Maynard (the Countess of Warwick) inherited Easton Lodge and the estate from her father and in 1902 commissioned Harold Peto to redesign the gardens around the house (much of which is now under the management of the Gardens of Easton Lodge Preservation Trust).

Harold Peto (born 1854) originally trained and practiced as an architect but turned to landscape architecture and garden design later in life. He was influenced by the Italian Renaissance and the Arts and Crafts movement, both of which informed much of his architectural and landscape design. Most of Peto's better known landscape design commissions were undertaken between 1900 and 1914 including Easton Lodge, West Dean House, Hartham Park and Bourton Hall. Ilford Manor was Peto's permanent base and home from 1899 where he tested and refined his landscape design through re-design and expansion of the garden. Restoration work on Peto's design at Easton Lodge has been undertaken over several years by the Gardens of Easton Lodge Preservation trust, which is ongoing. The gardens remain an important example of Harold Peto's style and influences.

8.20 Historic mapping shows the parkland associated with Easton Lodge stretching south to High Wood and the current A120 through the 19th century.

8.21 The wider estate of Easton Lodge was requisitioned by the War Office and in 1942-43 a significant number of trees were felled within 'Easton Park' to create Great Dunmow Airfield (now Little Easton Airfield LoWS). The layout of the old airfield is still evident through existing access tracks and areas of scrub and woodland in the location of the landing strips.

8.22 During the intervening years since the airfield became disused, parts of the original estate have been sold and the core area around the original house is in private ownership. Large areas of what was the original estate has been managed for agriculture and the remaining West Wing of Easton Lodge is privately owned. The majority of the original estate (including the formal designed gardens surrounding the present lodge) were sold to Land Securities in 2004 and the Gardens of Easton Lodge Preservation Trust continue to manage parts of the designed gardens under a lease agreement with Land Securities. The Gardens are designated Grade II on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England and listed on the Heritage at Risk Register. The designated area comprises the gardens and pleasure grounds directly around Easton Lodge between the drive from Park Road at the south to Perry Field Pond to the north and does not include what would have been the wider estate and park, which now only survives in remnant outline.

8.23 The creation of a country park would provide an opportunity to develop a cohesive plan to conserve and enhance the setting of remnant features, reinstate elements of the historic landscape that have been degraded or lost and provide interpretation to help reveal the history of the site. The Historic England list entry **[See reference** 33**]** provides information on a range of features with the Registered Park and Garden and the wider landscape, including:

- Entrances and approaches: Easton Lodge is approached from the east via Little Easton Village. Other drives approaches previously existed but were destroyed when the airfield was developed. A listed grade II brick archway gatehouse survives to the south of High Wood (under other ownership), and there was previously a drive which connected it to the house.
- Principal building by the architect Philip Tilden. Various wings of the previous buildings (Elizabethan, Jacobean, Victorian) were either

destroyed by fire or pulled down and the Tilden building was a rebuild of only the West Wing. C19 stable yard cottages (grade II), stables, former coach house, wash house, red bricked water tower (grade II) and a servants house are located to the west of the lodge. Stone Hall (grade II*) was previously part of the wider estate and is on the western edge of the former park within an area of woodland.

- Pleasure gardens and grounds: comprising terrace beds, formal pool and pavilion, dovecote, 'bosquet' – likely contemporary with the Elizabethan house but added to as part of the Peto design. Some components of the Harold Peto design survive in part and have been restored in places including pergolas, croquet lawn, sunken Italian garden, Japanese gardens (which previously incorporated Perryfield Ponds prior to the lease to Dunmow Fishing Club). A kitchen garden lies to the north of the lodge. **[See reference** 34**]**.

8.24 In the east, there are a cluster of listed buildings and an archaeological site within Little Easton Conservation Area. This includes several grade II listed buildings, as well as the grade I listed Church of St Mary the Virgin. The conservation area is characterised by landscaped ponds within small woodland blocks, as well as a cluster of historic buildings around the church. North of the conservation area, additional listed buildings include grade II* listed Eastern Glebe.

8.25 Several sites of archaeological interest are recorded. This includes an area around the cluster of listed features within the Registered Park and Garden, and to the south of the opportunity area around Stone Hall. A 2018 assessment of archaeological potential for the Easton Park area assessed the Easton Park area as having high archaeological potential for Bronze Age archaeology, Iron Age, Roman Period and the Medieval Period, and moderate potential for Saxon and Post Medieval Period archaeology.

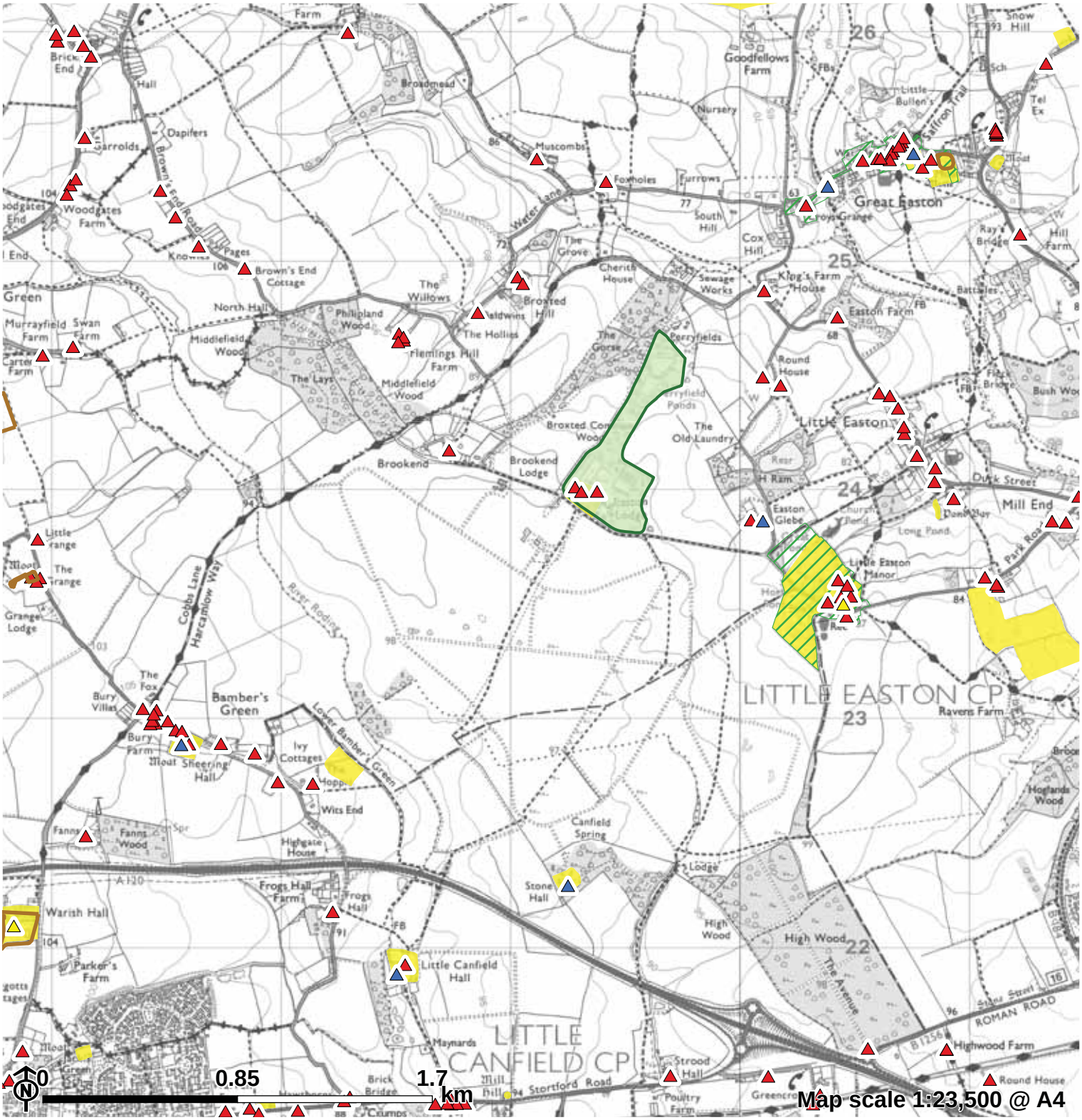
8.26 The creation of a country park will provide the opportunity to exploit and restore the historic parkland associated with Easton Lodge, connecting remnant features with the re-instatement of parkland features, habitats and routes, including historic avenues. Reinstating the historic character to this part of the

landscape will also enhance the historic setting of the Registered Park and Garden, Little Easton Conservation Area and several listed buildings.

8.27 Any future development and potential new open space should be informed by an understanding of the heritage significance of the designed landscape, heritage features and potential archaeology. Further work will need to be undertaken such as the development of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) and spatial plan to inform the future layout and design of the site.

8.28 Figure 8.5 provides an overview of the historic environment and heritage considerations.

Figure 8.5: Historic environment / heritage - Easton Park opportunity area



Statutory

- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Scheduled Monuments

Listed building (grade)

- I
- II*
- II

Non-statutory

- Archeaological Site
- Conservation Area

Hydrology

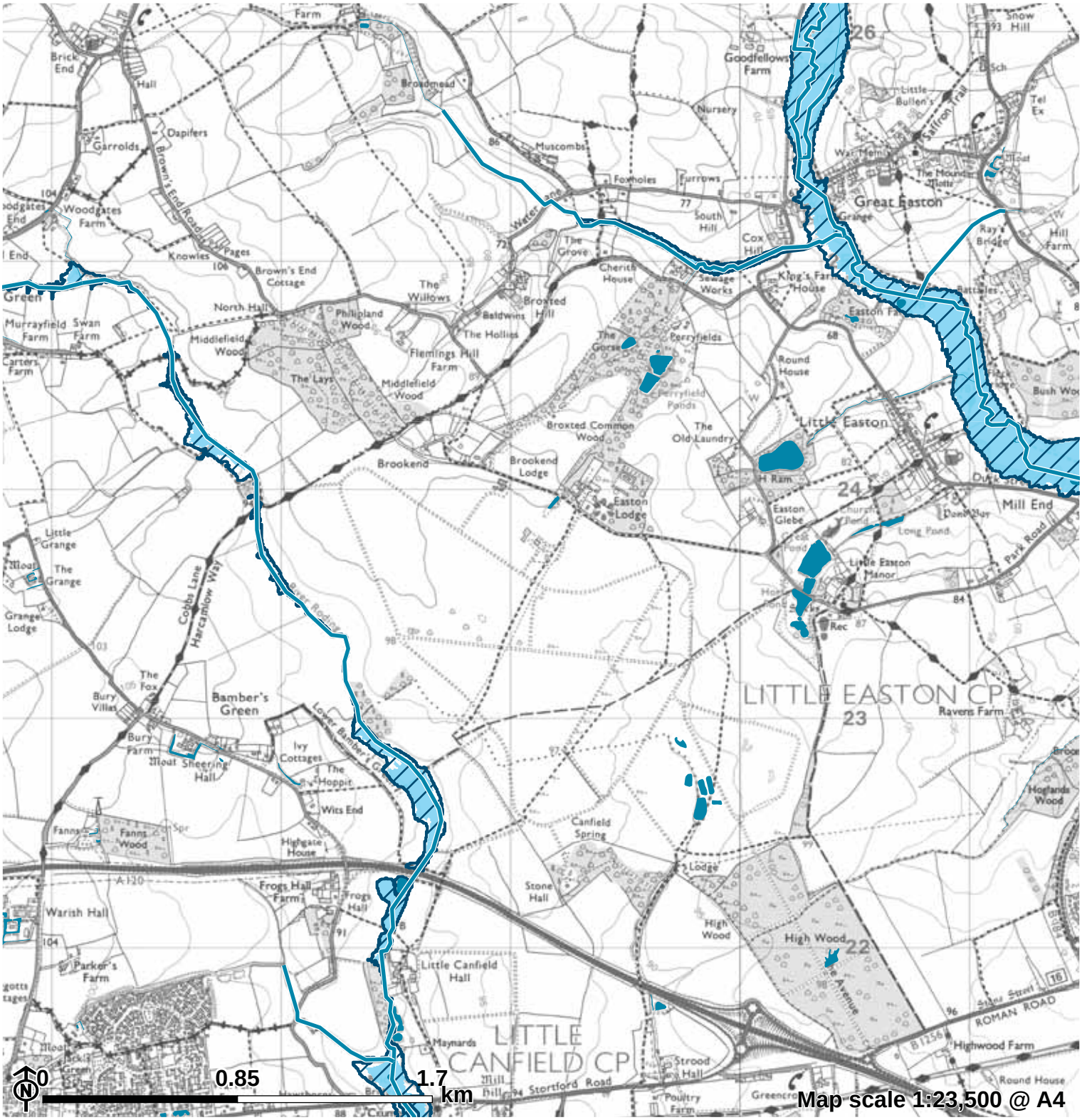
8.29 In the west, the opportunity area adjoins the River Roding. This forms the upper part of the catchment and at this point the watercourse is not classified within the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Classification for the River Roding further downstream is Moderate, indicating that action is needed to achieve acceptable ecological condition. The chemical status of the River Roding downstream is at a fail status, indicating chemical and nutrient run-off and discharge within the catchment. A suite of measures will likely be required to improve the status of water courses within the catchment. A reduction in agricultural run-off, appropriate ecological enhancements and habitat creation within a new open space would support a wider landscape scale approach to enhance water quality.

8.30 There is limited flood risk associated with the watercourse. The 2012 update to the River Roding Flood Management Strategy recommended reducing maintenance of flood defences in the upper reaches of the River Roding. This catchment has also been identified as low prioritisation for Natural Flood Management (NFM).

8.31 The north and east of the opportunity area are within the River Chelmer Catchment. This catchment has been identified as having a high priority for using NFM to reduce flood risk downstream.

8.32 Figure 8.6 provides an overview of the blue network and flood risk.

Figure 8.6 Blue network and flood risk - Easton Park opportunity area



Access and connectivity

8.33 Access to open space shows that residential areas around Takeley and Great Dunmow are within a 15-minute walk of natural and semi-natural green space. However, the smaller settlements of Little Easton and Bambers Green are deficient in access to natural green space, which could be addressed through the provision of additional green space.

