

Rochford Green Belt Assessment (Draft) – Executive Summary

What is this report?

The Green Belt Assessment is an evidence document prepared to support the new Rochford Local Plan. It does not allocate land for development and it does not make planning decisions. Instead, it assesses how different areas of Green Belt around Southend, Rochford, Great Wakering, Little Wakering and Barling contribute to the purposes of the Green Belt.

The assessment divides the Green Belt into a series of parcels (SO1-SO38) and scores each parcel against the nationally defined Green Belt purposes. This helps the Council understand which areas make the strongest contribution to Green Belt objectives and which areas may be less critical.

What are the Green Belt purposes?

The assessment considers the following purposes:

Purpose A - Preventing the unrestricted spread of large built-up areas.

Purpose B - Preventing neighbouring towns and settlements from merging together.

Purpose C - Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Purpose D - Preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

Purpose E - Supporting urban regeneration (all Green Belt land is considered to contribute equally to this purpose).

The report then identifies whether land could potentially meet the Government's emerging definition of "**Grey Belt**", which generally refers to Green Belt land that makes only a limited contribution to key Green Belt purposes.

Key Findings

1. Most Green Belt land continues to make a strong contribution

The majority of parcels assessed make a **strong contribution to at least one of the principal Green Belt purposes**, particularly:

- preventing urban sprawl,
- preventing encroachment into the countryside, and/or
- maintaining separation between settlements.

As a result, most parcels are **not identified as Grey Belt land**.

2. The most important Green Belt function around Rochford is maintaining separation

The assessment identifies the gap between:

- **Rochford and Southend**, and
- parts of **Southend and Great Wakering**

as particularly important.

Several parcels immediately between Rochford and Southend (especially **SO2, SO3 and SO4**) are assessed as making a **strong contribution to preventing settlement coalescence**. Development in these locations is considered likely to significantly reduce the distinction between settlements.

These parcels are amongst the most sensitive Green Belt areas identified in the assessment.

3. Some smaller or already developed areas may have Grey Belt potential

A number of smaller parcels containing existing development, "washed-over" development or land heavily influenced by surrounding urban areas are identified as having the **potential to be Grey Belt**.

Examples include:

- SO1
- SO8
- SO10
- SO11
- SO12
- SO16
- SO17
- SO21
- SO23
- SO25
- SO26
- SO29
- SO32

- SO34
- SO35
- SO38

However, the report is careful to stress that this is only a **provisional finding**. Further detailed work would still be needed to understand constraints such as:

- heritage impacts,
- flood risk,
- environmental designations,
- biodiversity,
- landscape impacts, and
- other planning considerations.

Being identified as potential Grey Belt does **not** mean a site is suitable for development.

4. Historic town considerations are generally limited

Most parcels receive a **Weak/No Contribution** score against Purpose D (preserving the setting and special character of historic towns).

The assessment concludes that most Green Belt parcels do not play a significant role in protecting the historic character of Rochford or other historic settlements because they lack a direct historic or visual relationship with those settlements.

5. Large rural areas remain highly important

The larger open countryside parcels, particularly east of Rochford and around Great Wakering and the wider estuarine landscape, generally score strongly for:

- preventing sprawl, and
- protecting the countryside.

These areas remain key components of the overall Green Belt.

What does this mean for the Local Plan?

The assessment provides an evidence base to help the Council decide whether any Green Belt release should be considered through the Local Plan process.

In practical terms:

- **Some Green Belt parcels are shown to be particularly important and difficult to justify releasing.**
- **Other parcels appear to make a weaker contribution and may warrant further investigation.**
- The report does **not recommend development sites.**
- The report does **not change Green Belt boundaries.**
- Any future Green Belt release would still need to be justified through the Local Plan process, taking account of housing need, sustainability, infrastructure, environmental constraints and national planning policy.

Headline Conclusion

The draft assessment confirms that the majority of Rochford's Green Belt continues to perform an important planning function, particularly in maintaining separation between Rochford and Southend and protecting the wider countryside. However, the report also identifies a limited number of smaller or previously developed parcels that may have potential to be considered Grey Belt under national policy, subject to further detailed assessment and Local Plan evidence.

The report should therefore be viewed as an evidence-gathering exercise that helps identify where Green Belt performs strongly and where further investigation may be appropriate, rather than a document that determines where development will take place.



Rochford Green Belt Assessment

Rochford District

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

July 2026

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
1	Draft report	H. Lowson	R. Swann	R. Swann	31.07.2026



Land Use Consultants Limited

Registered in England. Registered number 2549296. Registered office: 250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD. Printed on 100% recycled paper

Contents

Chapter 1	6
Introduction	
Chapter 2	8
Context	
National Green Belt policy	8
Consultation on revised NPPF	11
National Green Belt Planning Practice Guidance	11
Rochford Local Plan Green Belt policy	15
The Green Belt in Rochford	16
Previous Green Belt Assessment	16
Chapter 3	19
Assessment Methodology	
General approach	19
The location and scale of assessment areas	19
NPPF footnote 7 areas and assets	22
Previously developed land	25
Assumed future development	25
Assessment of Green Belt contribution and definition of grey belt land	26
Purpose A – to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	27
Purpose B – to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	33
Purpose C – to protect the countryside from encroachment	37
Purpose D – to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	39
Purpose E – to assist in urban regeneration	42
Chapter 4	47
Summary of Findings	
Contribution ratings and grey belt	47
Potential for Fundamental Impacts	66

Chapter 5 **70**

Next Steps

Exceptional circumstances	70
Prioritisation	70
Sustainability	71
Definition of Green Belt boundaries	72
Enhancement of Green Belt	73

Appendix A **75**

Glossary

Appendix B **78**

Historic Towns Assessment

Appendix C **82**

Parcel Assessments

References **83**

Table of Tables

Table 4.1: Contribution Rating Summary	50
--	----

Table of Figures

Figure 2.1: Existing Green Belt in Rochford and surrounding areas	18
Figure 3.1: Footnote 7 designations	24
Figure 4.1: Provisionally identified grey belt	59
Figure 4.2: Purpose A contribution	60
Figure 4.3: Purpose B contribution	61
Figure 4.4: Purpose C contribution	62
Figure 4.5: Purpose D contributions	63

Figure 4.6: Purpose E contributions	64
Figure 4.7: Highest contribution ratings	65

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 LUC was commissioned by Rochford District Council to undertake an independent, robust, and transparent assessment of all Green Belt land across the local planning authority area. This Green Belt Assessment will form part of the key evidence base for the Council's emerging Rochford Local Plan.

1.2 The Green Belt Assessment will be used to inform the preparation of the new Rochford District Local Plan (hereafter referred to as the 'Local Plan') set for adoption in late 2027 to early 2028 and will cover the district up until 2042. This assessment will replace the previous joint Rochford/Southend Green Belt Assessment undertaken by LUC in 2020.

1.3 There are a number of policy requirements and changes that necessitate undertaking a new Green Belt Assessment:

- In December 2024, the Government introduced significant changes to national policy on Green Belt within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), notably through the introduction of the concept of 'grey belt' land where, subject to meeting other criteria, development would not be considered inappropriate.
- In February 2025, equally significant changes were introduced into the relevant sections of Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) that related to grey belt land and the methodology for undertaking assessments to identify it.
- The NPPF requires (para 32) that the preparation of policy "*should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence*". The previous evidence on Green Belt predates the changes to national policy and guidance, and is therefore out of date. A new Green Belt Study is therefore required.

1.4 The purpose of the Green Belt Assessment is to assess the Green Belt within Rochford to determine how it performs against the purposes of the Green Belt, consistent with the requirements of NPPF and PPG. The assessment outputs will form part of a wider evidence base that, taken together, will help inform the development of the next Local Plan. The purpose of the assessment is not to identify land that is suitable for development, or to set out the necessary exceptional circumstances for releasing land from the Green Belt. This will be subsequently undertaken, by the Council, if appropriate, in the context of the proposed strategic approach to meet development requirements, considering a wide range of evidence relating to wider sustainability and viability considerations.

1.5 This report sets out the context and methodology used to undertake the Green Belt review, the key study findings and proposed next steps. LUC has also prepared a revised Green Belt assessment for Southend. The two studies will be undertaken using the same methodology to ensure consistency across the study areas.

1.6 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** sets out planning policy in relation to Green Belt, with particular reference to the latest changes to the NPPF and PPG. It also outlines the origins of the Green Belt in Rochford and provides a summary of the previous Green Belt study.
- **Chapter 3** outlines the methodology that was used to undertake the assessment of Green Belt land.
- **Chapter 4** summarises the findings of the assessment.
- **Chapter 5** suggests next steps that should be considered.
- **Appendix A** sets out a glossary of key terms.
- **Appendix B** provides background information to the Historic Towns assessment methodology (relevant to the assessment of Purpose D).
- **Appendix C** contains the detailed proforma reports for the assessment land parcels.

It should be noted that this method statement is in an 'Accessible format', which means it has been formatted to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations (2018), as set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2). This means it must have larger font and larger spacing between lines and headings.

Chapter 2

Context

2.1 This chapter sets out the planning policy context relating to the definition and assessment of Green Belt and grey belt. It also provides a summary of the origins of the Green Belt in Rochford and details of the previous Green Belt study that was prepared by LUC in 2020.

National Green Belt policy

2.2 Government policy on the Green Belt and grey belt is set out in chapter 13 'Protecting Green Belt Land' [See reference 1] of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Government attaches great importance to Green Belt, and for this reason there is a detailed policy framework in this chapter of the NPPF for both the review of Green Belt boundaries and for determining planning applications for development within the Green Belt.

Aims and purposes

2.3 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that *"the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence"*.

2.4 Paragraph 143 sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt. The stated purposes of the Green Belt are particularly important because the main purpose of the Green Belt assessment is to assess the extent to which areas of land within the Green Belt contribute to these purposes. As noted at paragraph 2.14 below, the purposes of the Green Belt are also directly related to the definition of Grey Belt. The five purposes are:

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

2.5 The NPPF explains that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless covered by one of the exceptions set out in paragraphs 154-155 (see Glossary), and that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 states that, when considering planning applications, ‘substantial weight’ should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.

Exceptional circumstances

2.6 The NPPF paragraph 145 states that *“Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period”*.

2.7 Paragraph 146 goes on to state that *“where an authority cannot meet its identified need for homes, commercial or other development through other means... authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in this Framework and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt, when considered across the area of the plan”*.

2.8 Paragraph 147 states that authorities must examine fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development before exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. Notable reasonable alternatives include:

- *“making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;*
- *optimise the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of the Framework, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and*
- *discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground”*.

2.9 Paragraph 148 states that *“Where it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give priority to previously developed land, then consider grey belt which is not previously developed, and then other Green Belt locations. However, when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote*

sustainable patterns of development should determine whether a site's location is appropriate with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework”.