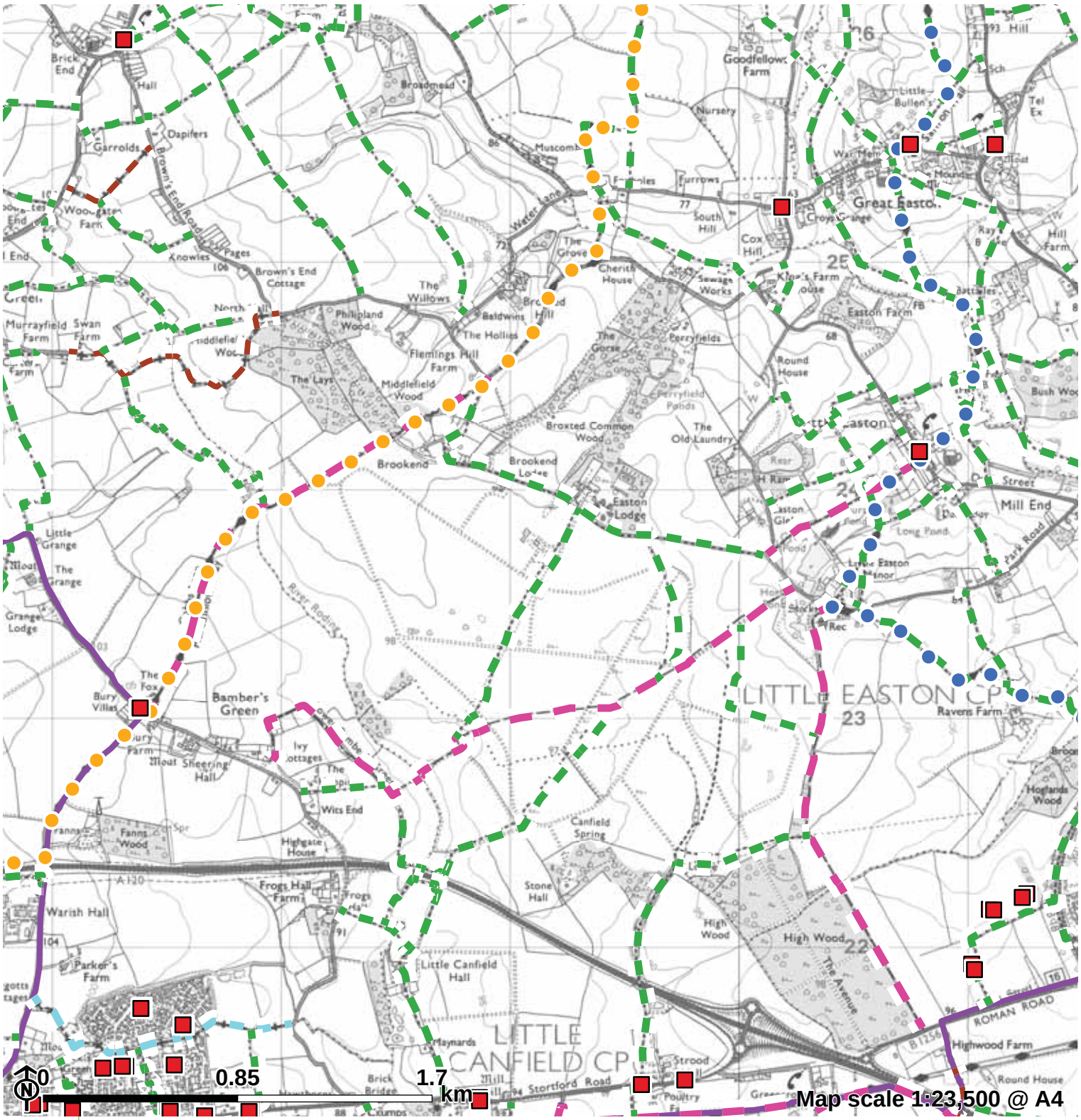
8.34 Existing access into Easton Lodge Gardens is from the east. This access is primarily along country lanes (e.g. Park Road, Laundry Lane). Significant additional vehicle access along this route would be inappropriate. Future proposed vehicle access to the consented residential scheme (Land East of Highwood Quarry) could potentially provide access to a future country park from the A120. Parking and other access infrastructure could also be considered as part of restoration plans at the quarry. Transport assessments would need to be undertaken to understand the impacts of vehicle entrance points if there were a future change of use.

8.35 There are a number of existing public rights of way within the site. This includes routes which provide access from surrounding communities including Bamber's Green, Great Dunmow and Little Easton. The site is within close proximity to several long distance promoted routes and green corridors at Harcamlow Way and Flitch Way.

8.36 A key historic access point and route to Easton Lodge from the south through High Wood SSSI is privately owned. Future use of the site could consider re-instating some of the historic routes and rides across the core historic parkland area.

8.37 Figure 8.7 provides an overview of access and connectivity.

Figure 8.7: Access and connectivity: Active travel and public transport - Easton Park opportunity area



- National Cycle Network
- Bus stop

Public Right of Way

- Bridleway
- Byway
- Footpath
- Restricted Byway

Long distance walking route

- Harcamlow Way
- Saffron Trail

Other key considerations

Population and development

- Existing settlements would benefit from access to a county park in this location including:
    - Great Dunmow to the east (population of 10,624 - 2021)
    - Takeley (to the south west (population of 5,299 - 2021) **[See reference** 35**]**
- Several development sites allocated in the new Local Plan are within easy reach of the opportunity area including East of Highwood Quarry, residential development at Takeley and an employment allocation (south of the A120).

Land ownership

- Further work will need to undertaken to identify key stakeholders and surrounding land owners:
    - The majority of the opportunity area has been owned by Land Securities since 2004.
    - The Easton Lodge Gardens area leased out by Land Securities to The Gardens of Easton Lodge Trust **[See reference** 36**]**.
    - There are several private residential properties and agricultural buildings within the opportunity area.

Utilities

8.38 Utilities may present constraints for some types of interventions and development (e.g. to maintain minimum offset distances from the pipeline route) and there will be a requirement to consult with utilities companies:

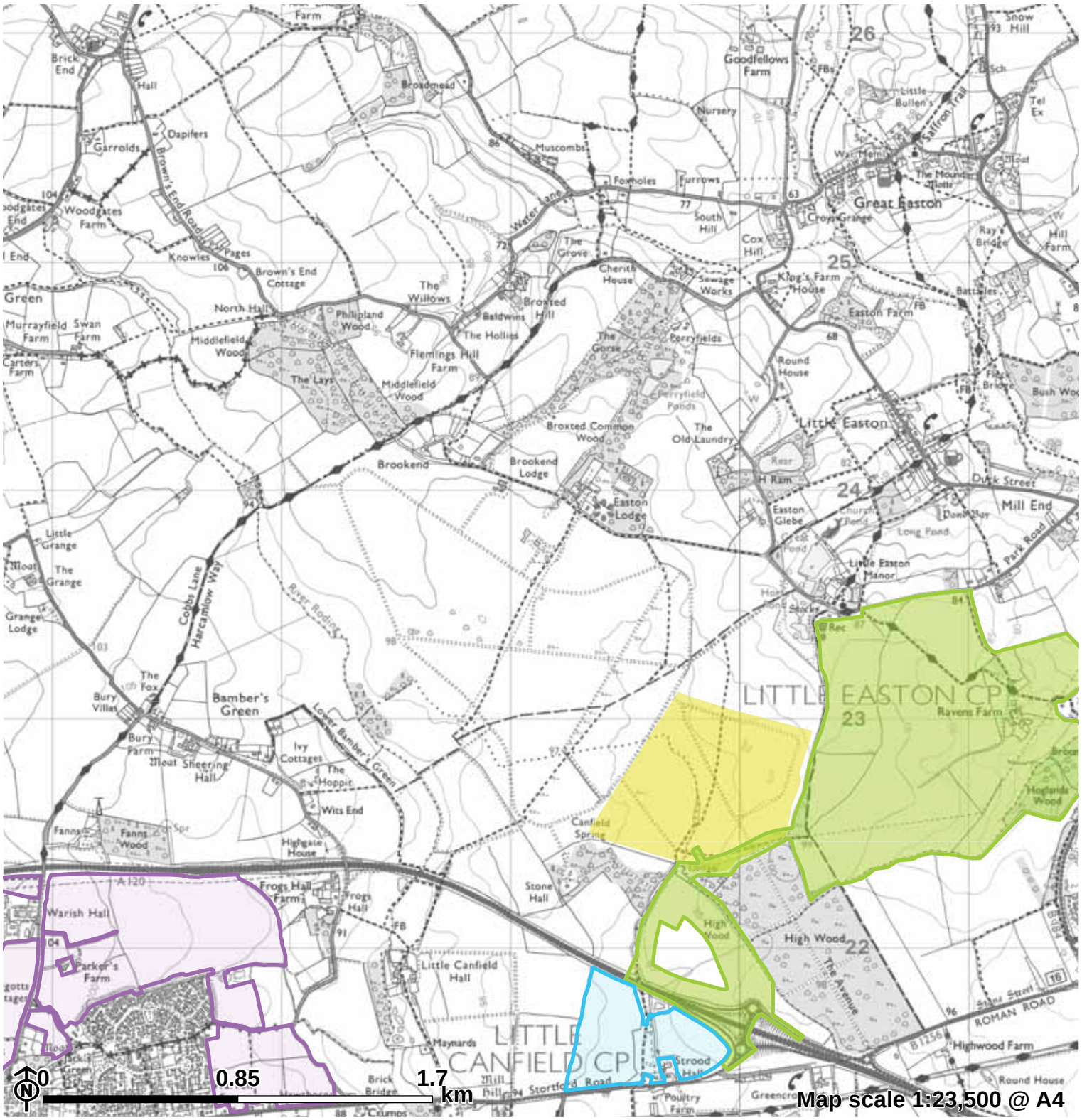
- There is a gas pipeline crossing the site north to south just east of the River Roding.

Other land use

- High Wood quarry, in the south east, is a working quarry. An application to extend the quarry to the west has been put forward within the Essex Regulation 18 Waste and Minerals Plan **[See reference** 37**]**.

8.39 Figure 8.8 provides an overview of planned growth and development.

Figure 8.8: Growth and development - Easton Park opportunity area



- Site allocation
- Proposed employment site
- Land East of Highwood Quarry proposed development
- Highwood quarry

Recommendations: Easton Park

8.40 It is an aspiration of UDC to deliver a new country park within the broad Easton Park area which will provide access to natural green space and could in the future provide mitigation for recreational impact at Hatfield Forest. The development of a new country park in this area would also provide significant opportunities to protect, enhance and re-instate remnant historic features and enhance the ecological value of the area. Whilst delivery constraints and landownership factors prevent delivery in the short term, it is expected that it will be considered in more detail as part of the next Local Plan process, to be adopted c. 2030/31

8.41 Following the baseline assessment, an opportunity area has been defined, informed by historic land use and landscape features (**Figure 8.9**). It is recommended that further work is undertaken to understand the historic development of the site, the evolution of the landscape and habitats, and significance of its component parts. It would be beneficial to develop a spatial plan or conservation plan to cover the broad opportunity area to guide future use, development of the site and planning decisions. This should consider the multiple ownerships of historic assets associated with the Easton Park area and should be developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

8.42 A future spatial plan or conservation plan should inform any future development proposals, including the design, layout, and location of any built development, open space or delivery of BNG. Future planning policy associated with the Easton Park opportunity area should set out:

- Requirements for the development of a spatial plan or conservation plan informed by assessments of significance of heritage assets, biodiversity value and an understanding of the historic development of the site.
- Requirements to deliver open space that meets the needs of the local area, expected population increase and to meet Natural England country park criteria as a minimum. Proposals will also need to set out how SANGs provision will be met.

- That the character and design of any open space should reflect and aim to reinstate and reveal aspects of the historic designed landscape and enhance the setting of heritage assets. This should consider aspects such as key views, circulation, access, historic tree pattern, habitat features / biodiversity and land use.
- Requirements to ensure good connectivity to adjacent open space, such as proposed open space at Land East of Highwood Quarry.

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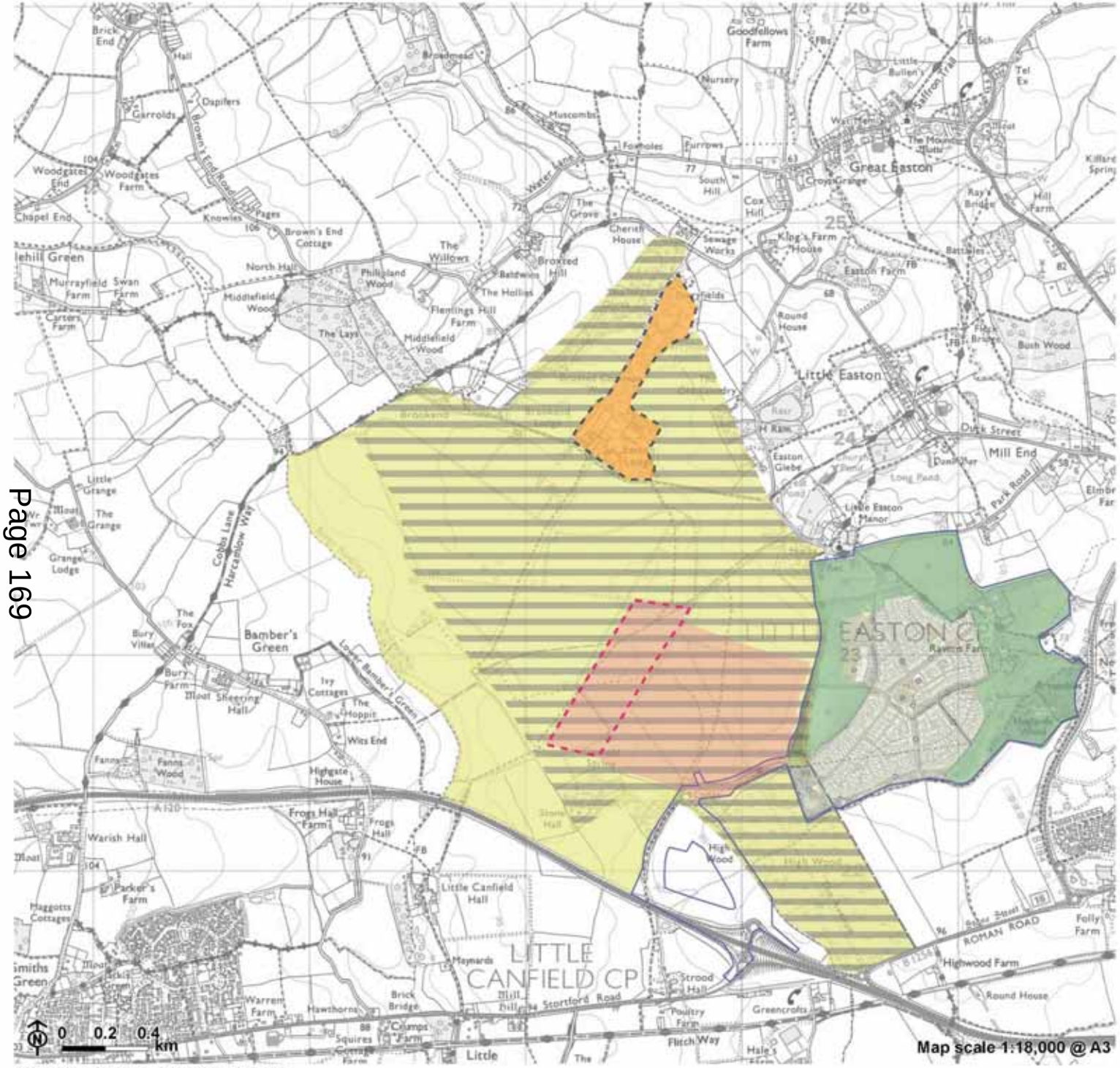
Figure 8.9: Easton Park Opportunity Area



Chapter 9

Saffron Walden opportunity area profile and baseline assessment

Context

9.1 The opportunity area is located to the south east of Saffron Walden, to the north of Thaxted Road (B184). Knight Park shopping centre and Saffron Walden recycling centre are located to the west. To the north it is bounded by private land and a section of Cole End Lane to the east. The remaining site of the proposed country park follows field boundaries and all of it is currently used for agriculture.