Grey belt

2.10 As noted above, the NPPF indicates that, after considering previously developed land, grey belt land should be prioritised for release in order to meet development need. The NPPF's policies regarding development proposals in the Green Belt also indicate, at paragraph 155, that development will not be inappropriate if it would utilise grey belt land, as long as:

- It would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
- There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- The development would be in a sustainable location (with particular reference to NPPF paragraphs 110 and 115); and
- The development would, where applicable, meet the 'Golden Rules' set out in NPPF paragraphs 156-157.

2.11 The concept of 'grey belt' was only introduced into the NPPF in December 2024. It is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, **does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d)** in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development'.

2.12 The definition of grey belt is important because one of the main purposes of the Green Belt assessment will be to determine the extent to which land within the Green Belt contributes to the purposes (a-e) set out at paragraph 143 of NPPG. In turn, this will then identify grey belt land that does not make a strong contribution to purposes (a), (b) or (d).

2.13 Footnote 55 states that with regard to development proposals, if these are on previously developed land (PDL) or grey belt, and are not inappropriate development, substantial weight does not need to be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including to its openness.

Consultation on revised NPPF

2.14 In December 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a wide range of proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the planning system. A consultation on these reforms ran until the 10th of March 2026. MHCLG is now considering the consultation responses following which it will publish a new version of the NPPF, expected later in 2026.

2.15 The proposed reforms do not introduce any changes that would affect the Green Belt contribution assessment methodology set out in this report. However, they do propose an amendment to the definition of 'grey belt', removing the requirement to consider NPPF footnote 7 constraints (other than Green Belt). Should this change be implemented, it would remove the need to classify certain areas in the Green Belt Study as 'provisional' grey belt pending further assessment of whether development would have a significant impact on footnote 7 areas or assets.

2.16 Importantly, if this change does go ahead, it would not negate the need to consider the impact of specific development proposals on footnote 7 areas and assets alongside wider sustainability considerations, rather it only removes the need to do so as part of the process of defining grey belt. The guidance note describing the proposed NPPF changes states that the revised definition *"seeks to enable grey belt to be identified with greater certainty, whilst continuing to ensure that these areas receive the same level of protection as elsewhere in the Framework"*.

2.17 Other proposed changes in the NPPF relating to the Green Belt, whilst not changing the Green Belt contribution assessment methodology set out in this report, if implemented may require consideration during the plan-making and decision-making processes. This includes the approach to housing and mixed-use development around stations defined as 'well-connected' and the application of the 'golden rules'.

National Green Belt Planning Practice Guidance

2.18 The NPPF's Green Belt policies are supplemented by Planning Practice Guidance [See reference 2] (PPG, February 2025) on Green Belt planning and how to assess Green Belt land. This section of PPG was substantially re-written in February 2025 and now sets out a detailed methodology for undertaking Green Belt assessments, and how to identify grey belt land, that the Shropshire Green Belt Assessment will need to follow. This is particularly relevant to the methodology of this study.

2.19 The PPG makes it clear that strategic or local planning authorities, or appropriate groups of local planning authorities, should produce a Green Belt assessment during the preparation or updating of all Local Plans and Spatial Development Strategies that set the strategic context for the release of land – where this would be required to meet development needs.

2.20 The PPG sets out the key steps in a Green Belt assessment, which include:

- Defining the location and scale of the assessment area;
- Evaluating contribution to the Green Belt purposes;
- Considering areas and assets lists in NPPF footnote 7;
- Identifying grey belt land; and
- Determining if proposals would fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes (taken together) for remaining Green Belt in the plan area.

2.21 Key points in the guidance relating to the assessment of contribution to the Green Belt purposes are summarised below. The PPG goes on to address the sustainability of development and meeting the ‘Golden Rules’, both of which are relevant to determining whether development would be inappropriate, but these are considerations that lie outside of the scope of this Green Belt Assessment.

Assessing Green Belt land to identify grey belt land

2.22 Authorities must identify grey belt land as part of the necessary review and alteration of Green Belt boundaries in order to:

- Suitably prioritise sustainable grey belt for any proposals for development allocations in the Green Belt over other Green Belt locations, in line with NPPF paragraphs 147 & 148, through the plan-making process; and
- Help determine planning applications on Green Belt land in line with paragraph 155.

2.23 Importantly, the guidance is clear that where grey belt is identified, it does not automatically follow that it should be allocated for development, released from the Green Belt, or for development proposals to be approved in all circumstances. The contribution Green Belt land makes to Green Belt purposes is one consideration in making decisions about Green Belt land’. Decisions on planning applications should be informed by an overall application of the relevant policies in the area’s adopted Development Plan and the NPPF (PPG Paragraphs: 010, 011 Reference ID: 64-001-20250225), including whether:

- Development is sustainably located;
- Whether it would meet the 'Golden Rules' contribution (where applicable); and
- Whether there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed.

2.24 The principle of sustainability will necessarily also guide the strategic approach to development, both inside and outside of the Green Belt, and inform the assessment of land allocation options during plan-making, in accordance with the principles set out in the NPPF.

The appropriate scale of Green Belt assessments

2.25 Authorities must identify an appropriate scale of Green Belt assessment that delivers clear variations in contribution to the Green Belt purposes, assessing all Green Belt land within a Plan area in the first instance and responding to local circumstances. Local circumstances may dictate, for example, the need for smaller assessment areas in areas where there is greater variation in contribution to the Green Belt purposes, or greater potential for sustainable development, such as around existing settlements or public transport hubs or corridors.

2.26 Villages should not be defined as large built-up areas, towns or historic towns. Where there are no historic towns in or adjacent to a plan area, it may not be necessary to provide detailed assessments against Purpose D.

Grey belt assessment criteria

2.27 The PPG sets out illustrative criteria that should be considered when assessing the contribution of land to Green Belt Purposes A, B and D. These are detailed in Chapter 3 below, where it is shown how they have informed the assessment methodology for this study.

Applying NPPF footnote 7 to the definition of grey belt land

2.28 Grey belt land cannot be defined on Green Belt land covered by or affecting other NPPF footnote 7 designations (excluding Green Belt) where that designation 'would provide a strong reason for refusing and restricting development'. In such locations, it may be necessary to only 'provisionally identify such land as grey belt in advance of more detailed specific proposals' (PPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 64-

006-20250225). The relevant NPPF footnote 7 designations are outlined in paragraph 3.20 below.

Assessing the impact of Green Belt release or development on the remaining Green Belt in the Plan area

2.29 The PPG states that a Green Belt assessment should not be limited to the impact of release or development of grey belt land but any Green Belt land, and requires consideration of fundamental impact to all five Green Belt purposes (taken together) to all remaining Green Belt across the plan area as a whole.

2.30 Such Green Belt locations should only be discounted for release or development where they would ‘affect the ability of all the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way’ (PPG Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 64-008-20250225).

Identifying sustainable locations in a Green Belt

2.31 Irrespective of the outcomes of reviewing Green Belt boundaries, when determining applications in the Green Belt or identifying appropriate locations for development in a Local Plan, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development is essential, as set out in paragraph 11 sections (a) and (d) (ii) of the NPPF. These principles should determine whether a site’s location would be appropriate for the kind of development proposed. Consequently, where grey belt land is not in a location that is or can be made sustainable, development on this land is inappropriate.

2.32 The sustainability of specific locations should be determined in light of local context and site or development-specific considerations. Thus, in plan making, the fit of locations with the principles of sustainability will take into consideration factors such as: local geography; infrastructure and connectivity; the specific settlements characteristics and function; climate change; effective use of land; and other relevant constraints and opportunities, including the natural and built environment, physical characteristics, legal covenants, and opportunities for environmental improvement. Furthermore, authorities are required to seek to maximise sustainable transport solutions in line with NPPF paragraphs 110 and 115.

Impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt

2.33 PPG Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 64-013-20250225 sets out factors that can be considered in assessing the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt. It states that, where necessary, assessments of the impact of proposals on the openness of the Green Belt must be tailored to the circumstances of the case and may include consideration of a proposals:

- Spatial volume, i.e. impact on spatial openness;
- Visual impact, i.e. impact on visual openness;
- The duration of development, and its remediability; and
- The degree of activity, such as traffic generation.

2.34 Although relating to development proposals, this guidance can help inform judgements relating to the impact that existing development has on Green Belt openness, which is one of the factors that needs to be considered when assessing contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

Rochford Local Plan Green Belt policy

2.35 Current local plan policies predate the recent revisions to the NPPF.

2.36 The Rochford District Council development plan is currently formed of several documents including the Core Strategy (2011), the Development Management Document (2014) and Action Plans for Hockley, London Southend Airport and Environs, Rochford Town Centre and Rayleigh Centre Areas. These documents set the planning framework for Rochford until the adoption of the emerging Local Plan.

2.37 Within the adopted Core Strategy, Policy GB1: Green Belt Protection states that the Council will allocate the minimum amount of Green Belt land necessary to meet the District's housing and employment needs. In doing so, particular consideration will be given to the need to prevent the coalescence of individual settlements, in order to help preserve their identities. The Council will direct development away from the Green Belt as far as practicable and will prioritise the protection of Green Belt land based on how well the land helps achieve the purposes of the Green Belt.

2.38 The Draft Local Plan for Rochford District, which was released for consultation in February 2026, includes Strategic Policy MG2 – Green Belt, which states that:

1. Land which is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt will be protected against inappropriate development, as defined by national policy.

2. Within the Green Belt, inappropriate development will not be permitted, unless the applicant can demonstrate very special circumstances which can outweigh the potential harm, including harm to the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it.

2.39 As mentioned above, the Rochford Green Belt was last reviewed in 2020 as part of a joint assessment of the Green Belt land within the District of Rochford and the Borough of Southend-on-Sea which is set out in more detail below [\[See reference 3\]](#).

The Green Belt in Rochford

2.40 The Green Belt land within Rochford and Southend-on-Sea forms part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The idea of preserving open land around cities dates back as far as the 16th century, when Queen Elizabeth I restricted building within a few miles of London to prevent disease and protect food supplies.

2.41 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, planners such as Ebenezer Howard promoted the idea of keeping countryside close to urban areas to improve living conditions. This led to more formal proposals, particularly in the early 1900s, to create a continuous belt of open land to stop urban sprawl.

2.42 Green Belt policy was not formally incorporated into the planning system until 1955, when the government issued Circular 42/55. This marked the key point at which local authorities were required to include Green Belt designations within their development plans.