9.2 This area falls out with the Hatfield Forest ZoI and therefore is not required to contribute to SANG provision for the Forest. However, it adjoins of the strategic site allocations to the east of Saffron Walden and would contribute to meeting the need for access to semi-natural greenspace in this part of the District.

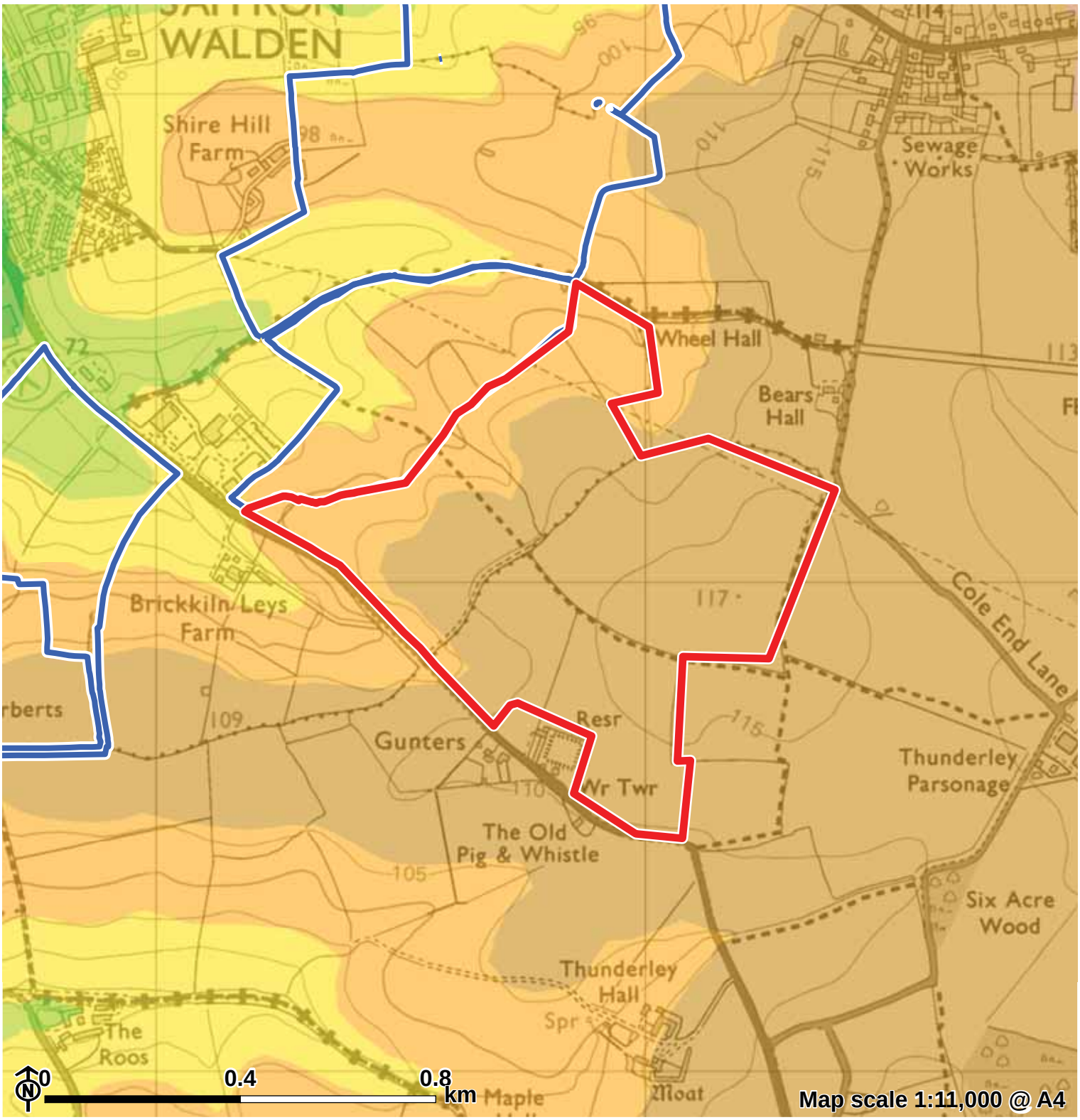
9.3 The following section provides a high level baseline review to establish the key constraints and opportunities for developing a country park at the opportunity area. The baseline review focuses on the opportunity area indicated on figures 9.1 to 9.8. Some open space or sports facilities will likely be delivered within the red line boundary of the development allocation directly adjacent to the north. Areas within the opportunity area have the potential to form an extension to open space within the development allocation, potentially forming a larger country park site.

Landscape

9.4 As set out in Uttlesford's Landscape Character Assessment (2023), the majority of the area falls within LCAB3: Debden Farmland Plateau. This LCA is characterised by rolling plateau farmland, with considerable woodland coverage. The opportunity area largely matches the characteristics of rolling plateau farmland. There is gentle gradient across the area rising from 95m in the north to a crest at 117m in the centre and declining gently to 110m in the south (see **Figure 9.1**). The area has medium to largescale field sizes which support intensive arable farming. Fields are dominated by pre-18th century irregular boundaries, most of which are lined by hedgerows. Most of these hedgerows feature remnant trees, which have greater density along the northern boundary. Chalky boulder clay geology with glacial deposits has resulted in loamy soils and the entire area is classed as grade 2 (very good) agricultural land (see **Figure 9.2**).

9.5 There are no landscape designations within the opportunity area.

Figure 9.1: Topography - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area

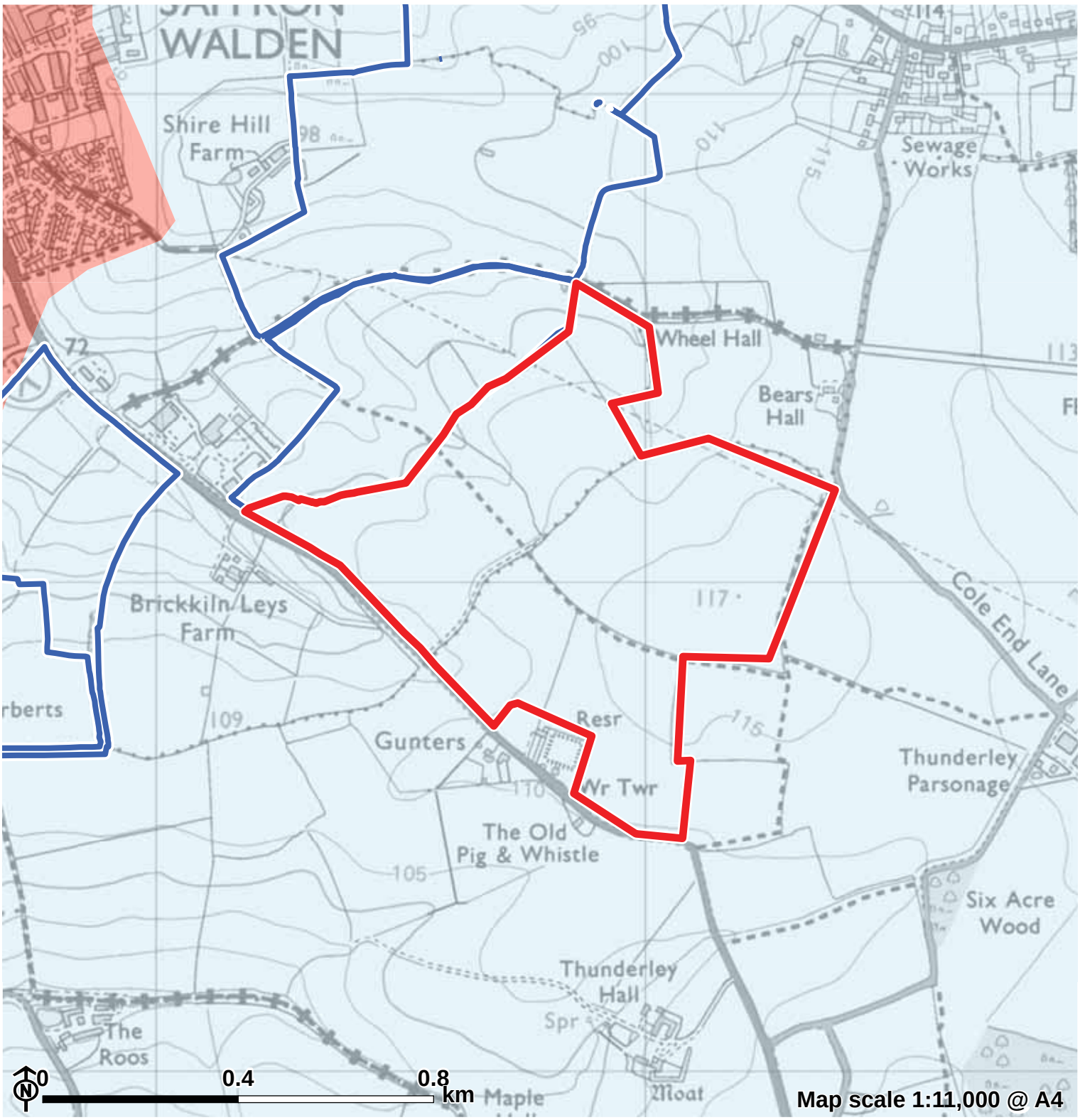


- Country Park opportunity area
- Development allocation

Height above sea level (m)

- 61 - 72
- 73 - 83
- 84 - 95
- 96 - 106
- 107 - 118
- 119 - 134

Figure 9.2: Agricultural Land Classifications - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



Country Park opportunity area

Development allocation

Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 2

Urban

Biodiversity

9.6 The entirety of the area is arable land providing limited biodiversity value except for farmland birds. The existing hedgerows and remnant trees provide ecological connectivity across the landscape. Additionally, a significant amount of the Special Roadside Verges (SRV) in Essex are situated around Saffron Walden; they represent a significant biodiversity asset as remnants of larger grasslands, managed under species-specific cutting programmes. These sites represent the most significant stock of chalk grassland plant species remaining in Essex.

9.7 There are no statutory or non-statutory designated sites within the opportunity area. There are several county wildlife sites within a 1km buffer of the site including Pounce Wood and Martins Wood to the north, Crowney Wood and Harrison's Wood to the south east and Peverel's Wood to the south. Fulfen Slade Lane to the south and Wimbish Lanes to the east are also within this buffer area. Six Acre Wood to the south east is a broadleaved woodland, identified as an important woodland within the previous Local Plan (2005). Ancient and Veteran Tree irreplaceable habitats are likely to be present.

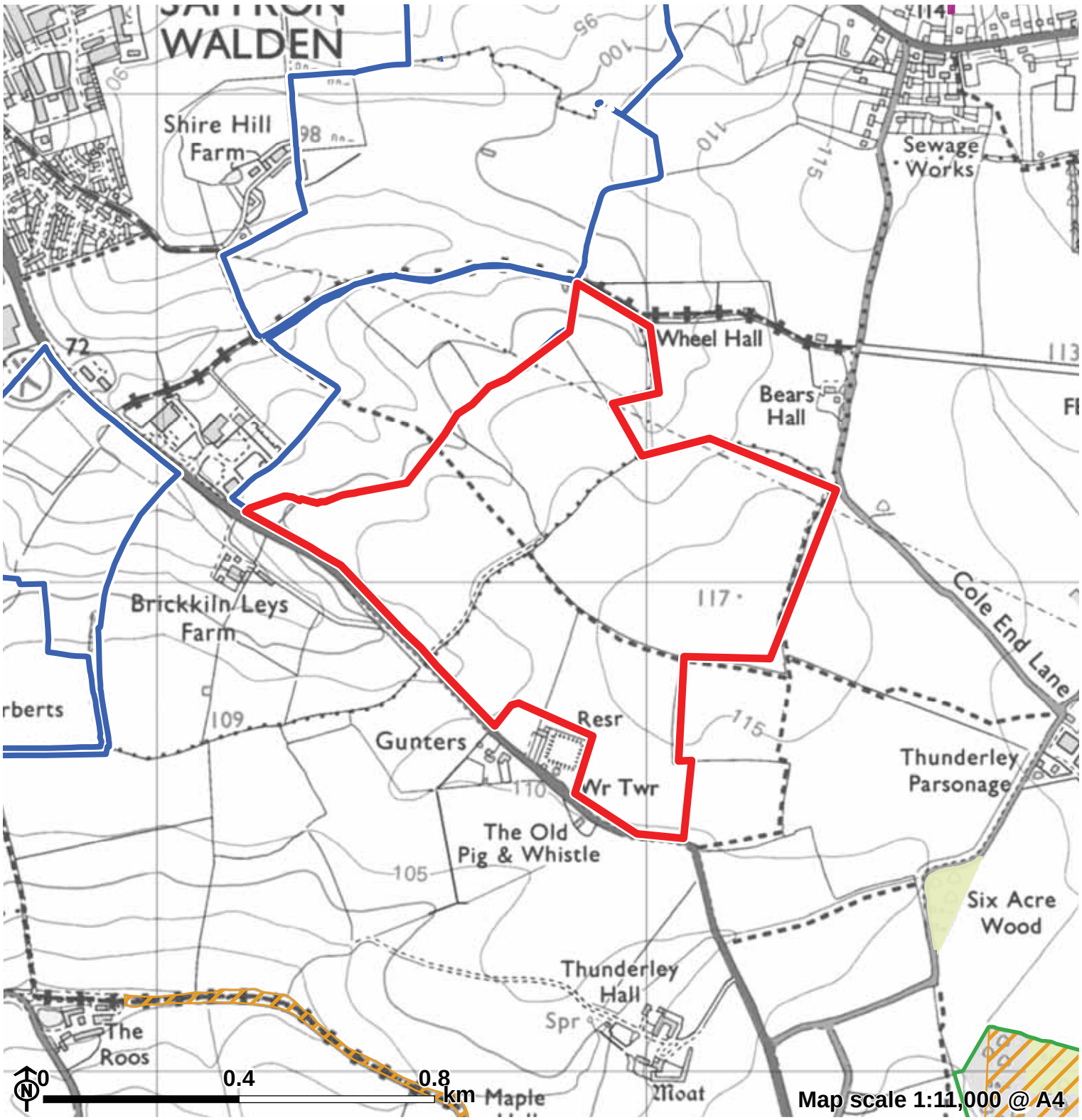
9.8 Natural England's Habitat Network dataset classifies the area as Network Enhancement Zone 2 (priority areas for habitat creation, land management enhancement & Green Infrastructure to strengthen the network of existing habitats). This indicates that targeted interventions can significantly improve ecological connectivity and support a broader range of species by linking isolated habitats with larger conservation networks. There is a key opportunity to join up woodland areas, connecting county wildlife sites, areas of ancient woodland and priority deciduous woodland habitat. This is a key biodiversity aim identified in the emerging Local Plan.