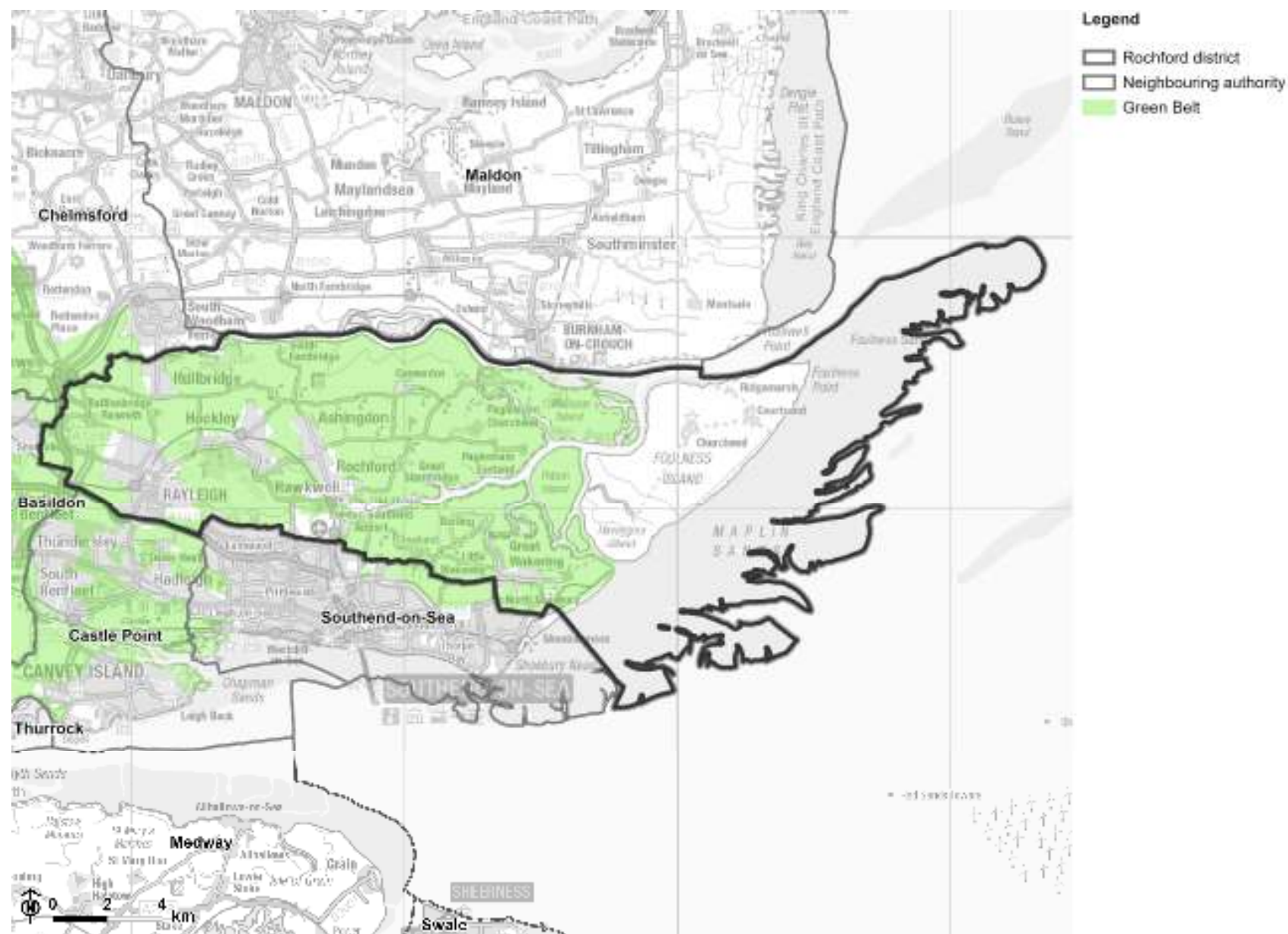
2.43 Following this directive, county authorities, particularly in Essex, began defining Green Belt boundaries. Rochford was subsequently included within the Metropolitan Green Belt as part of statutory development plans, ensuring the protection of open countryside and preventing coalescence between settlements such as Southend and neighbouring towns. The Green Belt in Rochford today extends to 11,820ha which constitutes just under 71% of the land area within the district council area [\[See reference 4\]](#). **Figure 2.1** below shows the extent of the Rochford Green Belt in the context of the Southend borough.

Previous Green Belt Assessment

2.44 In 2020, LUC was commissioned to undertake an assessment of the Green Belt land within the District of Rochford and the Borough of Southend-on-Sea. The Study was undertaken in two stages:

- Stage 1 identified strategic variations in the ‘contribution’ of land to the five Green Belt purposes as defined in the NPPF. In addition, Stage 1 identified areas of potential for realignment of the Green Belt boundary along alternative permanent and readily recognisable physical features, or just to resolve digital mapping errors. The Stage 1 study also assessed the potential for the Councils to designate new Green Belt land.
- Stage 2 involved a more detailed assessment of the potential ‘harm’ of releasing sites/parcels of land from the Green Belt. This study assessed specific promoted sites identified by Rochford and Southend-on-Sea Councils, in addition to areas that made the weakest contribution to the Green Belt purposes as identified in the Stage 1 strategic assessment.

Figure 2.1: Existing Green Belt in Rochford and surrounding areas



Created by UIC - 18322 Rochford OverviewMaps18322 rd Fig 2.1 Context 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number ACC000808122, © MHCLG 2020.

Chapter 3

Assessment Methodology

3.1 This chapter sets out the proposed methodology for the Rochford Green Belt assessment, with reference to key planning policy, planning practice guidance and case law. The February 2025 PPG (outlined above in Chapter 2) is particularly relevant to this chapter.

General approach

3.2 The assessment assessed and presented the contribution that identified parcels of land make to each of the five purposes of the Green Belt (A to E). Contribution to Purposes C and E are not relevant to the identification of grey belt but Purpose C in particular is still an important consideration in planning decisions related to the Green Belt, particularly in scenarios involving the potential release or development of Green Belt land that is not defined as grey belt land.

3.3 Having assessed contribution to the Green Belt purposes, conclusions have been drawn on any potential for development to fundamentally undermine these purposes across the plan area as a whole.

The location and scale of assessment areas

3.4 The PPG states that local planning authorities must identify an appropriate scale of Green Belt assessment that delivers clear variations in contribution to the Green Belt purposes, assessing all Green Belt land within a Plan area in the first instance and responding to local circumstances.

3.5 Local circumstances may dictate, for example, the need for smaller parcels in areas where there is greater variation in contribution to the Green Belt purposes, or greater potential for sustainable development, such as around existing settlements or public transport hubs or corridors.

3.6 This study has encompassed all of the Rochford Green Belt. LUC's Green Belt assessments do not produce an assessment of predefined parcels of land but use an analysis process to identify variations in contribution to the purposes, with areas being defined to reflect those variations. The defined areas will be the final product of the assessment, reflecting the range of variations in Green Belt contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

3.7 The benefits of this approach are that:

- It avoids misleading results where predefined areas have variations in contribution within a parcel that are averaged out; and
- It enables the Councils to overlay potential development sites/locations over the findings of the Green Belt assessment to get a clear understanding of the contribution they make to the Green Belt purposes without the need for further evaluation (unless the sites are less than the minimum parcel size identified – in this case one hectare – see below for further information on the granularity of the assessment).

3.8 Areas vary in size depending on the range of factors (within and in their immediate vicinity) affecting their contribution to the Green Belt purposes. For example, parcels closer to urban areas are likely to be subject to a greater range of factors influencing their contribution compared to more remote areas in the open countryside, resulting in smaller ‘parcels’ at urban edges and larger ‘outer areas’ in the open countryside respectively.

3.9 Parcel boundaries typically follow readily recognisable physical features, including natural features such as waterways and water bodies, woodlands and topographical features, and manmade features such as roads and railway lines and field boundaries) where possible. However, their geographic extent is ultimately determined by performance against Green Belt purposes.

3.10 The granularity of the study, in terms of the resultant number of identified assessment parcels, have been influenced by the rating scale and defined minimum parcel size described below.

3.11 Parcels have not straddled local authority boundaries and consultation has been undertaken with neighbouring authorities to understand any cross boundary methodological issues. LUC has prepared the Green Belt study for Southend so this has ensured consistency across these two studies.

Rating scale

3.12 The PPG is not prescriptive in terms of the definition of rating scales, but for the purposes of identifying grey belt land it provides illustrative examples of features which would characterise ‘strong’, ‘moderate’ and ‘weak/no’ levels of contribution to the relevant Green Belt purposes (A, B and D). To minimise complexity, this assessment of Green Belt land has followed the rating scale referenced in the PPG.

3.13 Even where grey belt areas are defined through the study, a plan area's growth needs, other locationally specific development requirements, the need for development to be in sustainable locations, and the specific constraints and opportunities of sites, may still require consideration of the release of Green Belt land that does not meet the grey belt definition. Therefore, Green Belt purposes C and E have also been rated.

3.14 The 'strong' contribution ratings, where applicable to Purposes A, B or D, identify land which does not meet the definition of grey belt (given that land which contributes strongly to Purpose C and/or E can still meet the definition of grey belt land).

3.15 The release and/or development of land or sites not identified as grey belt may be harder to justify, but NPPF paragraph 148 makes it clear that more sustainable greenfield sites around sustainable transport nodes (such as railway stations) on higher-performing Green Belt land can still be considered for allocation or permission where Exceptional or Very Special Circumstances are demonstrated to apply.

3.16 Distinguishing between land that does not perform a strong contribution against a specific Green Belt purpose (through two other categories – moderate and weak/no contribution) – is in line with the PPG on grey belt. This can, alongside sustainability and other relevant considerations, inform more nuanced judgements regarding the suitability of locations (including those classified as grey belt) for release or development.

Minimum parcel size

3.17 The number of parcels which have resulted from the analysis process has also been influenced by setting a minimum parcel size. The higher the minimum parcel size, the greater the likelihood that smaller areas may exist within a parcel that performs more weakly in relation to one or more of the Green Belt purposes than the parcel as a whole.

3.18 In order to make the outputs useful for development management purposes and to reduce the likelihood of more localised variations in Green Belt contribution being identified at a later stage, the minimum parcel size for the assessment has been defined as one hectare.

NPPF footnote 7 areas and assets

3.19 The Government's definition of grey belt land excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. The PPG states in such locations, it may be necessary to only provisionally identify such land as grey belt in advance of more detailed specific proposals (PPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 64-006-20250225).