9.9 Most of the area is within a Bug-Life B-line but there is limited existing habitat to support pollinators besides the SRV. Sections of the area to the centre and east are within the amber zone for Great Crested Newts which contain main population centres and important connecting habitat that aids natural dispersal.

9.10 There are likely no significant ecological constraints within the opportunity area for the development of a new country park, but further surveys would likely be required to determine the presence of any protected species or species of note.

9.11 Figure 9.3 and **Figure 9.4** provide an overview of habitats and ecological opportunities.

Figure 9.3: Ecology and habitats - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



Country Park opportunity area

Development allocation

Non-statutory

Local wildlife site

Other

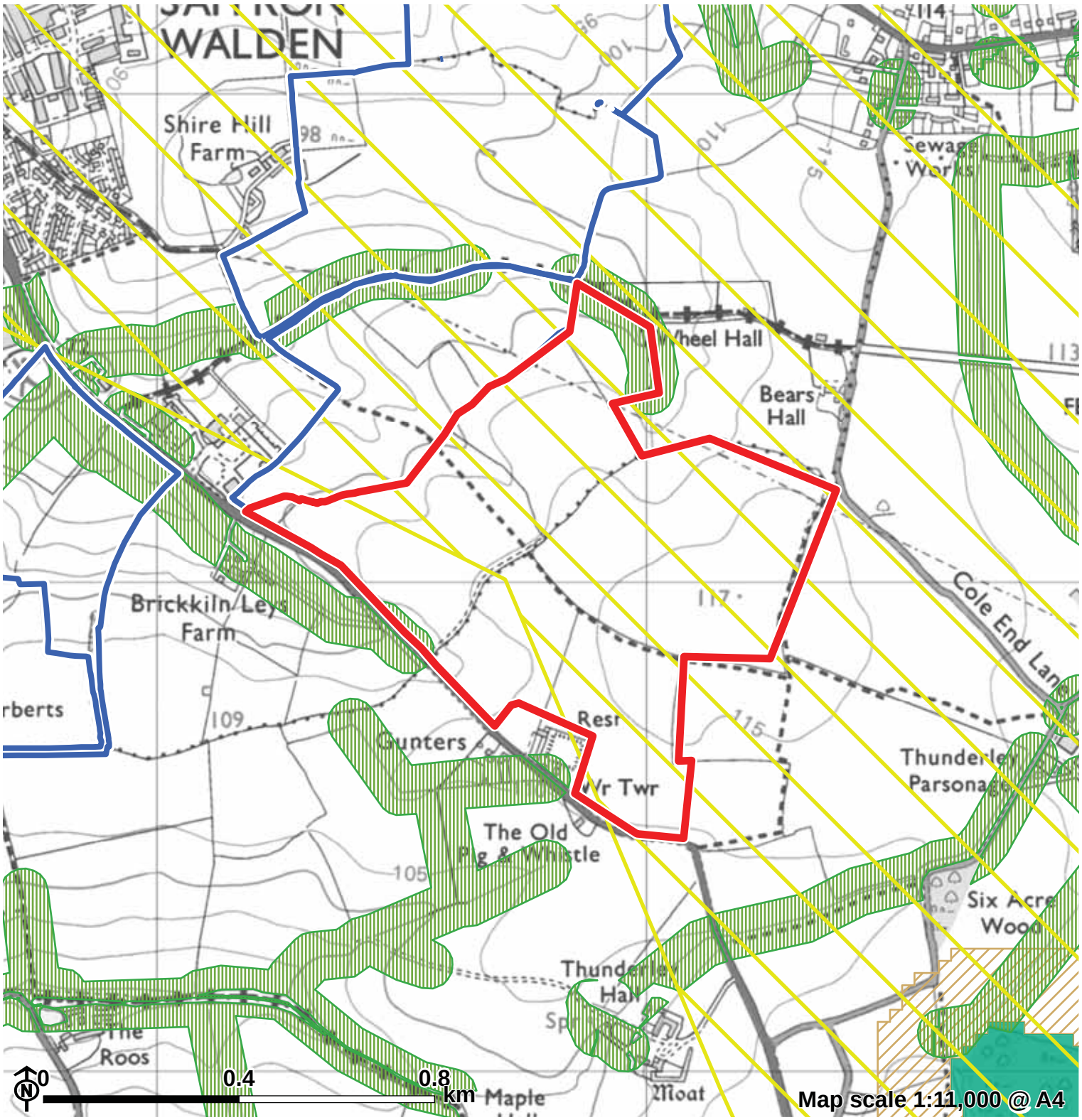
Ancient Woodland

Priority Habitats Inventory

Deciduous woodland

Traditional orchard

Figure 9.4: Ecological opportunities - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



- Country Park opportunity area
- Development allocation
- B-line*
- Riparian Woodland Potential

Habitat Network

- Ancient woodland
- Network Enhancement Zone 2

*B-lines are networks of insect pathways which connect the wildflower-rich habitats of the UK.

Heritage

9.12 Historic landscape character of the wider area, incorporating pre-18th century irregular field patterns, has undergone boundary loss due to the intensification of agriculture since the post-war period to the present day. Vernacular buildings are scattered within close proximity of the opportunity area, typically with colour-washed plaster and thatched roofs.

9.13 Audley End House and Gardens, a registered park and garden, located approximately 2km away, is a 17th Century mansion set in a spectacular landscaped park. Both the house and gardens have evolved in design and character through multiple ownerships and the extent of the associated landscaped park has reduced and has fragmented through changing land use over time. The opportunity area is within the wider Audley End Estate tenanted land holdings.

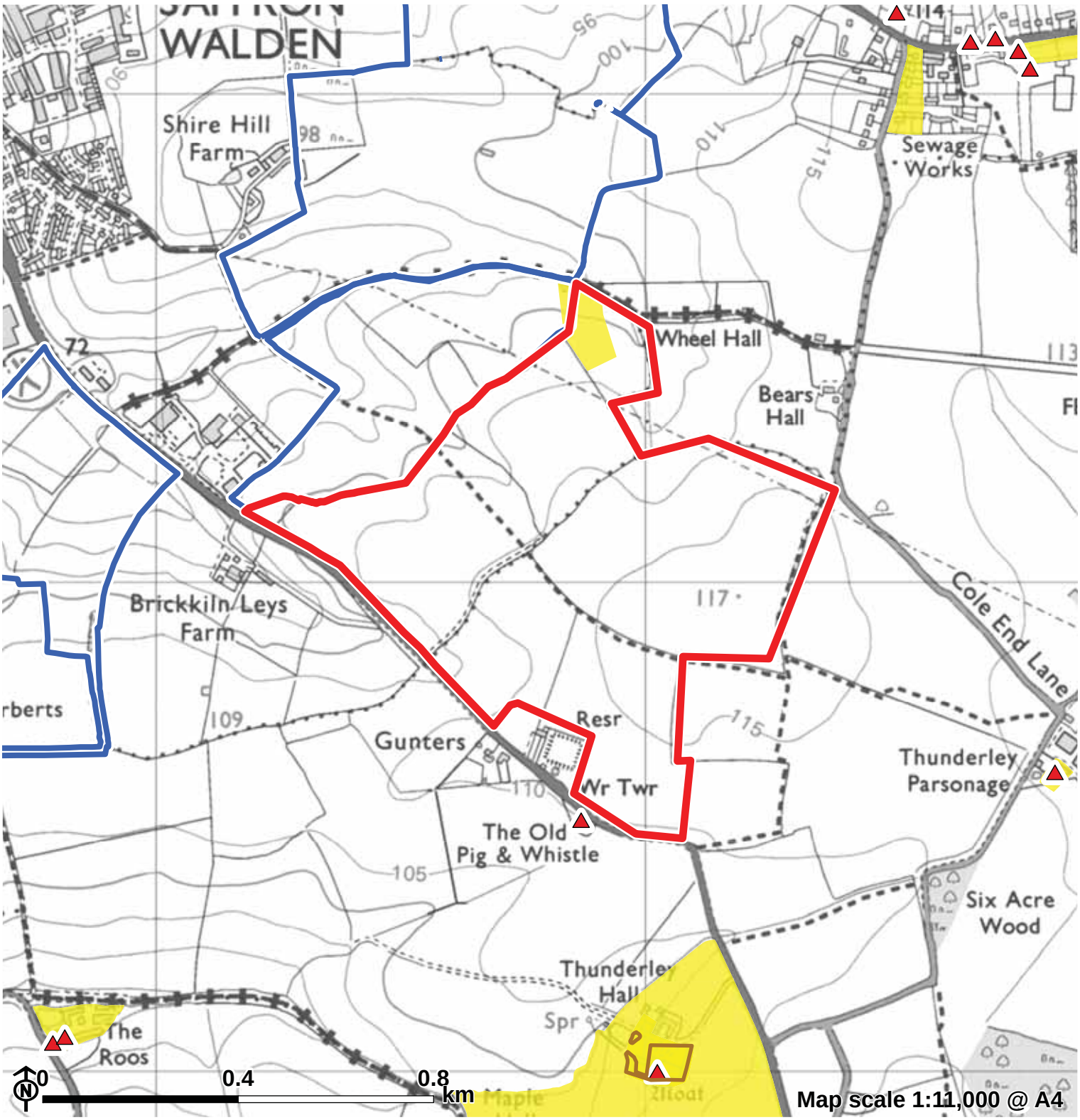
9.14 Archaeological Site number 0261 is located on the north edge of the site. Publicly available records are not available for this designation; however, it broadly aligns with a Clay Pit identified in 1st edition OS mapping and likely pertains to the West of Bears Hall assemblage comprising Iron Age and Roman pottery and millstone. The concentration of archaeological artefacts recovered from the site suggests that there is an elevated likelihood for encountering prehistoric and Roman archaeology within the rest of the site as well. The potential for Iron Age and Roman archaeological remains should be considered in SWOT analysis and management options for the whole site, including opportunities to influence park layout and design, and to interpret and raise awareness of the area's history and development.

9.15 Planning consent for the site would be conditioned with a requirement for an archaeological investigation. The primary archaeological risk lies with the prehistoric and Roman archaeological potential outlined above. Areas with high archaeological potential may need to be avoided for the placement of any physical development or significant ground breaking during the creation of a new open space.

9.16 There are no listed buildings or designated heritage assets within the opportunity area. There are two Scheduled Monuments and six Listed Buildings within 500m of the site and comprise two medieval moated sites with associated halls Grade II and Grade I respectively, two post-medieval farmhouses, both Grade II, a post-medieval dwelling, Grade II and a post-medieval building, possibly an inn, Grade II. The risk of significant effects as a result of setting change is low despite the proximity of some of these assets to the site due to the nature of the development. However, they further highlight the longevity of occupation in this area, though largely agricultural in nature.

9.17 Figure 9.5 provides an overview of historic environment and heritage considerations.

Figure 9.5: Historic environment / heritage - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



Country Park opportunity area

Development allocation

Statutory

Scheduled monument

Listed building (grade)

II

Non-statutory

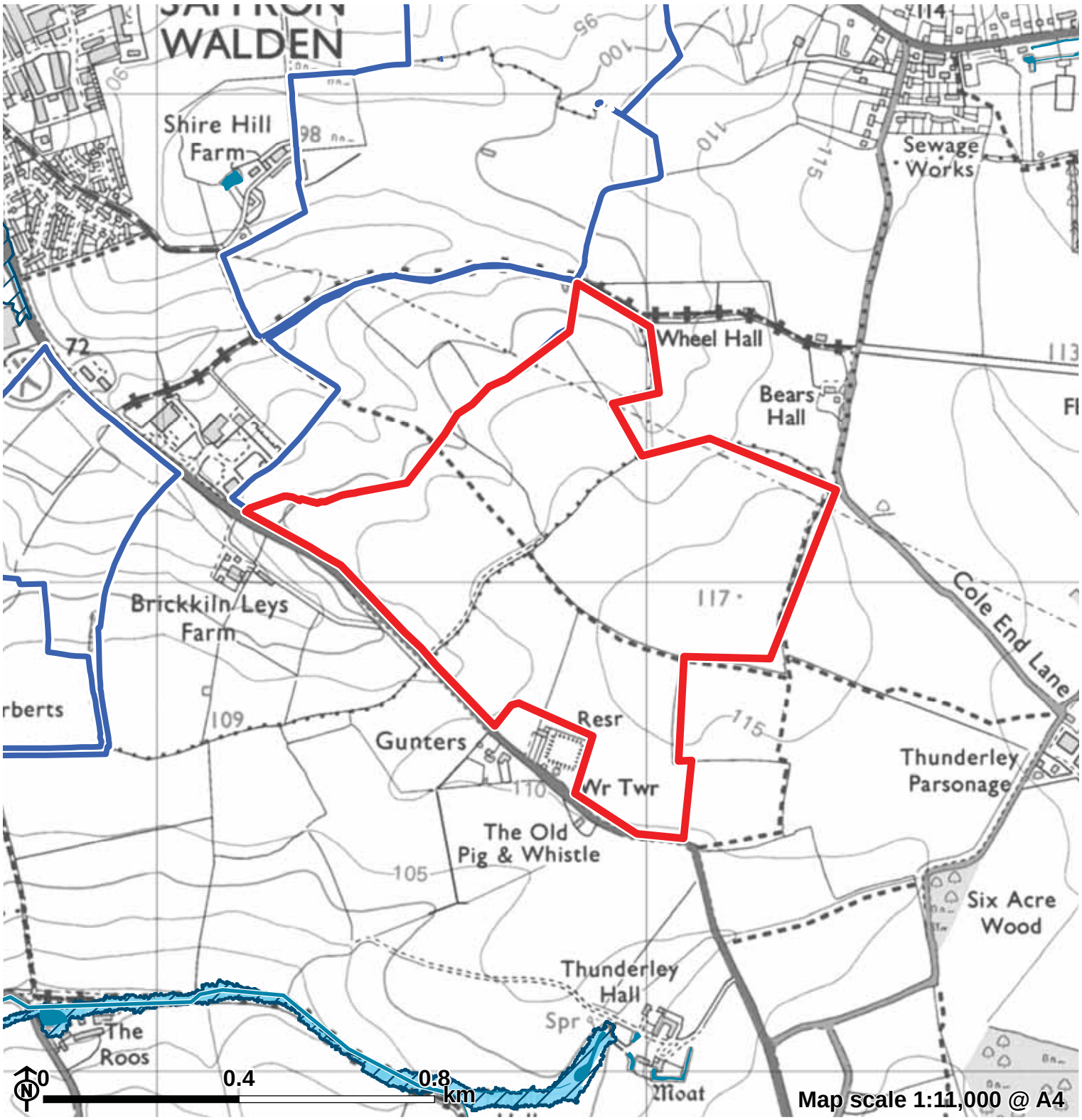
Archeaological Site

Hydrology

9.18 There are no water courses within the opportunity area. Beachy Brook is located approximately 300m to the south, with some land in flood zones 2 and 3 around this brook. Areas of Saffron Walden are highlighted as being at higher flood risk due to the River Slade and its tributaries and targeted habitat restoration in the wider area may help mitigate some flood risk. Most of the opportunity area has been identified as having wider catchment woodland potential for natural flood management by the Environment Agency's Working with Natural Processes data **[See reference** 38**]**. River enhancements should refer to the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) through the relevant catchment partnership; Cam and Ely Ouse Catchment Partnership (CamEO).

9.19 Figure 9.6 provides an overview of the blue network and flood risk.

Figure 9.6: Blue network and flood risk - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



- Country Park opportunity area
- Development allocation
- Flood zone 2
- Flood zone 3
- Water body
- River

Accessibility, population and development

Access and connectivity

9.20 There is no direct public transport access to the site at present although bus stops (routes 313, 314 and F29) at Tiptofts Lane connect to a public right of way which links to the opportunity area. Thaxted Road (B184) forms the southern boundary of the opportunity area and provides a short, direct connection to the centre of Saffron Walden.

9.21 An existing public right of way traverses north west to south east through the opportunity area, using farm tracks and field edge paths, although many of the field edge paths are in poor condition and do not include signposting, especially at the southern end of the area. This public right of way provides a well maintained, surfaced, onward connection north to Shire Hill in Saffron Walden. Branches to the south connect to Cole End Lane, Cole End and Thaxted Road. A public right of way from Knight Park shopping centre (and the existing bus stops) meets this path from the west. This route continues east along the northern boundary of the opportunity area.

9.22 There are small areas of natural green space within and around Saffron Walden but there are no medium or large sites. This site would provide access to a large semi-natural greenspace within a 15 minute walk for a large proportion of Saffron Walden's population and would service new development that is due to come forward to the north of the opportunity area. This would include areas in the south east of Saffron Walden and Sewards End which aren't currently within a 15 minute walk of a semi natural greenspace. The existing public rights of way would help to facilitate access.

9.23 The population of Uttlesford as a whole experiences low levels of deprivation and high levels of life satisfaction and health outcomes. The most

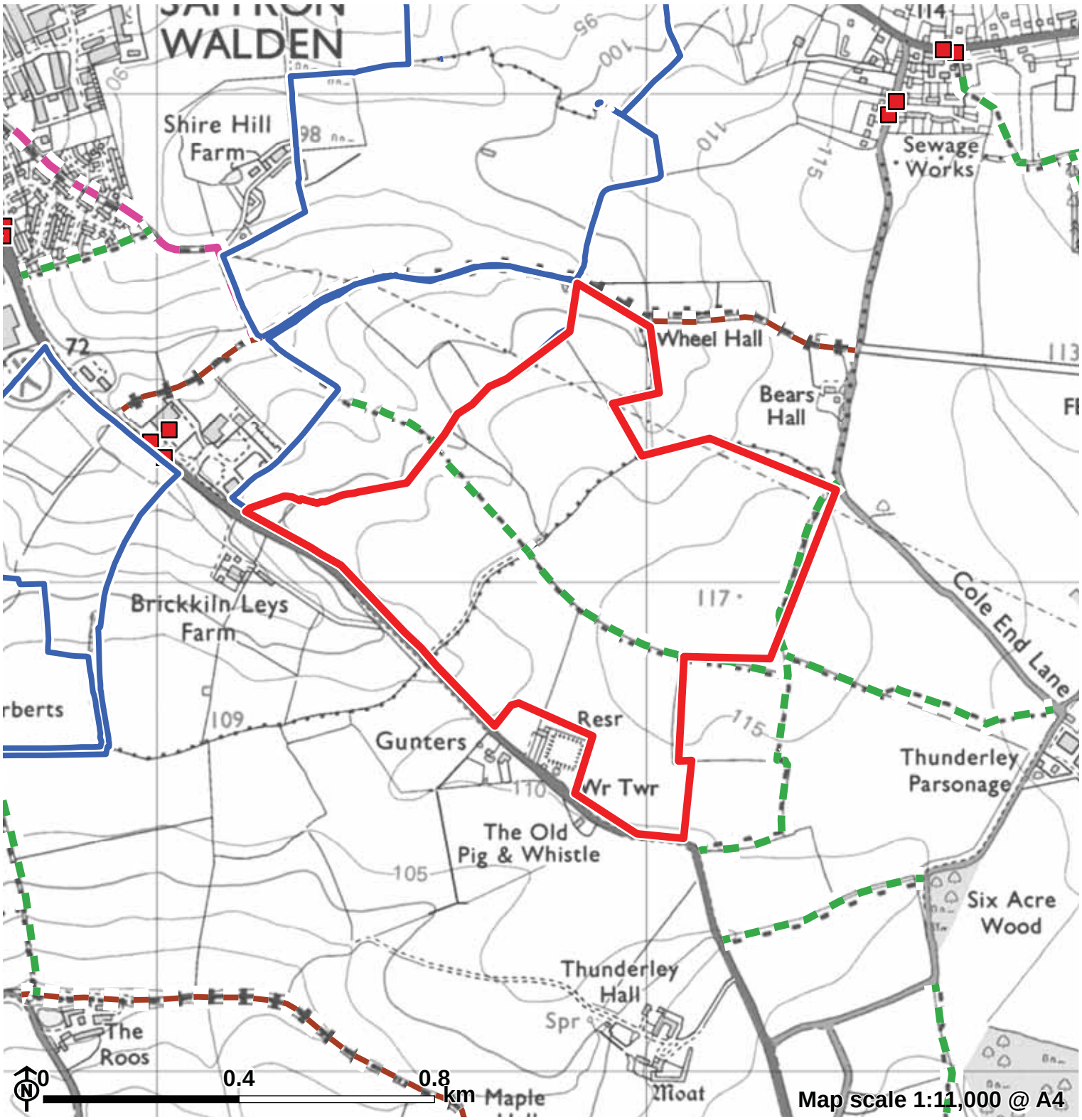
deprived area in Uttlesford sits within the north of Saffron Walden, in the 5th decile on the indices of multiple deprivation. The country park would improve access for residents in this area, however, they are the furthest away from the opportunity area and would be more reliant on public transport access.

9.24 The opportunity area sits to the south east of a significant area of new development in Saffron Walden. There are three consented developments with a total of 456 dwelling and proposed site allocations for the regulation 19 Local Plan for an additional 879 dwellings. This new development would put significant pressure on existing greenspaces in Saffron Walden and new provision will be essential to meet the needs of a growing population.

9.25 The new development provides a significant opportunity to provide sustainable travel routes from the south, near the country park opportunity area, linking Saffron Walden and other areas within Uttlesford. The development will likely also include road access that would need to incorporate walking and cycling routes. Safe active travel routes could therefore be provided from a new access road into a future country park likely south / east of Knight Park.

9.26 Figure 9.7 provides an overview of access and connectivity.

Figure 9.7: Access and connectivity: Active travel and public transport - Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area



Country Park opportunity area
Development allocation
Bus stop

Public Right of Way
Bridleway
Byway
Footpath

Other considerations

Land ownership

9.27 The land is all owned by Audley End Estate who have agreed to discussions on releasing the land for the development of this site as a country park. This would meet their organisational objectives and support the development of site allocations to the north on land also owned by them.

Infrastructure and adjacent land use

9.28 An oil pipeline and oil pipeline consultation area passes through part of the site which may pose restrictions for the location of the main road access point and visitor infrastructure as well as certain types of habitat creation, particularly woodland planting. Further information will need to be sought on constraints and required offset distances.

9.29 Some overhead lines traverse fields in the north east of the opportunity area which may pose similar constraints to access, infrastructure and habitat creation. They would also need to be considered when identifying focal or view points.

9.30 The northwest of the site is adjacent to a shopping centre and recycling centre which may cause noise disturbance to park users. This may need to be assessed and mitigated against with appropriate buffer planting.

Summary of Country Park opportunities

9.31 Figure 9.8 provides an indicative overview of opportunities at the site. **Table 9.1** provides an assessment of the country park opportunities against Natural England country park criteria (based on the indicative opportunities).

Uttlesford SANG Strategy
Uttlesford District Council

LUC

Figure 9.8: Saffron Walden: Country Park Opportunities

Site Allocation Boundary (amended Reg 19)

Indicative Country Park areas

To comprise a mixture of habitats including meadow grassland, scrub, parkland trees, wetland features, secondary access routes and informal play.

- Potential open space within site allocation boundary.
- Potential future open space extension outside of site allocation boundary to connect other areas of open space.
- Extend and strengthen existing woodland / tree cover or strengthen field boundaries.*
- Potential shared arrival zone - including car parking, sports pavilion, toilets, opportunities for concession / kiosk, formal play zones

Other open space provision

- Potential location for new sports pitches.
- Proposed other habitat network.

Access

- Public Right of Way (Footpath)
- Public Right of Way (Byway)
- Potential new country park primary path networks
- Sustainable travel route
- Potential primary entrance / arrival opportunity / signage
- Potential secondary / informal access
- Potential vehicle / car park access

Table 9.1: Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area: Natural England Country Park Criteria check list

Criteria	Summary	Check list following country park (✓ ×)
(1) At least 10 hectares in size	There is capacity within the broad opportunity area to provide a site of at least 10 ha in size. A combination of proposed open space within the site allocation boundary and adjacent areas to develop a contiguous country park site will likely be required to meet the minimum size criteria.	✓
(2) Defined by a clear boundary – marked on a map, whether it is open or fenced in	A clear boundary for a country park will be determined through agreements with the landowner. The site will likely need to be defined by boundary treatments on site (fencing / vegetation).	✓
(3) Accessible – less than 10 miles from a residential area	Within a 10 mile distance of numerous settlements within and outside of Uttlesford. A new country park will also provide important access to greenspace 'on the doorstep' for residents of the proposed development directly adjacent. The site allocation also provides multiple opportunities to incorporate active and sustainable travel to local amenities, including any future open space.	✓
(4) Free to enter	It is currently assumed that a future country park at Saffron Walden would be free to enter.	✓
(5) Inclusive and accessible – show how you have met equality	Design should ensure all facilities, site furniture and the majority of access routes are accessible for all, with limited barriers for access.	Detailed design will need to be assessed.

Criteria	Summary	Check list following country park (✓ ×)
and disability needs and provided for varied groups	A car park will likely need to be provided – to include disabled parking bays. Play provision and activities to consider accessibility requirements and be inclusive.	
(6) Predominantly natural and semi-natural landscapes for example woodland, grassland, wetland, heathland and parkland, with no more than 5% of the area built upon (excluding car parks).	A range of habitats will need to be provided on existing agricultural land. No significant constraints to providing a range of new habitats.	✓
(7) Signposted and easy to navigate – you should show visitors where they can go, what they can do and direct them along footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes.	A range of signage and site information will need to be provided as part of the design.	✓
(8) Visibly staffed, for example litter collection and maintenance.	Management arrangements are yet to be determined. It is assumed that management of a new country park will be taken on by a third party which will need to provide staff to have a visible presence on site.	Yet to be determined.
(9) Available for public or educational events.	Management arrangements are yet to be determined. It is assumed that management of a new country park will be taken on by a third party which will need to be able to facilitate public or educational events.	✓
(10) Near public toilets. Either on site or a 2 minute walk away.	New toilet facilities will need to be provided on site. No significant constraints identified for providing new toilet facilities.	✓

Criteria	Summary	Check list following country park (✓ ×)
(11) Informed by the local community – the public should have some influence over the management and development of your site.	Management arrangements are yet to be determined. It is assumed that management of a new country park will be taken on by a third party which will need to provide staff to engage with the local community on the development and ongoing management of the site through a community forum, friends group or similar.	✓

Chapter 9 Saffron Walden opportunity area profile and baseline assessment

Chapter 10

Delivery and management

SANGs

Summary of findings

10.1 This study indicates that there is capacity at the site allocations within the Zone of Influence in Uttlesford to deliver new open space that will meet SANGs requirements in line with the level of development that is expected over the new Local Plan period.