3.20 Footnote 7 states *"The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitat sites [See reference 5] (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets [See reference 6] (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75 [See reference 7]); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change"*. This is considered to include the following designations within Rochford:

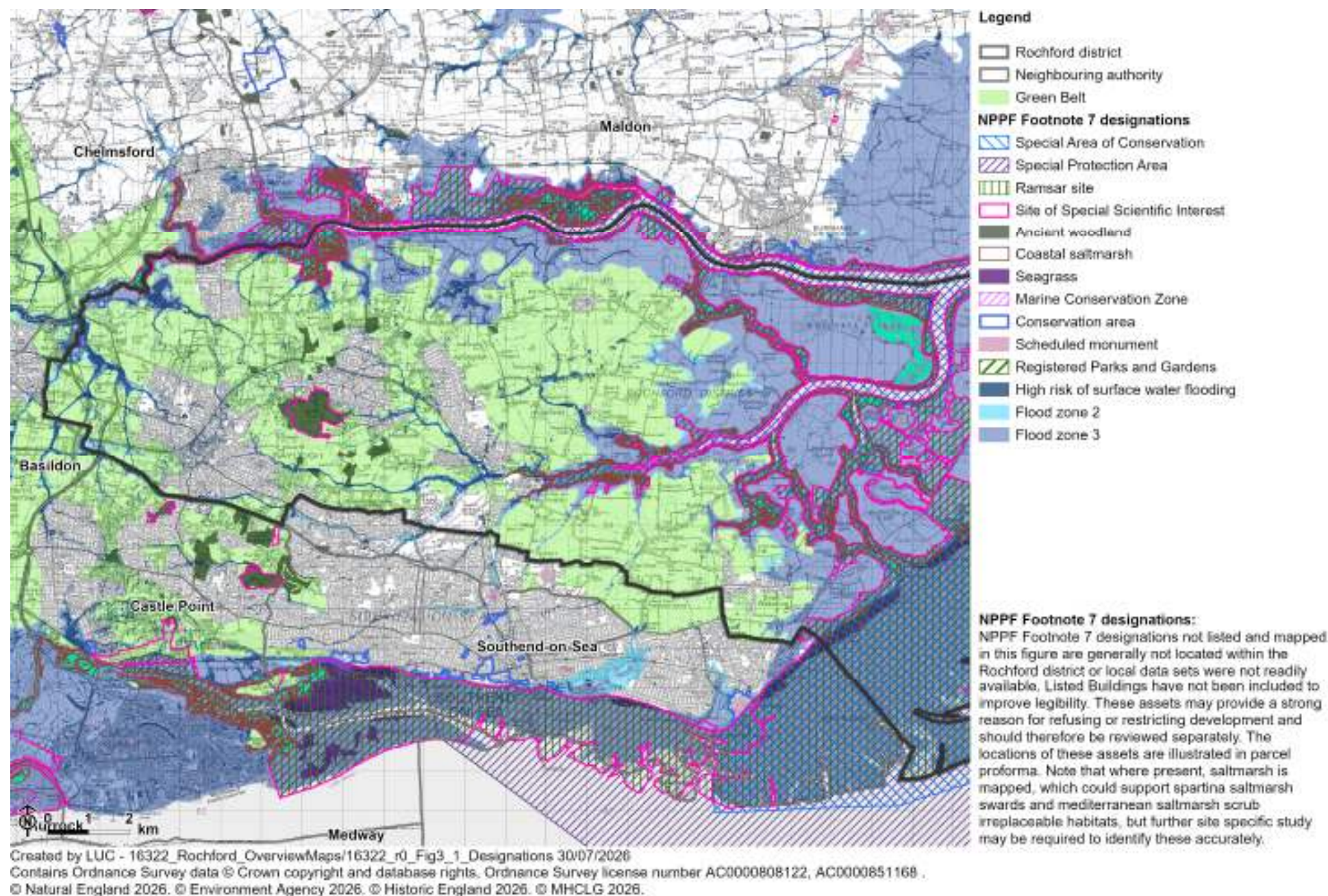
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC);
- Special Protection Areas (SPA);
- RAMSAR sites;
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Marine Conservation Zones;
- Irreplaceable habitats [See reference 8];
- Conservation areas;
- Scheduled monuments;
- Registered Parks and Gardens;
- Listed Buildings; and
- Flood risk areas – including Flood Zones 2 and 3, and areas of high risk for surface water flooding.

3.21 In light of the PPG, these areas and assets have not been excluded from assessment, but their location and extent have been mapped alongside the findings of the Green Belt contribution assessment. See **Figure 3.1** for a map of footnote 7 designations within Rochford District. Green Belt land that does not contribute strongly to Green Belt purposes A, B and D and overlaps with these footnote 7 areas

and assets have only been 'provisionally' identified as grey belt land. Further detailed work would need to be undertaken by local planning authorities (as necessary through the plan-making and development management processes) to establish the effects of more detailed specific proposals on them.

3.22 Additionally, the majority of footnote 7 designations (for example Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monument) have no consistent and accurate GIS data available marking the extent of the settings of these assets (the notable exceptions being SSSI which have mapped 'Impact Risk Zones' and World Heritage Sites). To reflect this uncertainty the assessment outputs have used the terminology 'provisional grey belt'.

Figure 3.1: Footnote 7 designations



Previously developed land

3.23 The NPPF definition of grey belt indicates that only previously developed land (PDL) that does not make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes A, B or D can be defined as grey belt land, i.e. that PDL in isolation is insufficient justification to define Green Belt land as grey belt. This is supported by recent appeal decisions directly relevant to the matter [\[See reference 9\]](#).

3.24 The NPPF glossary defines Previously Developed Land (PDL) as *“Land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape”*.

3.25 The majority of significant (less than one hectare) activities and land uses that qualify for definition as PDL have likely been defined as making less than a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes A, B and D (by virtue of their urbanising influence and/or effect on the openness of the Green Belt) and have therefore fallen within defined grey belt locations through the strategic assessment process. However, some PDL such as large areas of fixed surface infrastructure may in certain locations maintain a strong sense of openness such that they make a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes A, B or D and are not eligible for definition as grey belt land.

3.26 PDL and grey belt at a scale of less than one hectare in area have not been identified through this strategic assessment.

Assumed future development

3.27 The assessment process assumes that land adjacent to, but inset from, the Green Belt which is not currently developed will, unless it is constrained by footnote 7 designations, be developed in the future. When assessing the relationship between urban and open land, such areas are treated as though already developed, but with the assumption that existing Green Belt edge boundary features will be retained.

3.28 Similarly, where land within the Green Belt has consent (or a resolution to consent) for major development, it has been assumed that this will go ahead with a consequent loss of openness but retention of existing boundary features. There has been no consideration of specific development or associated landscaping proposals.

Assessment of Green Belt contribution and definition of grey belt land

3.29 Working outwards from inset settlement edges, the analysis process has identified variations in the relationship between the urban area and open Green Belt land, marking variations in the relevance of each Green Belt purpose and the strength of Green Belt land's relationship with urban areas and the open countryside. These markings have then been used to define parcels and outer areas which each make a consistent level of contribution to the Green Belt purposes.

3.30 To identify variations in the relationship between urban and open land the analysis has considered the role of:

- Boundary features (with reference to their strength and consistency);
- Landform;
- Perception of urban development (influenced by boundaries, landform, the scale and extent of urban development and distance from urban areas);
- Urbanising influences within the Green Belt; and
- Strength of relationship with the wider countryside (with reference to any features creating containment).

3.31 It has been assumed, when assessing the contribution of a parcel to the Green Belt purposes, that any future development within that parcel would retain existing outer boundary features (to form the new boundary between urban and open land).

3.32 The paragraphs below identify the factors relevant to the assessment of each of the Green Belt purposes and detail the assessment outputs specific to each purpose in line with national planning policy, practice guidance and case law.

Purpose A – to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Grey belt PPG for Purpose A

3.33 The following features in combination have been identified as being illustrative of a '**strong**' contribution:

- Absence of existing development.
- Proximity to a large built-up area.
- Lack physical features in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development.
- A location which, if developed, would form an incongruous pattern in relation to the large built-up area.

3.34 The presence of one or more of the following features, in addition to being near to a large built-up area, has been identified as being illustrative of a '**moderate**' contribution to Purpose A:

- Presence of, or containment by, development such that any new development would not result in an incongruous pattern of development.
- Being subject to other urbanising influences.
- Having physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development.

3.35 Either lack of proximity to a large built-up area or the presence of, or containment by, significant existing development, has been identified as being illustrative of a '**weak/no**' contribution to Purpose A.

Purpose A definitions

3.36 The PPG uses several terms which require further definition to be applied as part of the assessment process. These are addressed in the paragraphs below.

‘Large built-up area’

3.37 The PPG states that “*villages should not be considered large built-up areas*” (PPG Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225). The implication of this is that towns and cities are large built-up areas.

3.38 The Green Belt within Rochford District forms part of the Metropolitan Green Belt surrounding Greater London, preventing the sprawl of the city. However, the Green Belt within Rochford represents a clear eastwards extension to the main body of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Rochford Green Belt is tightly drawn around existing settlements, the vast majority of which are undeveloped, and serve a local purpose in restricting development in areas around villages to prevent urban sprawl and the merging of neighbouring towns into one another. All settlements defined as towns and cities have been treated as large built-up areas.

3.39 In Rochford this includes:

- Rayleigh;
- Hockley merged with Hawkwell; and
- Rochford merged with Ashingdon.

3.40 In other local authority areas, this includes:

- Southend-on-Sea;
- Basildon;
- Hadleigh;
- South Benfleet;
- South Woodham Ferrers;
- Thundersleigh; and
- Wickford.

‘Near to’

3.41 Purpose A is relevant to land which is ‘adjacent or near to’ a large built-up area. The extent to which land in the vicinity of a large built-up area relates to it is a question of judgement based on a range of factors including:

- Distance proportional to the size and proximity of large built-up areas.
- Features that create a sense of physical and/or visual separation.

- Features that weaken the sense of separation through physical and/or visual connection.
- Urbanising development and activity within the Green Belt.

3.42 Although villages are not large built-up areas, villages that lack significant separation from, or are relatively close to a large built-up area as a result of one or more of the factors outlined above have been considered to be near to a large built-up area.

3.43 The point beyond which Green Belt land has not been considered to be ‘near to’ a large built-up area is where development, whether it be the expansion of existing villages or the creation of new settlements would be sufficiently distinct from the large built-up area as to not be perceived as sprawl associated with it.

‘Free of existing development’

3.44 ‘Existing development’ has not been considered to include the appropriate development ‘exceptions’ listed in NPPF paragraph 154 (see definition of ‘not inappropriate development’ in the Glossary), such as agricultural buildings, which case law [\[See reference 10\]](#) generally considers does not affect the openness of the Green Belt.

3.45 ‘Free of’ has not been considered to mean ‘no existing inappropriate development’. The influence of existing inappropriate development is judged on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the combination of a particular area’s visual and spatial openness.

‘Physical features in reasonable proximity... that could restrict and contain development’

3.46 Many features could be considered to define the edge of a developed area, including features created in association with new development, but the concept of ‘restricting’ and ‘containing’ development has been considered to relate to the extent to which new development would be prevented from having an urbanising influence on land immediately beyond by intervening physical features. Urbanising influence (defined under the header ‘other urbanising influences’ directly below) is one of the factors identified in the PPG as being indicative of a ‘moderate’ contribution to Purpose A. If adjacent land which currently makes a ‘strong’ contribution to Purpose A would, as a result of increased urbanising influence, make a weaker contribution, such that it became grey belt, then physical features would not be deemed to ‘restrict and contain’ development.

3.47 For the purposes of a strategic assessment of existing Green Belt land, this judgement is based on existing physical features in reasonable proximity of existing urban areas, without consideration of potential strengthening of boundaries that could be associated with particular development proposals. Physical features that restrict and contain development would typically be:

- Strong natural landscape elements such as woodlands or changes in topography, which limit views or create a stronger sense of separation between urban and open land; or
- Natural or manmade features that present a physical barrier to movement, and which have some visual screening role, such as tree-lined rivers or canals, motorways and railway lines with embankments, or main roads with strong boundary vegetation.