10.2 The SANG opportunity area at Parsonage Green will likely not be able to provide a route length of 2.3km. However, this could potentially be mitigated with good links to nearby SANG and open space (i.e. other SANG areas at Church End East). The SANG opportunity area at Stansted Mountfitchet is also not likely to be able to provide a route length of 2.3km and there are opportunities to provides linking routes (that may not meet SANG criteria) but could provide good connectivity to public rights of way and nearby open space.

10.3 On both of these sites, it will be important to ensure that the shortfall of route length is offset by ensuring routes provide a range of interest, viewpoints (where possible), informal seating and different habitat areas (such as ponds, scrub, wildflower areas) to provide a varied experience.

10.4 Further detailed design work will need to be undertaken as part of the development proposals to demonstrate how each site will meet SANGs requirements. It is recommended that developers engage with Natural England through their Discretionary Advice Service to obtain early advice on the design and layout of SANGs. It should be expected that Natural England will visit each proposed SANG area to determine suitability.

Future management

Management body

10.5 The future management body for each SANG site will need to be agreed with Natural England. Due to the specific management requirements of SANGs, it will generally not be appropriate for a standard management company (i.e. that may usually be set up to manage communal, shared areas or other public open space within a development site) to manage a SANG. Within Uttlesford, potential management bodies will likely comprise:

- District Council
- County Council
- Other appropriate third party management body (e.g. The Land Trust or a wildlife trust)

10.6 The District Council may be unlikely to have capacity or experience in managing SANGs therefore it is recommended that an appropriate third party body such as the Land Trust is engaged in discussions to manage SANG sites in Uttlesford in the long term. The Land Trust is a Natural England approved management body for SANGs and has experience in managing SANGs and BNG together. As a suite of bespoke SANGs are likely to come forward within a similar time frame over the next Local Plan period, it is recommended that UDC, the relevant developers and proposed management bodies engage in early conversations and set up a form of working group to ensure a co-ordinated approach and develop lines of communication.

Monitoring

10.7 Monitoring for each new SANG will be essential to ensure that it is effective in providing an alternative destination and recreational space to Hatfield Forest. This will provide assurance that the strategy is working and help to inform future SANGs strategy reviews. It is recommended that the UDC

monitors and records this through existing planning obligation monitoring systems (for instance as part of future Biodiversity Net Gain monitoring requirements). Partnership working with Natural England and the National Trust (as custodians of Hatfield Forest) to undertake appropriate monitoring of the effectiveness of the wider mitigation strategy should continue.

10.8 Monitoring will likely need to comprise:

- Monitoring of SANG capacity; ensuring that the SANG capacity is being delivered in line with the level of development coming forward.
- Ensuring that free public access is maintained at each site.
- Ensuring that the appropriate levels of facilities & amenities are in place and maintained.
- Monitoring visitor numbers at each site.
- Any habitat monitoring that may relate to the site, where there are cross considerations for BNG.

10.9 All SANG monitoring should be agreed with Natural England and will be shared with Natural England and published as part of any required periodic reporting.

Summary of next steps

10.10 The information used within this study can inform the development of more detailed plans for bespoke SANGs at each site. The likely next steps to bring SANGs forward at each site are as follows:

- Engage with Natural England through the Discretionary Advice service.
- Confirm the final number of homes, occupancy rate and population yield at each development site. Any changes since the development of this report will need to be reflected in final calculations to determine minimum SANG requirements. Any type of development other standard C3 residential development will require agreement with Natural England on an

appropriate occupancy rate (e.g. for care facilities or similar accommodation).

- Confirm the boundary and SANG area and develop detailed designs in consultation with Natural England.
- Confirm any other adjustments to calculations of SANG capacity that may be required once the final boundary of the proposed SANG site is confirmed. There will be requirements on sites with existing public access (i.e. via public rights of way) to discount some of the SANG area to account for levels of existing uses. It should be noted that there may be opportunities to utilise any spare capacity at SANG sites for allocating to developments within an appropriate catchment distance. As the landowners, it will be up to each developer to choose whether to identify and determine opportunities for offering SANG capacity to third parties (usually charging for SANG capacity per dwelling). This will likely need to be undertaken through engaging an appropriate experienced management body (such as the Land Trust).
- Confirm the future management body for the site. Any future management body will need to be agreed with Natural England to ensure the site will be managed appropriately for the purposes of SANGs provision in perpetuity.
- Develop a site specific SANGs Management Strategy to demonstrate an appropriate plan for management in perpetuity. This will need to set out management arrangements and responsibilities, responsibly parties and a method of monitoring, review, visitor surveys and programmes of landscape and ecological management. Management plans will need to consider existing habitats, species and other constraints (such as heritage) to ensure future management is appropriate for the site and the SANGs function of the site is achieved in the long term. Management strategies should include plans for community consultation and engagement where appropriate.

SANG Contribution Towards BNG

10.11 Through appropriate design and implementation BNG can complement the purpose of SANGs; although SANG is not an automatic delivery mechanism for BNG, the two can exist on the same site. But BNG on SANG is only attributable to such habitat creation or enhancement that proves measurable additionality over and above the minimum requirements of the SANG.

10.12 BNG can be implemented on SANG land, but with specific considerations. According to the latest Defra's guidance, actions taken on SANG land can count towards a development's BNG requirements, but only in part **[See reference** 39**].** This means that while habitat creation or enhancements made to comply with SANG requirements can contribute to the BNG calculations, they cannot fulfil the entire BNG obligation by themselves. At least 10% of the developer's biodiversity units must come from activities other than those associated with mitigation and compensation measures, such as those required for SANGs. This ensures that developers incorporate additional biodiversity enhancements beyond the basic mitigation efforts.

10.13 Earlier guidance provided by Natural England[1] **[See reference** 40**]** clarifies and adds nuance to how BNG can be achieved on lands designated for SANG purposes. Both pieces of guidance agree that actions on these lands can contribute towards BNG, but with limitations:

- Habitat creation or enhancement for purposes like SANG can contribute towards achieving a point of no net loss in biodiversity as calculated by the Biodiversity Metric. However, these contributions alone cannot exceed a no net loss threshold, meaning they cannot fully satisfy BNG requirements.
- To move beyond no net loss and achieve positive BNG, additional habitat features must be created or enhanced on the same land beyond what was delivered for the non-BNG outcomes. These additional efforts can contribute to the positive territory of BNG, assuming they meet other BNG requirements like agreement type and duration.
- Good practice, as outlined, involves using a separate accounting line to illustrate contributions to BNG for clarity. This approach ensures transparency in how different habitat creations or enhancements contribute to the overall BNG.

Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area

Delivery

10.14 It will likely be essential for a new project officer role to be created to oversee the delivery of a new country park . A new role would be responsible for the development of a detailed delivery plan to cover likely resources & skills required and professional services that may need to be engaged. A range of sources of funding will likely need to be considered to deliver the country park but this will include developer contributions to ensure new open space can be delivered to support open space needs of planned development nearby. Other funding sources may comprise green finance (private finance – e.g. for businesses to meet Corporate Social Environmental Responsibility targets) or other any national funding opportunities such as the recently announced New Community Green Spaces Fund or similar **[See reference** 41**]** – which could be utilised to deliver discrete aspects of a wider project.

Future management

10.15 Uttlesford District Council does not currently manage any strategic scale natural greenspace sites. It is recommended that a partnership with Essex County Council is explored as a future management approach for the proposed country park. Essex County Council currently manages a portfolio of large country parks sites across the county, including Great Notley Country Park on behalf of Braintree Council. The details of any specific management arrangements and agreements would need to be determined with Essex County Council, although this could comprise an agreed annual fee paid by Uttlesford to Essex County Council to manage the site.

10.16 Further work will need to be undertaken to develop a plan and vision for a new country park. It is recommended this is done in consultation with the local community, established community groups, sports groups, the Town Council, Essex County Council and any other key stakeholders and adjacent landowners / managers. It is recommended that in the long term a stakeholder advisory group is formalised to help inform the management of the site. There will also be opportunities to encourage the development of a country park Friends Group to ensure community participation as part of long term planning and management.

Income generation

10.17 Consultation with Essex country parks service has highlighted the need to consider opportunities for ongoing income generation to ensure the long term management of the site is financially sustainable. Across the other country parks sites in Essex, key income opportunities comprise parking charges and lease arrangements for concessions (e.g. a café or canteen area).

10.18 Use of the site for large scale events could provide significant opportunities for income generation but would need to be balanced with potential disruption to other uses of the site, the capacity of facilities such as toilets and parking, potential wear / damage to infrastructure and other

landscape impacts (i.e. erosion, grass damage, ecological disturbance etc). Large scale events for income generation in many other country parks in Essex have been deemed inappropriate or a challenge to deliver due to access, parking and clay soils across the county which pose challenges for large scale events during the winter or in wet conditions (which presents challenges for parking, vehicle and plant use across grass areas).

10.19 The proximity of the country park opportunity area to Saffron Walden may lend itself to other types of recreation focussed income opportunities such as bike hire, which could be developed as a concession type arrangement with a third party providing the service under a lease / contract arrangement.

BNG

10.20 There is potential for some areas to be set aside for offsite BNG delivery (creation of units to be sold offsite). However, the development of a new country park (as a change of land use) will require a planning application and be subject to BNG requirements. Proposals would need to meet Uttlesford's BNG policy (which may be higher than the statutory 10%). Any areas for offsite BNG unit creation would therefore need to be over and above BNG requirements associated with the development of the site. Consideration will also need to be given to levels of recreational use that would be likely on the site and impacts this could have on potential BNG uplift.

Chapter 11

Outline costs

11.1 The following chapter sets out likely costs associated with the delivery of SANGs at Church End East (including Parsonage Green), Takeley and Stansted Mountfitchet. A high level cost estimate is also provided for the proposed country park area at Saffron Walden.

Cost sources

11.2 Costs have been derived from standard industry rates, costing resources and costs from recently completed schemes including:

- Spon's Architects and Builders Price Book
- Spon's External Works and Landscape Price Book

Assumptions

11.3 The following costs are based on assumptions of the type of features that will be provided and the mix of vegetation cover at each site. It should be noted that costs set out are high level and further costing work will need to be undertaken as designs for each bespoke SANG are developed. Overall cost estimates have been rounded.

11.4 Natural England have produced guidance and criteria for what should be expected and delivered as part of a SANGs site. The criteria has been referenced to set out the features that will likely be required at proposed SANG sites for the purposes of costing (see **Table 11.1**).

Table 11.1: SANGs features and habitats included within cost estimates

Item	Description / assumptions
Hard landscape / infrastructure	
Primary path network - easy access	Self-binding gravel or similar - naturalistic. Allowance for up to 2.5km where capacity allows. Allow 2m path width, timber edging.
Secondary path network	Grass paths, allowance for levelling, drainage seeding. Allow 1.5m width.
Car park (surfacing)	Spaces (min) at suggested standard rate of 1 per ha. Assume car park with landscaping.
Car park (vehicle barrier / gate)	Heavy duty with service vehicle access.
Other entrances	Gate, sign, boundary / threshold treatments.
Cycle parking / cycle rack	Assume Sheffield cycle rack.
Signage (map / info boards)	Assume all weather map board, assume timber or recycled plastic frame / stand / post.
Signage (directional)	Assume timber finger post signage.
Bins	
Benches / seating	Assume timber / recycled plastic.
Picnic benches	Assume timber / recycled plastic.
Allowance for boundary treatments / rail fencing	Allowance for post, rail, galv. mesh fencing to road, woodland protection, pond fencing, dog area.
Allowance for safer road crossing	To allow safe pedestrian / cycle access from development site. Assume zebra crossing, signage, surfacing at verge, vegetation management.
Soft landscape / habitats	
Grassland (rough / amenity) (assume approx. 20% of site area)	Ground preparation, seeding, establishment.
Meadow grassland (assume approx. 15% of site area)	Ground preparation, seeding, establishment.

Woodland / shelter belt (assume approx. 60% of site area)	Assume 1,600 trees per ha. Allowance for tree, guard, stake, establishment.
Other parkland trees	Light / medium standard tree, stake, protection.
Pond / wetland features (large)	Assume approx. 1,000m2
Pond / wetland features (small)	Assume approx. 200m2
Other	
Noise bund / mitigation / land forming at A road	Assume at Takeley only to mitigate noise from A120.
Promotion and marketing	Promote use, local leaflet, council web presence, opening event.

Development of total project costs

11.5 Estimated costs below represent likely base construction costs, presented as a range. Total project costs will need to allow for additional costs associated with the delivery of a project (other costs over and above the base construction cost). It should be noted that the following items will also likely need to be considered and added as percentage allowances:

- Professional fees, which may represent 7-15% of total project costs (e.g. surveys, design etc.)
- Preliminaries, which may represent 7-15% of total project costs (other contractor costs associated with delivering the works, health & safety, management, welfare, expenses etc)
- Contingency which could be added at 5-10% (to allow for unforeseen circumstances / events)

11.6 Cost estimates below allow for some establishment works to soft landscape and habitat features, but do not include ongoing maintenance costs in perpetuity.

Cost estimates per site

Proposed SANGs

11.7 The table below provides a summary of the estimated costs for bespoke SANGs at each site allocation. Estimated costs represent likely base construction costs and are presented as a range.

Table 11.2: Estimated SANG costs

SANG site	Estimated base construction cost range
Church End East and Parsonage Green	£1.1m - £1.4m
Takeley	£1.2m - £1.5m
Stansted Mountfitchet	£600,000 - £750,000

Saffron Walden Country Park opportunity area

11.8 The outline costs for the country park opportunity area include costs for several additional types of facilities that are assumed will not be delivered within the proposed SANG areas elsewhere in the District. This includes:

- Toilet facilities - access to toilets is required in order to meet country park criteria. It is assumed that this would be a modular unit with a septic tank.
- Canteen / facility to rent out as a concession space. It is assumed this would be a modular unit. Service / utilities connections have not been considered as part of the costs.
- Destination play space.

11.9 Cost estimates below do not include any costs associated with playing pitch requirements which may be delivered nearby.

Table 11.3: Saffron Walden estimated country park costs

Scenario	Estimated base construction cost range
Country park - including additional facilities (toilets, canteen / concession, destination play space)	£1.5m - £1.9m
Country park – excluding additional facilities	£800,000 - £1m

Appendix A

Natural England SANGs guidance

Guidelines for Creation of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) – August 2021

Introduction

'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace' (SANG) is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as avoidance within the Thames Basin Heaths Planning Zone.

Its role is to provide alternative green space to divert visitors from visiting the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). SANG are intended to provide avoidance measures for the potential impact of residential development on the SPA by preventing an increase in visitor pressure on the SPA. The effectiveness of SANG as mitigation will depend upon the location and design. These must be such that the SANG is more attractive than the SPA to users of the kind that currently visit the SPA.

This document describes the features which have been found to draw visitors to the SPA, which should be replicated in SANG. It provides guidelines on

- the type of site which should be identified as SANG
- measures which can be taken to enhance sites so that they may be used as SANG

It also covers the outputs of the recent Thames Basin Heaths Project 2021.

These guidelines relate specifically to the means to provide mitigation for significant impact arising from new housing within the Thames Basin Heaths Zone of influence. They do not address nor preclude the other functions of green space. Other functions may be provided within SANG, as long as this does not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the SPA.

SANG may be created from:

- existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public
- existing open space, which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the SPA
- land in other uses which could be converted into SANG

The identification of SANG should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANG, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the development plan. These sites may require an ecological discount of their proposed SANG area.

SANG continue to need to be delivered in advance of any associated housing stock being occupied. They should also be funded for in perpetuity as is the current process.

The Character of the SPA and its Visitors

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is made up of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and consists of a mixture of heathland, mire, and woodland habitats. They are essentially 'heathy' in character. The topography is varied, and most sites have a large component of trees and some contain streams, ponds and small lakes. Some are freely accessible to the public and most have a degree of pubic access, though in some areas this is restricted by army, forestry or other operations.

Survey effort in 2005 showed that more than 83% of visitors to the SPA arrive by car, though access points adjacent to housing estates showed a greater proportion arriving on foot (up to 100% in one case). 70% of those who visited by car had come from within 5km of the access point onto the SPA. A very large proportion of the SPA visitors are dog walkers, many of whom visit the particular site on a regular (more or less daily) basis and spend less than an hour there, walking on average about 2.5km. Almost 50% are retired or part-time workers and the majority are women. Further detailed information on visitors can be found in the reports referenced at the end of this document. These figures have been supported in further SPA wide surveys, the most recent being in 2018.

Guidelines for the Quality of SANG

The quality guidelines have been sub-divided into different aspects of site fabric and structure. They have been compiled from a variety of sources but principally from visitor surveys carried out at heathland sites within the Thames Basin Heaths area or within the Dorset heathlands. These are listed as references at the end of this document.

The principle criteria contained in the Guidelines have also been put into a checklist format which are contained in Appendix 1.

Accessibility

Most visitors come by car and want the site to be fairly close to home. Unless SANG are provided for the sole use of a local population living within a 400-metre catchment around the site, then **the availability of adequate car parking at sites larger than 4 ha is essential**. The amount and nature of parking provision should reflect the anticipated use of the site by visitors and the catchment size of the SANG. It should provide an attractive alternative to parking by the part of SPA for which it is mitigation. **Car parks should be clearly signposted and easily accessed**.

New parking provision for SANG should be advertised as necessary to ensure that it is known of by potential visitors.

Target groups of Visitors

This should be viewed from two perspectives, the local use of a site where it is accessed on foot from the visitor's place of residence, and a wider catchment use where it is accessed by car. **Most of the visitors to the SPA come by car and therefore should be considered as a pool of users from beyond the immediate vicinity of the site.** All but the smallest SANG should therefore target this type of visitor.

It is apparent from access surveys that a significant proportion of those people who visit the sites on foot, also visit alternative sites on foot and so this smaller but significant group look for local sites. **Where large populations are close to the SPA, the provision of SANG should be attractive to visitors on foot.**

Networks of sites

The provision of longer routes within larger SANG is important in determining the effectiveness of the authorities' network of SANG as mitigation. The design of routes within sites will be critical to providing routes of sufficient length and attractiveness for mitigation purposes.

Though networks of SANG may accommodate long visitor routes and this is desirable, they should not be solely relied upon to provide long routes.

Paths, Roads and Tracks

The findings suggest **that SANG should aim to supply a choice of routes of around 2.3 - 2.5km in length** with both shorter and longer routes of at least 5km as part of the choice, where space permits.

Paths have to be of a width acceptable to visitors.

Paths should be routed so that they are perceived as safe by the users, with some routes being through relatively open (visible) terrain (with no trees or scrub, or well spaced mature trees, or wide rides with vegetation back from the path), especially those routes which are 1-3 km long.

The routing of tracks along hill tops and ridges where there are views is valued by the majority of visitors.

Artificial Infrastructure

Little or no artificial infrastructure is found within the SPA at present apart from the provision of some surfaced tracks and car parks. Generally, an urban influence is not what people are looking for when they visit the SPA and some people undoubtedly visit the SPA because it has a naturalness about it that would be marred by such features.

However, **SANG would be expected to have adequate car parking with good information about the site and the routes** available. Some subtle waymarking would also be expected for those visitors not acquainted with the layout of the site.

Other infrastructure would not be expected and should generally be restricted to the vicinity of car parking areas where good information and signs of welcome should be the norm, though discretely placed benches or information boards along some routes would be acceptable.

Landscape and Vegetation

SANG do not have to contain heathland or heathy vegetation to provide an effective alternative to the SPA.

Surveys clearly show that **woodland or a semi-wooded landscape is a key feature** that people appreciate in the sites they visit, particularly those who use the SPA. This is more attractive than open landscapes or parkland with scattered trees.

A **semi-natural looking landscape with plenty of variation** was regarded as most desirable by visitors and some paths through quite enclosed woodland scored highly. There is clearly a balance to be struck between what is regarded as an exciting landscape and a safe one and so some element of choice between the two would be highly desirable. The semi-wooded and undulating nature of most of the SPA sites gives them an air of relative wildness, even when there are significant numbers of visitors on site. SANG should aim to reproduce this quality.

Hills do not put people off visiting a site, particularly where these are associated with good views, but steep hills are not appreciated. **An undulating landscape is preferred to a flat one.**

Water features, particularly ponds and lakes, act as a focus for visitors for their visit, but are not essential.

Restrictions on usage

The bulk of visitors to the SPA came to exercise their dogs and so it is imperative that **SANG allow for pet owners to let dogs run freely over a significant part of the walk**. **Access on SANG should be largely unrestricted, with both people and their pets being able to freely roam**

along the majority of routes. This means that sites where freely roaming dogs will cause a nuisance or where they might be in danger (from traffic or such like) should not be considered for SANG.

Assessment of site enhancement as mitigation

SANG may be provided by the enhancement of existing sites, including those already accessible to the public that have a low level of use and could be enhanced to attract more visitors. The extent of enhancement and the number of extra visitors to be attracted would vary from site to site. Those sites which are enhanced only slightly would be expected to provide less of a mitigation effect than those enhanced greatly, in terms of the number of people they would divert away from the SPA. In order to assess the contribution of enhancement sites in relation to the hectare standards of the Delivery Plan, it is necessary to distinguish between slight and great enhancement.

Methods of enhancement for the purposes of this guidance could include enhanced access through guaranteed long-term availability of the land, creation of a car park or a network of paths.

SANG which have not previously been open to the public count in full to the standard of providing 8ha of SANG per 1000 people in new development. SANG which have an appreciable but clearly low level of public use and can be substantially enhanced to greatly increase the number of visitors also count in full. The identification of these sites should arise from evidence of low current use. This could be in a variety of forms, for example:

- Experience of managing the site, which gives a clear qualitative picture that few visitors are present
- Quantitative surveys of visitor numbers
- Identified constraints on access, such as lack of gateways at convenient points and lack of parking
- Lack of easily usable routes through the site
- Evidence that the available routes through the site are little used (paths may show little wear, be narrow and encroached on by vegetation)

Practicality of enhancement works

The selection of sites for enhancement to be SANG should take into account the variety of stakeholder interests in each site. Consideration should be given to whether any existing use of the site which may continue is compatible with the function of SANG in attracting recreational use that would otherwise take place on the SPA. The enhancement should not result in moving current users off the SANG and onto the SPA. The specific enhancement works proposed should also be considered in relation not only to their effects on the SANG mitigation function but also in relation to their effects on other user groups.

TBH SPA Mitigation Project – January 2021

The Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Councils worked together with Natural England to complete a project reviewing the approach to mitigation within the Thames Basin Heaths. The work analysed eleven potential alternative options when it comes to delivering SPA mitigation. The report concluded that the role and design of SANG could be clarified further.

To be made very clear from the outset. There remains a hierarchy of SANG provision. Great weight will be given to those SANGS meeting all the existing quality criteria (shown in Appendix 1) which should be delivered in the first instance. Only if this is **not possible**, **for clearly established reasons**, should the delivery of the options outlined in the section below be considered. If any proposed SANGS do not meet all of the Appendix 1 quality criteria, then these SANGS will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis and should be **agreed** with both the competent authority and Natural England. The proposal will need to demonstrate equivalent effectiveness of mitigation being provided to ensure a robust, consistent approach continues. Any shortfall in SANG criteria should be offset by other complementary means, such as an elevated provision rate, size or high-quality features.

The evidence shows that the use of SANG networks, linear orientated sites and small sites of no smaller than two hectares have potential to provide effective mitigation where traditional SANG is unavailable. These SANG areas will be linked and/or in proximity to an already established SANG. If effectiveness can be demonstrated of small or linear SANGs working alone, then we will assess this on a case by case basis, taking in to account the site's context amongst the wider greenspace network.

Historically Natural England have apportioned significant weight to the requirement for a 2.3 – 2.5km circular walk, which is less likely to be achievable in a small or linear SANG. These guidelines do not remove weight from the requirement but do accept that in specific circumstances the walk doesn't have to be included within every single SANG unit. It is however desirable to provide the full Appendix 1 criteria across a local SANG network or on another SANG.

Natural England would urge all Local Planning Authorities to take note, that this approach **could** enable sites previously deemed unacceptable to Natural England, to now qualify as valid avoidance measure. Please come and speak to us if you feel that is the case.

Appendix 1: Site Quality Checklist – for a SANG

This guidance is designed as an Appendix to the full guidance on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) to be used as mitigation (or avoidance) land to reduce recreational use of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Must haves

- For all sites larger than 4ha there must be adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local use, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated use of the site and reflect the visitor catchment of both the SANG and the SPA.
- Possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANG.
- Car parks must be easily and safely accessible by car and should be clearly sign posted.
- The accessibility of the site must include access points appropriate for the visitor use the SANG is intended to cater for.
- The SANG must have a safe route of access on foot from the nearest car park and/or footpath/s
- All SANG with car parks must have a circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park.
- SANG must be designed so that they are perceived to be safe by users; they must not have tree and scrub cover along parts of the walking routes.
- Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming to urban in feel.
- SANG must be perceived as semi-natural spaces with little intrusion of artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.
- All SANG larger than 12 ha must aim to provide a variety of habitats for users to experience.
- Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.
- SANG must be free from unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment works smells etc).

Should haves

- SANG should be clearly sign-posted or advertised in some way.
- SANG should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential users. It would be desirable for social media to be used as well, with the goal of reducing paper use. Although a leaflet for a new home is desirable. It could advertise the TBH Partnership website at https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace/

Desirable

- It would be desirable for an owner to be able to take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead.

- Where possible it is desirable to choose sites with a gently undulating topography for SANG

- It is desirable for access points to have signage outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

- It is desirable that SANG provide a naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. The provision of open water is encouraged and desirable on sites. However large areas of open water cannot count towards capacity.

- Where possible it is desirable to have a focal point such as a viewpoint, monument etc within the SANG.

Appendix 2: Further clarification on the TBH Project 2021

Reliance on the length of circular walk could be given less weight in specific circumstances on individual SANG sites. A circular route is still required. This will be agreed on a case by case basis by Natural England and the relevant Local Planning (Competent) Authority and only where equivalence can be effectively demonstrated. Sites will also only be accepted where most of the other criteria from Appendix 1 are met, either individually or as part of a group of sites.

Small SANG – This will be no smaller than 2 hectares in size. Where possible all other Appendix 1 criteria should be met, and the site will be adjacent to, linked in an accessible manner to, or close to a SANG or network which can deliver the required circular walk. Small SANG should be available to residents on their doorsteps.

Linear SANG – This approach allows for the width of a SANG to be reduced, where the walk incorporates an attractive linear feature or links to other open sites. For example, alongside waterways or disused railway lines. Linear SANG should include sites with wider areas, creating irregular shapes and opportunities for dogs to exercise freely off lead. In exceptional cases a there and back walk could qualify. It would require strong evidence and visitor surveys to show that it will provide an avoidance experience like that of a traditional SANG. It would also be preferable for linear SANG to link with wider routes and/or other SANGs to provide opportunities for a variety of walks.

SANG Network – Where several SANGs are in proximity or adjacent, they can be used and visited as one single entity. This approach allows for the use of links between SANG units to deliver a circular walk and meet all the Guidelines in combination. The default position is that the SANG links would not count as having capacity or catchments but would need to be secured in perpetuity. If they happen to be a substantial unit of green space themselves then they could be included within the SANG calculation. The size of an individual SANG catchment can be increased depending on the area afforded by an overall SANG network (excluding links), in line with the quanta figures in the TBH Delivery Framework.

Equivalence – This will be required on all SANG sites not meeting the guidelines in Appendix 1. There will have to be an over provision of something else to offset the lack of the full circular walk. This would be likely to incorporate an increased provision rate, for example providing 12 hectares of SANG per thousand head of population. A significant high quality SANG in terms of amenities and habitats could also demonstrate this requirement. We are happy to discuss this matter further on a case by case basis, either through our DAS Service for developers or our Local Plan Service for Local Planning Authorities.

Appendix 3: Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace: A best practice guide

Natural England would urge that these recommendations are followed unless there is valid justification for a deviation.

A SANG can be greatly improved for visitors and wildlife by implementing some of the suggestions in this guide. They are based on Natural England's Strategic Access Management and Monitoring teams' findings from visiting SANG and undertaking visitor number and questionnaire surveys.

This guide has been produced to provide more advice to Local Planning Authorities and developers up front. These are features found throughout the current SANG suite that we feel have tangible positive impacts on the draw to a SANG. We understand that it may not be possible to adopt them all, especially in a smaller SANG. There are a lot of quick fixes in this list which will generate a substantial uplift in SANG attractiveness. Natural England are likely to raise fewer concerns through the formal planning process on a SANG which provides the majority of the following.

It is essential that Natural England visits and agrees a SANG, before any housing development can be attributed towards it. This is in line with Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan. For SANG development advice please contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/developers-get-environmental-advice-on-your-planning-proposals

It is advisable to contact your local planning authority at the first instance of SANG development.