3.48 Such features have not been considered to restrict and contain development if they emanate out from a large built-up area.

3.49 As assessment parcels are defined to reflect variations in contribution to the Green Belt purposes, physical features that restrict and contain development are typically parcel boundaries. The question of the distance within which a physical feature can be considered to limit impact on undeveloped Green Belt land – that is, whether it is ‘in reasonable proximity’ – is more likely to arise when harm of the release of a specific site is being addressed.

‘Enclosed by existing development’ (‘partially’ or ‘largely’)

3.50 The extent to which land can be considered to be enclosed by development is a judgement which depends both on the strength of the existing development’s urbanising influence on neighbouring Green Belt land and the strength of the neighbouring Green Belt land’s physical and/or visual relationship with the wider countryside.

3.51 The greater the proportion of a parcel’s boundary that adjoins urban development (whether that is inset from the Green Belt or washed-over by it) the greater its enclosure. However, strong urban edge boundary features which limit urbanising influence can limit the sense of enclosure or containment by adjoining development, as long as there is some sense of connectivity with the wider countryside. Conversely, a lack of physical and visual connectivity with the wider countryside can increase the sense of enclosure, even if urban development around a Green Belt area is not strongly visible.

‘Other urbanising influences’

3.52 Separate to the consideration of existing development within the Green Belt, ‘other urbanising influences’ could be a land use or activity without built development which is generally associated with urban areas, or it could be an urbanising influence from adjacent development, either inset within the Green Belt or outside but adjacent to Green Belt land.

3.53 The PPG refers to activity in the Green Belt, such as traffic generation, having an impact on openness. In some cases, there may be land uses which, although appropriate and not therefore affecting openness, still have an association with the urban area that constitutes a degree of urbanising influence. Notable examples could include sport and recreational playing fields or *“large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding [that have not blended into the landscape”*, the latter of which is defined in the NPPF as PDL.

3.54 The urbanising influence of renewable energy and power infrastructure has been judged on a case-by-case basis, based on their permanence and scale of fixed surface infrastructure, such as large areas of hardstanding, associated with them. For example, renewable energy and power infrastructure permitted for temporary periods of time (often in the open countryside) are not permanent and therefore have not been judged as notable urbanising influences affecting contribution to the Green Belt purposes in perpetuity, whereas permanent substations set on fixed surface infrastructure, do affect the contribution to the Green Belt purposes over the long term.

3.55 The strength of urbanising influence associated with such areas depend on a number of factors, including the presence or lack of intervening physical boundary features, the scale/visibility of development in the associated urban area, landform change, distance from the existing urban edge and strength of relationship with the wider countryside.

‘An incongruous pattern of development’

3.56 The PPG cites an extended “finger” of development into the Green Belt as an example of an incongruous pattern of development. Where parcels are defined to reflect variations in contribution to the Green Belt purposes they are unlikely to be finger-like in form, so this scenario would more typically relate to the assessment of specific development proposals. There may, however, be smaller ‘satellite’ settlements around large built-up areas which lie close enough to them to be at risk of merging were development to reduce separation between them. Significant loss of

separation in such a gap, could in effect lead to the satellite settlement becoming an extended finger of the large built-up area.

3.57 Any breaching of a significant existing physical feature, or a significant combination of adjacent physical features, that currently serve to restrict and contain the existing large built-up area, would also form an incongruous pattern of development. Examples of this sort of step-change in settlement form would be development crossing a major retaining and containing road, railway or river, or extending out from a valley onto a hilltop into open Green Belt land that does not relate well to existing development.

Purpose A outputs

3.58 The contribution to Purpose A has been determined in line with the illustrative factors listed in the PPG guidance, denoting strong, moderate and weak/no contributions.

3.59 The supporting analysis of contribution to Purpose A is set out in parcel assessment outputs under five bullet points. These draw on information set out in the 'description' section:

- The first bullet point indicates whether the parcel is adjacent or near to a large built-up area, with additional text to note if the parcel is close to a village which is near enough to the large built-up area to contribute to preventing its sprawl (termed a 'satellite' settlement).
- The second bullet point indicates whether the parcel is free from development.
- The third bullet point indicates whether the parcel is subject to urbanising influences from outside of the parcel.
- The fourth bullet point notes whether there are physical features which could restrict and contain development.
- The fifth bullet point states whether development in the parcel would have an incongruous impact on the pattern of development.

Purpose B – to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Grey belt PPG for Purpose B

3.60 The following features in combination have been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**strong**’ contribution:

- Land forming a substantial part of a gap between towns.
- Absence of existing development.
- Development would result in the loss of visual separation of towns.

3.61 The presence of one or more of the following features in a gap between towns has been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**moderate**’ contribution to Purpose B:

- Land forming a small part of a gap between towns.
- Development would not result in the loss of visual separation of towns, for example due to the close proximity of structures, natural landscape elements or topography that preserve visual separation.

3.62 Green Belt land that is not part of a gap between towns or forms only a very small part of a gap between towns, such that it makes no contribution to visual separation, has been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**weak/no**’ contribution to Purpose B.

Purpose B definitions

3.63 The PPG uses several terms which require further definition to be applied as part of the assessment process for Purpose B. These are addressed in the paragraphs below.

‘Town’

3.64 The PPG states that *“this purpose relates to the merging of towns, not villages”* (PPG Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225). As all towns and cities have been treated as ‘large built-up areas’ for Purpose A, the same list of settlements is applicable to Purpose B.

‘A substantial part of a gap’

3.65 Whether part of a gap can be described as substantial is a function not just of its relative size to the gap as a whole, but also of the physical features in it. Some ‘separating’ physical features, such as woodlands, landform features, major roads, railways and rivers strengthen perceived separation, particularly where they contribute to visual separation. However, it is recognised that roads and railways can also be ‘connecting’ features that strengthen the link between towns, reducing the time taken to pass through a gap and weakening the role of visual separators. This has been considered by the assessment on a locality specific basis.

3.66 Other areas of built form, such as villages and hamlets, industrial, educational and retail estates, between towns can be physically and visually connecting features. However, if the scale of intervening development and/or the size of gap between the towns means that these towns are not considered ‘neighbouring’ then Purpose B is less directly relevant. In these cases, the contribution of open land in gaps between towns and other areas of built form has been addressed through Purpose A, which recognises the role of such land in preventing smaller ‘satellite’ settlements/developments from merging with towns.

3.67 A parcel has been considered contribute more to the ‘substance’ of a gap between towns if it contains key separating physical features. The more fragile a gap, the more likely that a smaller part of it might be to be considered substantial.

3.68 The fragility of a gap has been a key consideration in establishing if an assessment area is or is not substantial relative to its position within or adjacent to a gap between neighbouring towns. Gap fragility has been judged on a combination of factors, including the relative size of the gap and/or the presence/absence of connecting and separating features:

- A robust gap is typically relatively wide and contain significant physical features that maintain visual separation.
- A moderate gap may be relatively wide but lack significant physical features that maintain visual separation or be relatively narrow but contain physical features that maintain visual separation.
- A fragile gap is typically relatively narrow and lack physical features that maintain visual separation.

3.69 Green Belt land can play a peripheral role and therefore make a more limited contribution to a gap between towns where it does not lie directly in a gap but its development would weaken Green Belt land in a gap. Green Belt land on the periphery of a fragile gap may still have been judged to be a substantial part of it, if

development there would have a significant urbanising impact on land within the core gap, but otherwise will generally not. Green Belt land within a gap may also to an extent be considered peripheral if the neighbouring towns in question are already to a significant extent connected by development. This may be because the functional role of the gap has already been eroded by the partial merging of the towns.

3.70 Development expanding a town out into the core of a gap and removing a relatively large part of it, would clearly represent a substantial impact. However, this area of Green Belt has been generally recorded as making a ‘strong’ contribution to Purpose A and is more appropriately considered relative to this purpose. In this scenario, as a consequence of a likely resulting incongruous pattern of development, the assessment area has not been eligible for definition as grey belt.

3.71 Relatively wide gaps between towns generally have scope for some new development within them without significant loss of visual separation between neighbouring towns. Consequently, even large parcels within or on the periphery of relatively wide gaps that form ‘a substantial part of a gap’ between towns have generally been rated as making a ‘moderate’ contribution to Purpose B. This acknowledges the potential of the gap to accommodate some development, in smaller parts of the gap, without loss of visual separation of towns. Thus, the assessment findings also help to identify gaps between neighbouring towns where there could be potential (in Green Belt terms) for development. This could include new settlements.

‘A ‘small’ or ‘very small’ part of a gap’

3.72 ‘A small part of a gap’ is judged to be an ‘insubstantial’ part of it – that is, land in a gap that does not meet the ‘substantial’ definition above – but one which still provides a degree of visual separation.

3.73 A ‘very small’ part of gap is an area which does not contribute to visual separation, generally as a result of their existing development and/or containment and significant urbanisation. These areas generally also have made a weak/no contribution to Purpose A.

3.74 It is not appropriate to define fixed or overarching gap widths for the terms ‘substantial’, ‘small’ and ‘very small’. As with the definition of ‘near to’ set out above, this depends on site-specific factors, including the distance in proportion to the size of towns, the degree of visual separation, and the presence of urbanising development or activity within the Green Belt.

‘Loss of visual separation’

3.75 ‘Loss’ is interpreted as either complete removal or a ‘significant reduction’ in visual separation. Typically, the development of a substantial part of a gap has the potential to equate to a significant loss of visual separation. However, as noted in the section above, relatively wide gaps between towns could in some circumstances accommodate a degree of new development, isolated from any town, without a significant loss of visual separation, i.e. no more than a minor reduction in visual separation. Negligible reductions in visual separation have been considered as likely to be limited to areas already containing existing development and/or are contained and significantly urbanised by urban influences.

‘Free of existing development’

3.76 ‘Existing development’ has not been considered to include the appropriate development ‘exceptions’ listed in NPPF paragraph 154, such as agricultural buildings, which case law [\[See reference 11\]](#) generally considers does not affect the openness of the Green Belt. Paragraph 160 of the NPPF states “*elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development*” however, renewable energy and power infrastructure permitted for temporary periods of time (often in the open countryside) are not permanent and therefore have not been judged as existing development affecting contribution to the Green Belt purposes in perpetuity.

3.77 ‘Free of’ is not considered to mean ‘no existing inappropriate development’. The influence of existing inappropriate development has been judged on the basis of a combination of an area’s visual and spatial openness.

Purpose B assessment outputs

3.78 The contribution of a parcel to Purpose B have been determined in line with the illustrative factors listed in the PPG guidance, denoting strong, moderate and weak/no contributions.

3.79 The supporting analysis of contribution to Purpose B is set out in parcel assessment outputs under three bullet points. These draw on information set out in the ‘description’ section:

- The first bullet point states whether the parcel lies in a gap between towns and, if so, gives an indication of the strength of the gap, with reference to distance, separating and connecting features and visual openness. This helps to support judgements as to whether the parcel forms a substantial part of the gap.