Naming of SANG:

1. Use a name which highlights any attractive features within the site. E.g. meadow, copse, lake etc.
2. Avoid the use of the word 'SANG' in the name of the site.
3. Keep the name relevant to the location but dissimilar to nearby SANG's.
4. The name is different to any associated development.

Location of SANG:

1. Where possible, provision of connectivity to wider greenspace/other SANG is recommended but should ensure a SANG does not result in new and additional access and visits to sensitive sites.
2. Seek to protect and enhance any existing local wildlife site designations (e.g. SSSI/SINC/SNCI) within or adjacent to the SANG boundary.

Biodiversity:

1. Ensure habitat of SANG complements adjacent habitats. e.g by extending similar landscape or something complementary such as grassland for foraging woodland birds.
2. Ensure appropriate connectivity of landscape scale habitat features. e.g. hedgerows, tree belts etc.
3. Include features such as; dead wood, sand banks, wildflower meadows etc.
4. Where open water is included, separate dog ponds and wildlife ponds. (Case study 4)
5. Avoid frequent mowing as a tool to manage grasslands, it is an expensive technique which produces little biodiversity benefit.
6. Grazing is a good management tool. It is not suitable for all SANG, but if it possible on your SANG, a route must be provided which avoids the grazing area for the benefit of those nervous of cattle.
7. Good practice monitoring of SANG use should be built into in perpetuity management of the site, and work consistently with the SAMM Project.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to land management and/or development that aims to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before. BNG does not change existing protections to protected sites, irreplaceable habitats or protected species.

Through appropriate design and implementation BNG can complement the purpose of SANGS. These are designed to provide more natural and diverse green space for communities to benefit from and, consequently, delivering more effective mitigation to alleviate pressure on SPAs. SANG is not an automatic delivery mechanism for BNG but the two can exist on the same site. BNG on SANG is only attributable to such habitat creation or enhancement that proves measurable additionality over and above the minimum requirements of the SANG, demonstrated through use of the Biodiversity Metric stipulated by the consenting body.

For BNG to be delivered on SANG, the SANG should achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations under the SANG guidance, as quantified through the metric. It is encouraged that, where applicable, additional or enhanced features at SANGs are informed by local nature or wildlife strategies and priorities, such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). It is recommended that the BNG calculations for the SANG are done separately from the rest of the project calculations, in order to ensure a clear audit trail and allow for simple demonstration of the additional biodiversity unit uplift beyond the minimum SANG requirements. Any additional features provided for BNG purposes should not conflict with the principle purpose of the SANG. Consideration should be given for other ecosystem services provided by the SANG and design should ensure BNG does not compete with these but delivers alongside them. For example, a wildflower rich grassland area created for biodiversity benefits would provide additional ecosystem services but could potentially also conflict with recreational services provided by the SANG. Careful consideration should be given to the design of any additional biodiversity features introduced into the SANG to ensure they did not conflict with the SANGs principle purpose.

For the purposes of the BNG calculation, the baseline value of the SANG is the site with the Habitat Regulation key required habitat features incorporated. Enhancements should be additional to count towards BNG, in that the enhancements would not have taken place in the absence of the BNG funding (or commitment of funding) and the biodiversity benefit (as measured through the metric) should not also be claimed to compensate for another project's biodiversity impact. Further information on BNG is set out in the following guidance and standards

1. The CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA Good practice principles for development should be followed: https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/C776a-Biodiversity-net-gain.-Good-practice-principles-for-development.-A-practical-guide-web.pdf

2. The British Standard for Biodiversity Net Gain (BS 8683) is a process standard that describes the implementation of BNG by a project (to be released in 2021).

Equality Act 2010 Compliance:

1. This does not fall under the remit of Natural England and we will not be giving bespoke advice about it during our pre application discussions. However, we urge developers and Local Planning Authorities alike to consider the requirements of it, when designing their SANG solutions.

Paths:

1. We are concerned about sections of the circular route that seasonally are wet, muddy or flooded, and could put visitors off from visiting. In these cases, we recommend boardwalk or paths are built up, for them to remain as compliant SANG. Relating to this, if applying grip to surfaces, avoid wire netting as it can trap dog claws.
2. Path surfacing needs to remain semi natural. The highest specification surface we would accept is resin bound hoggin.

3. Avoid convoluted paths and pinch points in SANG design. By maintaining a minimum width between paths of 100 m in open ground and 50 m in dense woodland.
   If necessary, look to extend the area of the SANG, or look at a local SANG Network.
4. Avoid paths running through areas adjacent to major infrastructure with prolonged loud noise. For example, adjacent dual carriageways or motorways. Natural England look at a maximum decibel limit of 60, before requiring discounting of SANG area.

Way-marking and signage:

1. Provide a map at the entrances with an easy to follow circular walk.
2. Gates, fencing and planting following natural land features can help distinguish routes.
3. Highlight points of interest and site history.
4. Car parks well sign posted using highways specification. Where possible through use of the brown sign initiative.
5. Provide contact details for site manager at main entrance.

Bins and dog fouling:

1. Dog bins should be in convenient sections of site and near the entrances.

Car park standard:

1. Provide a minimum of 1 parking space per ha.

Safety and security:

1. Where required for health and safety purposes, the SANG should have suitable access for emergency vehicles.
2. Car parks should be designed to reduce risk of anti-social behaviour, break in or feelings of vulnerability for site users.
3. Perimeter fencing secure to prevent dogs getting out.

Amenities:
These are **not a requirement** but have proved an attractive feature in those SANG with the space available.

1. A play area is a feature that attracts those with children to visit the site, as these are not present on the SPA. If a play area is included, it should be made from sustainable natural sources and not be full of bright plastics.
2. A café or food/drink provisions often attracts more visitors to the site. (Case study 4)

To conclude
We sometimes lose track of the basic requirement for a SANG, which is to attract people away from the SPA. When designing all SANG, the visitor experience needs to be put first. Costings and even habitat creation should all fall from a strong Visitor Strategy, which should form part of the SANG Management Strategy. Sites and their information should be created in a positive manner to interest visitors and have them coming back time and time again. Though biodiversity and landscape planning are obviously important, we urge you to start by considering the local populous and what they want and how they want to interact with your site, when creating a new SANG.

Case Studies

1. Edenbrook Country Park – Hart District Council - Well surfaced paths, and provisions for wildlife.

Edenbrook is a 24-hectare country park, delivered by Berkeley in partnership with Natural England and Hart District Council.
The paths are sufficiently wide for a combination of site users (Figure 1). There is also a good network of surfaced paths which are not convoluted and avoids pinch points. This was historically agricultural fields, but through innovative design, they have delivered a site that delivers both for visitors but also for biodiversity. Hart District Council have recognised the SANG network approach here and are bolting on extra area to the SANG and linking to other SANG in the vicinity.

Figure 1: The surfaced paths at Edenbrook are located sufficiently far from one another, and from wildlife rich-areas. They are wide enough for the whole combination of site visitors to use.

2. Farnham Park – Waverley Borough Council - Provisions for dogs and wildlife.

Several of the ponds in Farnham Park are designated as wildlife ponds. These are rich in wildlife, hosting many amphibian and invertebrate species. Dead hedges were built around three of the ponds, using materials cut from Farnham Park. To provide water and an opportunity to swim, 'Friends Pond' has been kept fully accessible to dogs. It is located nearest the main entrance and is easily accessible to all visitors. The wildlife ponds are further away from the main entrance, where visitor density is expected to be lower.

Figure 2: 'Friends Pond' a dog pond on Farnham Park which allows dogs to swim and drink from, whilst other ponds are fenced to protect wildlife.

3. Bucklers Forest – Bracknell Forest Council Comprehensive and engaging interpretation.

At the entrance to the site, Buckler's Forest includes a map that shows 3 options for circular routes (measuring 3.6 km, 2.4 km and 1.3 km). It also includes information on the wildlife that visitors can expect to see on site. As well as this, it highlights the site history. The inclusion of such comprehensive signage encourages users to care more about the site.
Buckler's Forest has showcased its site history by incorporating green electrical boxes, retained from the transport laboratory, into the site design. These have been transformed into benches, bug hotels, and even mini 'museum' exhibitions. The integration of the site's history is beloved by many site visitors and it creates a distinctly 'country park' feel.

Figure 3: A mini 'museum' exhibition including some archaeological samples found on site. Located within a green electrical box present when the site was a transport laboratory.

Figure 4: A bug hotel also within a repurposed green electrical box.

4. Heather Farm – Delivered by Horsell Common Preservation Society in partnership with Woking Borough Council - Provision of amenities.

Heather Farm has proved to be a very popular SANG, particularly for of its amenities, including a café and a large car park. Whilst it is not possible, or advisable, to include a café on every SANG, at Heather Farm, it has attracted a lot of visitors, many of whom would otherwise visit the SPA. After identifying a need for additional parking provisions, Horsell Common Preservation Society added 57 new spaces to the car park. There are currently 109 car parking spaces for visitors. Heather Farm provides 4 spaces per hectare, significantly more than the suggested minimum of 1 space per hectare.

Figure 5: A view of some of the habitat creation at Heather Farm

5. Wellesley Woodlands – Rushmoor Borough Council - Waymarking and signposting.

Wellesley Woodlands has incorporated non-intrusive way-markers to clearly signpost users around the 8 trails included in the SANG. These are easy to follow for site users whilst remaining unobtrusive. Where multiple trails intersect, signposting is clear to ensure that trails can be followed with ease. Both the map and associated markers clearly identify those trails that are suitable ground for wheelchairs and those with restricted mobility.

Figure 6: A signpost clearly defining two all-ability trails, the Birch Trail and the Holly Trail.

Figure 7: A way-marker to signpost users along the Wellesley Willow Trail.

6. Biodiversity Net Gain

Examples of Biodiversity Net Gain delivered within a SANG:

A. If an extra hedgerow was put into a SANG, not for screening purposes, this could count. If it is put in for screening reasons, this is a key SANG feature and therefore cannot count towards BNG unless the hedgerow was of higher distinctives than that needed for screening purposes or maintained in better ecological condition, in which case it could count.
B. Planting wildflower bulbs on appropriately sited amenity grassland within a SANG and in turn converting it to species rich meadow could be counted towards BNG.
C. If the SANG has structures such as a toilet block or café, then BNG could be delivered through the introduction of green/vegetated roofs and/or walls on such structures.

Potential Opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain

Appendix B

Natural England Country Park Criteria

Essential criteria

Your park must be:

- at least 10 hectares in size
- defined by a clear boundary – marked on a map, whether it's open or fenced in
- accessible – less than 10 miles from a residential area
- free to enter
- inclusive and accessible – show how you've met equality and disability needs and provided for varied groups
- predominantly natural or semi-natural landscape, for example woodland, grassland, wetland, heathland or parkland, with no more than 5% of the area built upon (excluding car parks)
- signposted and easy to navigate – you should show visitors where they can go, what they can do and direct them along footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes
- visibly staffed, for example litter collection and maintenance
- available for public or educational events
- near public toilets – either on-site or a 2 minute walk away
- informed by the local community – the public should have some influence over the management and development of your site

Desirable criteria

Your park should ideally have:

- a visitor centre
- play facilities
- catering
- bike and horse trails
- art and sculpture
- permanent staff presence during the day
- detailed information available to visitors, such as leaflets
- brown and white tourist directional signs and shown on an OS map
- activities outside, such as water sports and adventure sports
- achieved, or is working towards, Green Flag Award (GFA) status
- a green transport policy, such as buses and cycle routes to your site
- facilities for less able visitors, such as easy trails, seats and information available in accessible formats
- planned for the management of biodiversity, geodiversity and preservation of historical environment
- opportunities for practical community involvement, such as volunteering
- promoted the health benefits of walking
- an outreach programme promoting your site to less represented sectors of the community
- a programme of events and guided walks, promoting healthy living and environmental awareness

Appendix C

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Condition assessment Categories [See reference 42]

Natural England categorises the condition of SSSIs as one of the following:

Favourable

The designated feature is being adequately conserved. The results from monitoring demonstrate that the feature is meeting all the mandatory site-specific monitoring targets set out in the monitoring specification (MS). The MS sets the minimum standard for favourable condition for the designated feature and there may be scope for the further (voluntary) enhancement of the feature.

Unfavourable recovering

Often known simply as ‘recovering’. The feature is not yet fully conserved but the necessary actions to achieve favourable condition have:

- been identified and recorded
- at least one action underway
- no actions behind schedule

Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the feature will reach favourable condition in time. At least one of the designated feature’s mandatory attributes is not meeting their targets (as set out in the site-specific MS).

Unfavourable no change

The feature is not being conserved. It will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the management or external pressures. This is reflected in the results of monitoring over time, with:

- at least one of the mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site-specific MS)
- the results not moving towards the desired state

The longer the feature remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.

If the feature is unfavourable, it should be recorded as unfavourable – no change, if the necessary actions to achieve favourable condition have:

- not been identified and recorded
- none of the actions underway
- at least one action behind schedule

In rare cases, an interest feature might not be able to regain its original condition following a damaging activity, but a new stable state might be achieved.

Unfavourable declining

The feature is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to management or external pressures. The feature condition is becoming progressively worse. This is reflected in the results of monitoring over time, with:

- at least one of the designated feature's mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site-specific MS)
- the results moving further away from the desired state
- The longer the feature remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.

Part destroyed

Lasting damage has occurred to part of a designated feature, such that it has been irretrievably lost and will never recover. No amount of management will allow the feature to ever reach favourable condition.

Destroyed

Lasting damage has occurred to an entire designated feature such that the feature has been irretrievably lost. No amount of management will bring this feature back. This feature will never recover. For example, a finite mineralogical feature has been totally removed from its surroundings without consent and is lost forever.

Site visits and condition assessments

Natural England may visit your SSSI to check on its general condition. Natural England or expert contractors will carry out condition assessments if:

- Natural England thinks it's necessary
- the condition of the site may change

For most sites they'll do this at least once every 6 years. They may visit more often if a special feature:

- can only be assessed at a specific time of year

- is likely to change quickly, such as grassland

For sites where changes are expected to be slow, such as woodland, they may do a condition assessment once every 10 years.

Natural England will request your permission before visiting. It may use its power of entry if it believes the site is being damaged.

At other times, Natural England can enter the site without your permission but will only do this if:

- you've been notified of the visit
- you've not allowed access

For assessment, Natural England assesses each feature for which the site was designated. Each feature is assessed as a whole.

Appendix C Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Condition assessment Categories

References

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