- The second bullet point indicates whether the parcel is free from development.
- The third bullet point states whether the parcel forms a substantial, small or very small part of the gap, with reference to separating features that would be lost were development to take place.
- The fourth bullet comments on the extent of loss of visual separation.

Purpose C – to protect the countryside from encroachment

3.80 Purpose C is not relevant to the identification of grey belt and is not referenced in the PPG, but it is still one of the five purposes of Green Belt set out in the NPPF. Ratings of contribution to Purpose C can still help inform judgements regarding which grey belt areas are more suitable for release than others in Green Belt terms. In addition, if the release and/or development of Green Belt land outside of defined grey belt areas is to be considered, contribution ratings for Purpose C is an important consideration. For example, in locations not near to and remote from towns and cities, variations in contribution to Purpose C is likely to provide the only source of comparison in the contribution of Green Belt land to the Green Belt purposes.

Purpose C definitions

3.81 Purpose C has been assessed by determining the extent to which a location can be considered part of the countryside, the level of urbanising influence affecting it and whether or not development in the parcel would significantly increase urbanising influence on adjacent open land.

‘Part of the countryside’

3.82 Green Belt land is part of the countryside where it is open and has a clear connection with the wider open countryside. Physical isolation from the wider countryside, uses which create a strong association with an urban area, or the presence of existing urban development can affect what is judged to be countryside in Green Belt terms. This is not a judgement which considers the scenic beauty, ecological value or condition of land.

‘Urbanising influence’

3.83 This is defined as a combination of both the influences of ‘existing development’ and ‘other urbanising influences’ (both defined under Purpose A above). This includes urbanising development washed over by, inset within or directly adjacent to the outer edges of Green Belt, such as villages and hamlets, industrial, educational and/or retail estates.

3.84 Relevant factors influencing the significance of urbanising influence include separating/screening physical boundary features, the scale/visibility of urbanising development and associated land uses and activity, landform change, distance from the urban areas, and the strength of relationship with the wider countryside.

Purpose C assessment outputs

3.85 The contribution of a parcel to Purpose C has been determined in terms of whether land makes a strong, moderate and weak/no contribution to this Purpose.

3.86 The following features in combination are identified as being illustrative of a ‘**strong**’ contribution:

- Land is part of the countryside.
- None or no significant urbanising influence with a lack of features to restrict and contain development, such that were development to take place there would be a stronger urbanising impact on adjacent Green Belt land than is currently the case.

3.87 The following features in combination have been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**moderate**’ contribution:

- Land is part of the countryside.
- Some urbanising influence.
- The presence of features to restrict and contain development, such that were development to take place, there would be no stronger urbanising impact on adjacent Green Belt land.

3.88 The following features in combination have been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**weak/no**’ contribution:

- Land is wholly or largely contained from the wider countryside by development, or openness is significantly limited by existing development.
- Significant urbanising influence.

- Were development to take place, there would be no stronger urbanising impact on adjacent Green Belt land.

3.89 The supporting analysis of contribution to Purpose C is set out in parcel assessment outputs under four bullet points. These draw on information set out in the ‘description’ section:

- The first bullet point indicates whether the parcel is perceived as part of the countryside or whether urban containment or development weaken its relationship with the wider countryside.
- The second bullet point indicates whether the parcel is free from development.
- The third bullet point indicates whether the parcel is subject to urbanising influences from outside of the parcel.
- The fourth bullet point states whether development in the parcel would significantly increase urbanising influence on adjacent open land.

Purpose D – to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Grey belt PPG for Purpose D

3.90 The following features in combination have been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**strong**’ contribution to Purpose D:

- Absence of existing development.
- Form part of the setting of a historic town.
- Land makes a considerable contribution to a historic town’s special character – being within, adjacent, or of significant visual importance to historic aspects.

3.91 The presence of one or more of the following features, in addition to being part of the setting and/or contributing to the special character of a historic town, has been identified as being illustrative of a ‘**moderate**’ contribution to Purpose D:

- Containing existing development.
- Separated from historic aspects of the historic town by existing development or topography.
- No important visual, physical, or experiential relationship to historic aspects of a historic town.

3.92 Land that does not form part of the setting of a historic town, with no visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of a historic town is illustrative of a **‘weak/no’** contribution to Purpose D.

Purpose D definitions

3.93 The PPG uses several terms which require further definition to be applied as part of the assessment process. These are addressed in the paragraphs below.

‘Historic town’

3.94 The PPG is clear that this purpose relate to historic towns, not villages (PPG Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225). An extract from Hansard in 1988 clarified which historic settlements in England were certainly considered ‘historic towns’ in the context of the Green Belt purposes. The Secretary of State for the Environment clarified in answer to a parliamentary question that the purpose of preserving the special character of historic towns is especially relevant to the Green Belts of York, Chester, Bath, Oxford and Cambridge **[See reference 12]**. Durham has since been added to this list.

3.95 It has been LUC’s experience through consultation with Historic England on several Green Belt study method statements, that Historic England do not consider the list of towns quoted in Parliament to be exclusive. Therefore, the settlements referenced under the definitions of ‘town’ (see section titled Purpose B definitions) above all have the potential to be defined as ‘historic towns’ relevant to the assessment of Purpose D, subject to the definition of their historic settings or special character.

3.96 Clearly, there are historic aspects to towns and smaller settlements within the study area, but the important aspect in terms of contribution to this purpose is that there needs to be a significant relationship between Green Belt land and historic aspects of a settlement’s setting, such that some degree of special character results. Many towns have designated conservation areas, but these are commonly focused on historic buildings and spaces within towns, with any views of the Green Belt countryside being incidental rather than key to special character.

‘Setting and special character’

3.97 The extent to which the Green Belt contributes to the setting and/or special character of a historic town is related to the visual, physical and/or experiential relationship between Green Belt land and historic aspects of a town.

3.98 What forms part of a historic town's setting and/or contributes to the setting and/or special character of a historic town is a matter of professional judgement that cannot be defined in general terms. It is unique to each historic town's character, townscape and connections to the wider landscape.

3.99 The connection between a historic town's historic character and the wider countryside does not have to be physical; indeed, successive waves of development often isolate core historic areas from the surrounding countryside, meaning it is often more a visual connection. This visual connection can be defined through movement through the area, or views into or out of the settlement.

'Historic aspects'

3.100 In order to establish the relevance of Green Belt land to historic aspects of a historic town it is necessary to review and research each historic town's historic aspects in turn. This has been undertaken with reference to historic environment evidence for each historic town, such as historic town setting studies and conservation area appraisals.

3.101 Recorded references to the open countryside or key physical features and/or landmarks in the Green Belt are useful in judging and justifying the appropriate level of contribution relevant Green Belt land makes to a historic town's setting and special character.

3.102 Some historic towns have historic characteristics that do not rely on their wider setting to define their special character. Many historic towns contain historic areas focused on historic buildings and spaces within towns, with any views of the Green Belt countryside being incidental rather than part of the historic town's setting and special character. Where this is the case, contribution to Purpose D can often be ruled out, noting that this does not mean such places do not have special and unique characteristics worthy of preservation, just that these characteristics are not directly relevant to an assessment of Green Belt Purpose D.

'Free of existing development'

3.103 'Free of existing development' is defined under Purpose A and B above. The same definition applies to Purpose D.

Purpose D outputs

3.104 For any settlements identified as historic towns to which Green Belt land contributes in terms of setting or special character the contribution of a parcel to Purpose D has been determined in line with the illustrative factors listed in the PPG guidance, denoting strong, moderate and weak/no contributions.

3.105 The supporting analysis of contribution to Purpose D has been set out in parcel assessment outputs under three bullet points. These, in part, draw on information set out in the 'description' section:

- The first bullet point states whether the parcel forms part of the setting of a historic town.
- The second bullet point indicates whether the parcel is free from development.
- The third bullet point indicates whether the parcel makes a considerable contribution to special character, some contribution or little/no contribution, with supporting text to justify this judgement.

Purpose E – to assist in urban regeneration

3.106 Purpose E is not relevant to the identification of grey belt and is not referenced in the PPG, but it is one of the five purposes of Green Belt set out in the NPPF.

3.107 Most Green Belt studies do not assess individual Green Belt land parcels against Purpose E, either not rating them against it or rating them all equally. This approach is taken on the grounds that outside the definition of PDL, it is difficult to justify why the release and/or development of one area of Green Belt land has a greater impact on encouraging re-use of urban land than another. This is supported by planning inspectors' judgements on the matter, such as the inspector's report regarding the London Borough of Redbridge's Local Plan (January 2018) **[See reference 13]**, which noted that with regards to Purpose E *"this purpose applies to most land" but that "it does not form a particularly useful means of evaluating sites"*.

3.108 More generally regarding plan-making, paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that *"before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development"... [including] 'a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land' and 'b) optimises the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of this Framework, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres*

and other locations well served by public transport". In other words, Purpose E must have already been followed before options in the Green Belt are considered further.

3.109 Using evidence to inform meaningful judgements on the collective contribution Green Belt land makes to Purpose E is also difficult. In the absence of any clear guidance on what percentage of recorded brownfield land enables a Green Belt to play a stronger or more limited role in encouraging urban regeneration, a uniform level of 'moderate' contribution to Purpose E has been applied to all areas of Green Belt in the study area.

Identification of potential grey belt

3.110 Having assessed the strength of contribution to Green Belt purposes A, B and D, areas of potential grey belt can be defined, and have been illustrated on maps for land surrounding each settlement and for the study area as a whole.

3.111 PPG Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 64-006-20250225 clarifies that grey belt, *"excludes land where the application of policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 to the NPPF would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development"*. It highlights that in such locations grey belt can only be identified provisionally before consideration is informed by specific proposals which provide appropriate detail. Mapping has therefore also shown footnote 7 areas, as Green Belt land which coincides with footnote 7 areas, or assets which can therefore only provisionally be considered grey belt. Land outside of footnote 7 areas could also require more detailed consideration of the potential impact that proposed or envisaged development might have on policies applicable to the footnote 7 areas.

3.112 Critically, even where Green Belt land is identified as grey belt, if it is proposed for development, there remains the need to consider such factors as whether:

- Its release and such development would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan (as set out below);
- There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and
- Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157.

Fundamental impact on remaining Green Belt land

3.113 Green Belt assessments must also consider the extent to which release or development of Green Belt land (including but not limited to grey belt land) would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area as whole. The PPG states that this judgement should focus on evaluating the effect of release or development on *“the ability of all the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way”*.

3.114 What is fundamental and meaningful could vary significantly based on the scale and nature of the plan area and the range, significance and extent of contribution Green Belt land makes to the Green Belt purposes within it.

3.115 The PPG uses a few terms which require further definition to be applied as part of the assessment process. These are addressed in the paragraphs below.

‘Plan area’

3.116 The plan area is the area covered by the Rochford District Council Local Plan.

‘Purposes (taken together)’

3.117 Most Green Belt land does not contribute to all Green Belt purposes to the same degree, with large areas of Green Belt land not contributing or contributing weakly to multiple purposes. Consequently, what constitutes a fundamental and meaningful impact varies from plan area to plan area depending on which purposes are important in the plan area. Release or development that fundamentally and meaningfully impacts Green Belt land contributing to one Green Belt purpose would in effect affect its ability to serve the purposes (taken together) in a meaningful way.

‘Fundamental’ and ‘meaningful’

3.118 Some proposals may only fundamentally undermine the ability of the remaining Green Belt land in the plan area to serve a single important purpose to have a meaningful impact. Other proposals may undermine multiple purposes to a degree that in combination their impact is meaningful.

3.119 The scale and contiguity of Green Belt land within a district may also play a role in what is meaningful. Release or development of smaller areas of Green Belt land are likely to be more meaningful in a district with smaller areas of Green Belt

land. Release or development of pockets of Green Belt land that are isolated from the wider designation within urban areas are less likely to have a meaningful impact.

3.120 A fundamental and meaningful impact on Purpose A (to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas) may include, but is not limited to, where release or development of land would result in the physical or perceived merging of a large built-up area with an adjacent satellite settlement, such that the adjacent settlement would be perceived to be part of a larger 'sprawling' large built-up area. How fundamental and meaningful the loss of a such a gap would be is dependent on its current contribution to Purpose A. Most sprawl of a large built-up area have not been considered to fundamentally undermine the ability of remaining Green Belt land to continue to fulfil this function.

3.121 A fundamental and meaningful impact on Purpose B (to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another) include but is not limited to release or development that would result in the physical or perceived merging of two currently distinctly separate neighbouring towns, or where release or development would result in the loss of the most substantial part of a gap separating neighbouring towns such that it no longer played a meaningful role in relation to Purpose B.

3.122 A fundamental and meaningful impact on Purpose C (to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) may include but is not limited to where release or development would sever and isolate an area of Green Belt land contributing strongly to Green Belt Purpose C from the wider designation. The vast majority of Green Belt land has at least some countryside function. The release or development of the vast majority of Green Belt land would likely not fundamentally and meaningfully influence the function of adjacent Green Belt land such that it would be cease be considered countryside.

3.123 A fundamental and meaningful impact on Purpose D (to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns) may include but is not limited to the release or development of an important or very important part of the setting of a historic town, integral to its special character.

3.124 A fundamental and meaningful impact on Purpose E (to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land) is not considered likely given that other Green Belt policy prioritises the use of non-Green Belt locations first followed by previously developed land in the Green Belt, i.e. it is unlikely that Green Belt release or development could be justified having not already demonstrated that this purpose has not been fundamentally and meaningfully undermined.

Fundamental impact outputs

3.125 Without a clear understanding of the location of release or development, its scale and land use, including what Green Belt land would remain within a plan area, it has not been possible to make a definitive judgement on fundamental impact. In the absence of specific development proposals, the variations in contribution to each Green Belt purpose identified in this assessment have highlighted the areas where Green Belt contribution is at its greatest within Rochford District. These areas of highest contribution have been reviewed in the round to judge where release or development could fundamentally and meaningfully undermine the purposes in the district. These judgements have been justified.

3.126 When the Council is in a position to evaluate specific proposals for Green Belt release or development, it will be possible to make a definitive judgement as to whether they would (individually or cumulatively) fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area as whole.

Chapter 4

Summary of Findings

4.1 This chapter summarises the findings of the assessment of Green Belt contribution.

Contribution ratings and grey belt

4.2 The findings of the assessment of Green Belt contribution are summarised in **Table 4.1** below and illustrated on **Figures 4.1** to **4.7**.

- Land provisionally identified as grey belt (**Figure 4.1**)
- Contribution to Purpose A (**Figure 4.2**)
- Contribution to Purpose B (**Figure 4.3**)
- Contribution to Purpose C (**Figure 4.4**)
- Contribution to Purpose D (**Figure 4.5**)
- Contribution to Purpose E (**Figure 4.6**)
- The highest contribution rating for each parcel (**Figure 4.7**)

4.3 As noted above, in the absence of any clear guidance on what percentage of brownfield land enables the Green Belt to play a stronger, or more limited, role in encouraging urban regeneration, and the fact that Purpose E must have already been followed before options in the Green Belt are considered further, a uniform level of 'Equal' contribution to Purpose E has been applied to all Green Belt land in Rochford.

4.4 The detailed proforma reports are contained in **Appendix C**. They set out the following information:

- Broad overview context map showing the parcel locations.
- Broad overview context map showing the areas potentially suitable for definition as grey belt.
- Broad location-level context map showing the highest contribution ratings, including NPPF purposes A, B, C and D.

4.5 Following this, each parcel assessment is set out separately and includes the following information:

- An OS map showing the parcel and any footnote 7 areas and assets.
- An aerial view showing the parcel.
- A description section summarising information relevant to the contribution assessment, including:
 - Boundary features between the urban area and assessment area.
 - Any changes in landform which strengthen the sense of separation from the urban area.
 - The degree of urbanising influence from defined urban areas, taking into consideration the above plus any other relevant factors, such as the scale of development in the settlement and the distance between the assessment area and urban areas.
 - The extent of development and/or activity in the Green Belt that would increase urbanising influence.
 - The relationship between the assessment area and the wider Green Belt, with reference to visual connectivity and the role of natural or built features in limiting this relationship.

4.6 The contribution ratings assigned for each Green Belt purpose for the release of the assessment area as a whole. Each rating is justified as follows:

- Purpose A:
 - The relevance of the purpose to the assessment area, with reference to whether the parcel is adjacent or near to large built-up areas.
 - The extent of development within the parcel.
 - The degree of urbanising influence from development/activity outside the parcel.
 - The strength of relationship with the wider countryside and whether, there are physical features that would restrict and/or contain development in the parcel.
 - Whether development in the parcel would have an incongruous impact on the pattern of development.
- Purpose B:
 - The relevance of the purpose to the assessment area – that is, whether the parcel lies in a gap between towns.

- Whether the area forms a substantial, small or very small part of the gap, with reference to the size of the gap and its strength (fragile, moderate or robust) taking account of separating and connecting features etc.
- The extent to which development within the parcel would have an impact on the visual separation of towns.
- Purpose C:
 - The relevance of the purpose to this assessment area – that is, whether the area is part of the countryside or whether urban containment or development weaken its relationship with the wider countryside.
 - The strength of urbanising influence within or adjacent to the area.
 - Whether development in the area would significantly increase urbanising influence on adjacent open land.
- Purpose D:
 - The relevance of the purpose to the assessment area – being within, adjacent or of visual or experiential importance to historic aspects of a historic town.
 - The extent to which the land within the parcel contributes to the setting and special character of historic town(s).

Table 4.1: Contribution Rating Summary

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
HO1	Hockley	6.27	Weak/No	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO2	Hockley	16.30	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO3	Hockley	8.93	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO4	Hockley	24.51	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO5	Hockley	79.66	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO6	Hockley	240.09	Weak/No	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
HO7	Hockley	53.72	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO8	Hockley	6.21	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO9	Hockley	7.65	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO10	Hockley	62.85	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO11	Hockley	4.46	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO12	Hockley	22.53	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO13	Hockley	177.30	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO14	Hockley	6.49	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO15	Hockley	12.23	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO16	Hockley	12.44	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO17	Hockley	34.52	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO18	Hockley	7.63	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO19	Hockley	1.48	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO20	Hockley	13.88	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO21	Hockley	82.85	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
HO22	Hockley	5.43	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO23	Hockley	1.80	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO24	Hockley	14.19	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO25	Hockley	1.61	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO26	Hockley	7.17	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO27	Hockley	15.27	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO28	Hockley	5.64	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO29	Hockley	15.23	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO30	Hockley	4.99	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
HO31	Hockley	7.69	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO32	Hockley	2.04	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO33	Hockley	5.00	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
HO34	Hockley	20.55	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO35	Hockley	13.66	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO36	Hockley	130.42	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO37	Hockley	4.27	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO38	Hockley	3.86	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO39	Hockley	6.29	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
HO40	Hockley	2.50	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO41	Hockley	78.33	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO42	Hockley	283.47	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO43	Hockley	107.58	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
HO44	Hockley	2.89	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO45	Hockley	26.43	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO46	Hockley	17.08	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO47	Hockley	14.15	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO48	Hockley	34.70	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO49	Hockley	7.11	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO50	Hockley	1.16	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
HO51	Hockley	119.36	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
HO52	Hockley	3.18	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO53	Hockley	5.27	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
HO54	Hockley	14.00	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA1	Rayleigh	0.96	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA2	Rayleigh	7.51	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA3	Rayleigh	2.57	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA4	Rayleigh	1.21	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA5	Rayleigh	17.98	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Moderate	Strong	No
RA6	Rayleigh	99.38	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Strong	No
RA7	Rayleigh	16.70	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes
RA8	Rayleigh	31.52	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA9	Rayleigh	20.20	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA10	Rayleigh	2.74	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA11	Rayleigh	13.60	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
RA12	Rayleigh	53.70	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA13	Rayleigh	71.53	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA14	Rayleigh	3.50	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA15	Rayleigh	30.97	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA16	Rayleigh	134.18	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA17	Rayleigh	55.37	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA18	Rayleigh	4.04	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA19	Rayleigh	54.50	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA20	Rayleigh	12.89	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA21	Rayleigh	35.81	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA22	Rayleigh	36.76	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA23	Rayleigh	237.57	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA24	Rayleigh	2.54	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA25	Rayleigh	3.48	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA26	Rayleigh	22.45	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA27	Rayleigh	76.46	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA28	Rayleigh	60.21	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA29	Rayleigh	95.50	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RA30	Rayleigh	39.37	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA31	Rayleigh	5.38	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA32	Rayleigh	92.54	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA33	Rayleigh	46.07	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
RA34	Rayleigh	132.65	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA35	Rayleigh	46.91	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RA36	Rayleigh	8.48	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
RA37	Rayleigh	15.20	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA38	Rayleigh	6.40	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA39	Rayleigh	45.73	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA40	Rayleigh	13.05	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA41	Rayleigh	24.58	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA42	Rayleigh	8.40	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Yes
RA43	Rayleigh	3.89	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes
RA44	Rayleigh	4.54	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA45	Rayleigh	24.11	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA46	Rayleigh	24.02	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA47	Rayleigh	1.50	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
RA48	Rayleigh	18.34	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA49	Rayleigh	19.88	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RA50	Rayleigh	22.42	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA51	Rayleigh	13.26	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RA52	Rayleigh	5.11	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO1	Rochford	5.07	Strong	Moderate	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO2	Rochford	2.35	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO3	Rochford	22.93	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
RO4	Rochford	25.32	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO5	Rochford	3.52	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO6	Rochford	10.25	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes
RO7	Rochford	43.73	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO8	Rochford	1.09	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO9	Rochford	4.13	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO10	Rochford	21.11	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO11	Rochford	4.70	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes
RO12	Rochford	1.41	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
RO13	Rochford	36.53	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Yes
RO14	Rochford	20.87	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO15	Rochford	321.99	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO16	Rochford	64.91	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO17	Rochford	55.19	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO18	Rochford	125.13	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO19	Rochford	7.47	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO20	Rochford	4.56	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO21	Rochford	4.05	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO22	Rochford	11.69	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO23	Rochford	1.80	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO24	Rochford	109.71	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO25	Rochford	217.27	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
RO26	Rochford	289.26	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO27	Rochford	24.05	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO28	Rochford	1.07	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
RO29	Rochford	28.44	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO30	Rochford	27.13	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO31	Rochford	48.71	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO32	Rochford	153.83	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
RO33	Rochford	1235.84	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO34	Rochford	0.93	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO35	Rochford	14.08	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO36	Rochford	13.94	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO37	Rochford	126.47	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO38	Rochford	2.50	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO39	Rochford	4.01	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO40	Rochford	11.73	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO41	Rochford	1.58	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
RO42	Rochford	15.04	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO43	Rochford	1262.60	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO44	Rochford	27.67	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
RO45	Rochford	27.59	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/no	Yes
RO46	Rochford	880.23	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes
SO1	Southend-on-Sea	5.85	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
SO2	Southend-on-Sea	3.75	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO3	Southend-on-Sea	195.07	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO4	Southend-on-Sea	73.71	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO5	Southend-on-Sea	94.16	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO6	Southend-on-Sea	381.60	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO7	Southend-on-Sea	1.98	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO8	Southend-on-Sea	9.40	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO9	Southend-on-Sea	63.14	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO10	Southend-on-Sea	8.94	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO11	Southend-on-Sea	5.31	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO12	Southend-on-Sea	1.24	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO13	Southend-on-Sea	170.81	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO14	Southend-on-Sea	10.48	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO15	Southend-on-Sea	0.03	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO16	Southend-on-Sea	1.04	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO17	Southend-on-Sea	1.42	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO18	Southend-on-Sea	9.39	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO19	Southend-on-Sea	45.06	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO20	Southend-on-Sea	228.52	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO21	Southend-on-Sea	0.96	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO22	Southend-on-Sea	58.23	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO23	Southend-on-Sea	8.04	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes

Parcel	Settlement	Area (ha)	Purpose A	Purpose B	Purpose C	Purpose D	Highest Contribution	Grey belt
SO24	Southend-on-Sea	123.06	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO25	Southend-on-Sea	2.36	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO26	Southend-on-Sea	11.48	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO27	Southend-on-Sea	20.63	Strong	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO28	Southend-on-Sea	69.34	Strong	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO29	Southend-on-Sea	1.56	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO30	Southend-on-Sea	68.68	Strong	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO31	Southend-on-Sea	6.08	Strong	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO32	Southend-on-Sea	2.99	Moderate	Weak/No	Weak/No	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO33	Southend-on-Sea	138.53	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO34	Southend-on-Sea	21.92	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO35	Southend-on-Sea	20.06	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Weak/No	Moderate	Yes
SO36	Southend-on-Sea	234.31	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO37	Southend-on-Sea	153.15	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	No
SO38	Southend-on-Sea	624.41	Weak/No	Weak/No	Strong	Weak/No	Strong	Yes

Figure 4.1: Provisionally identified grey belt

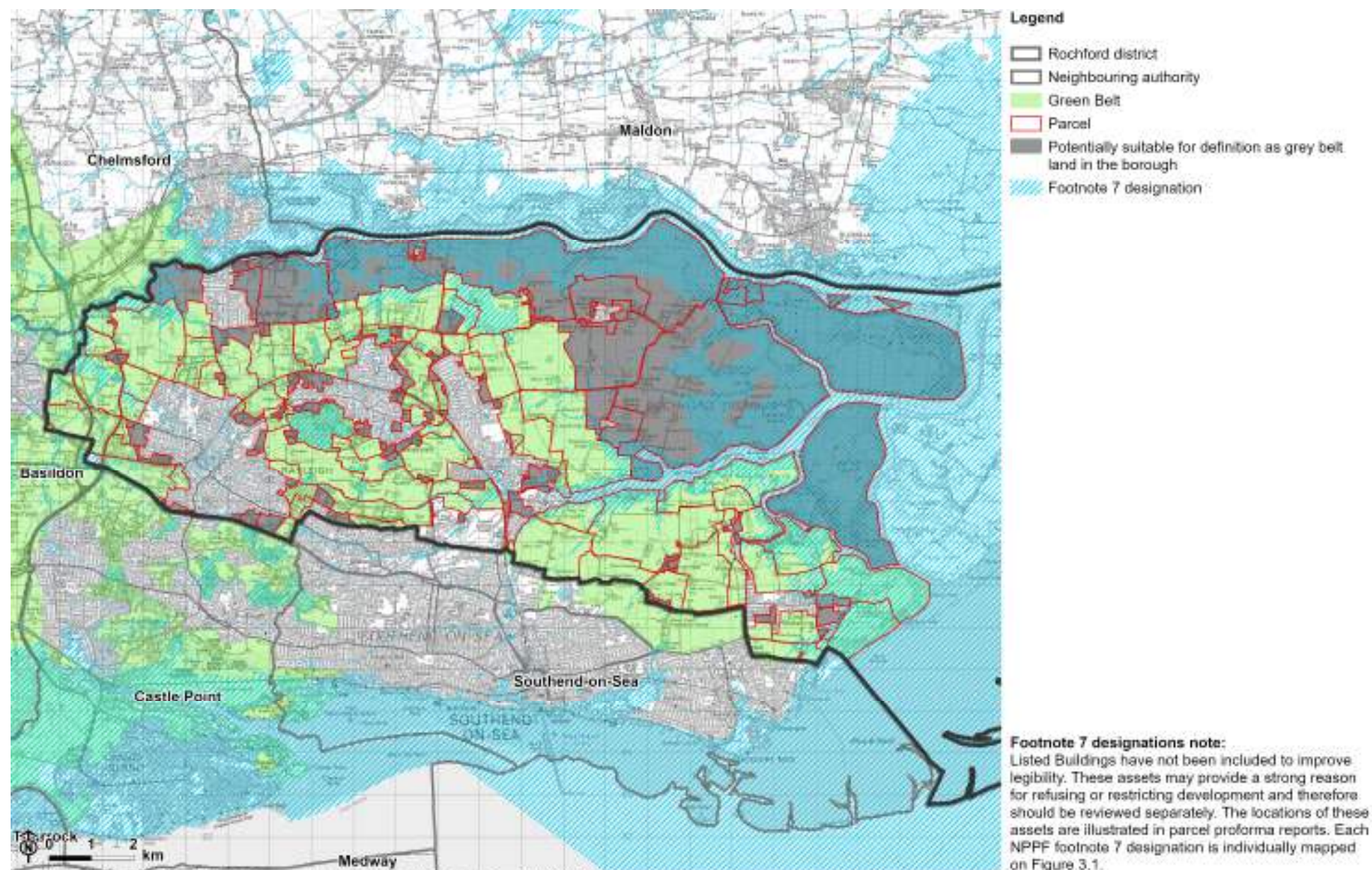
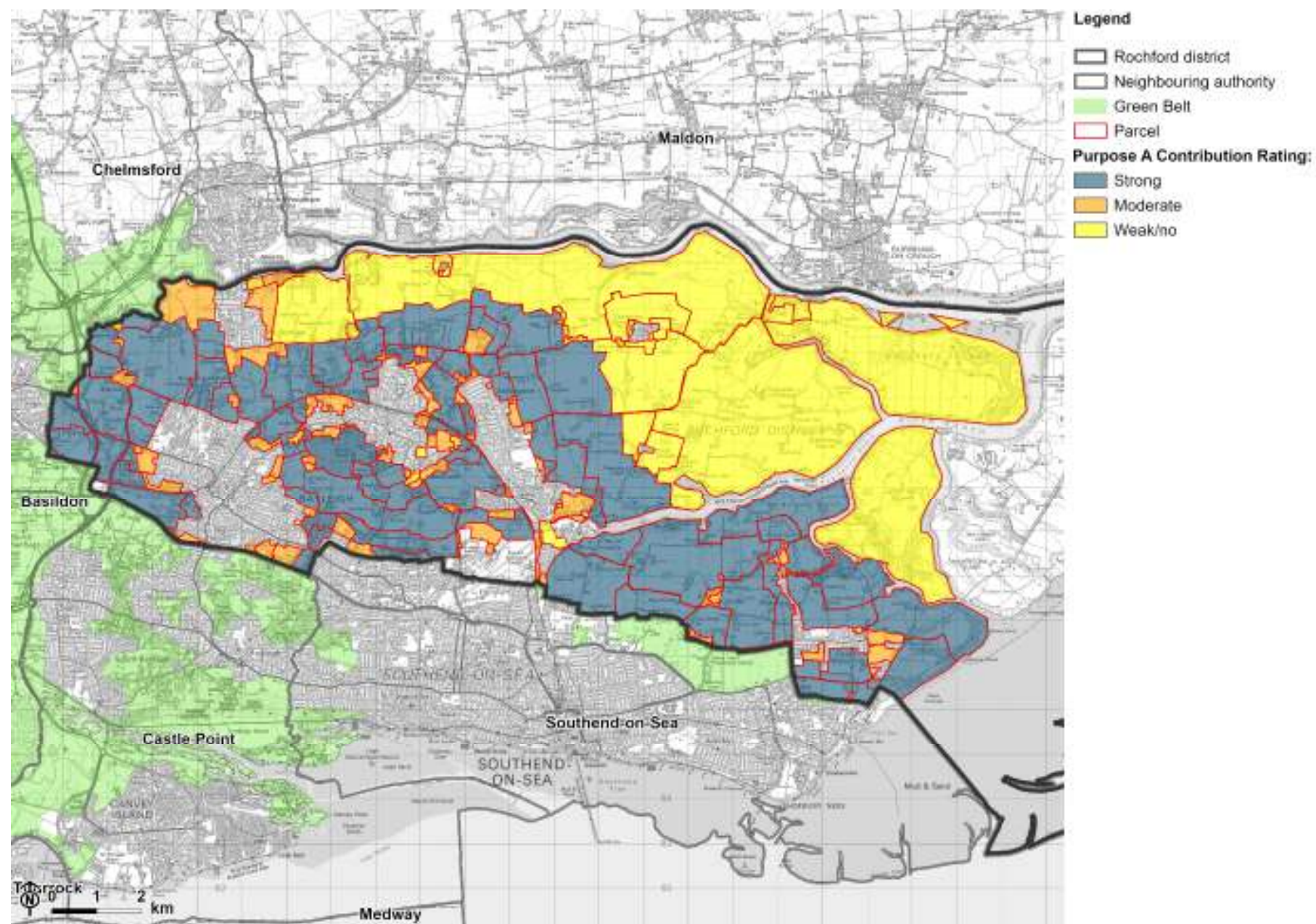
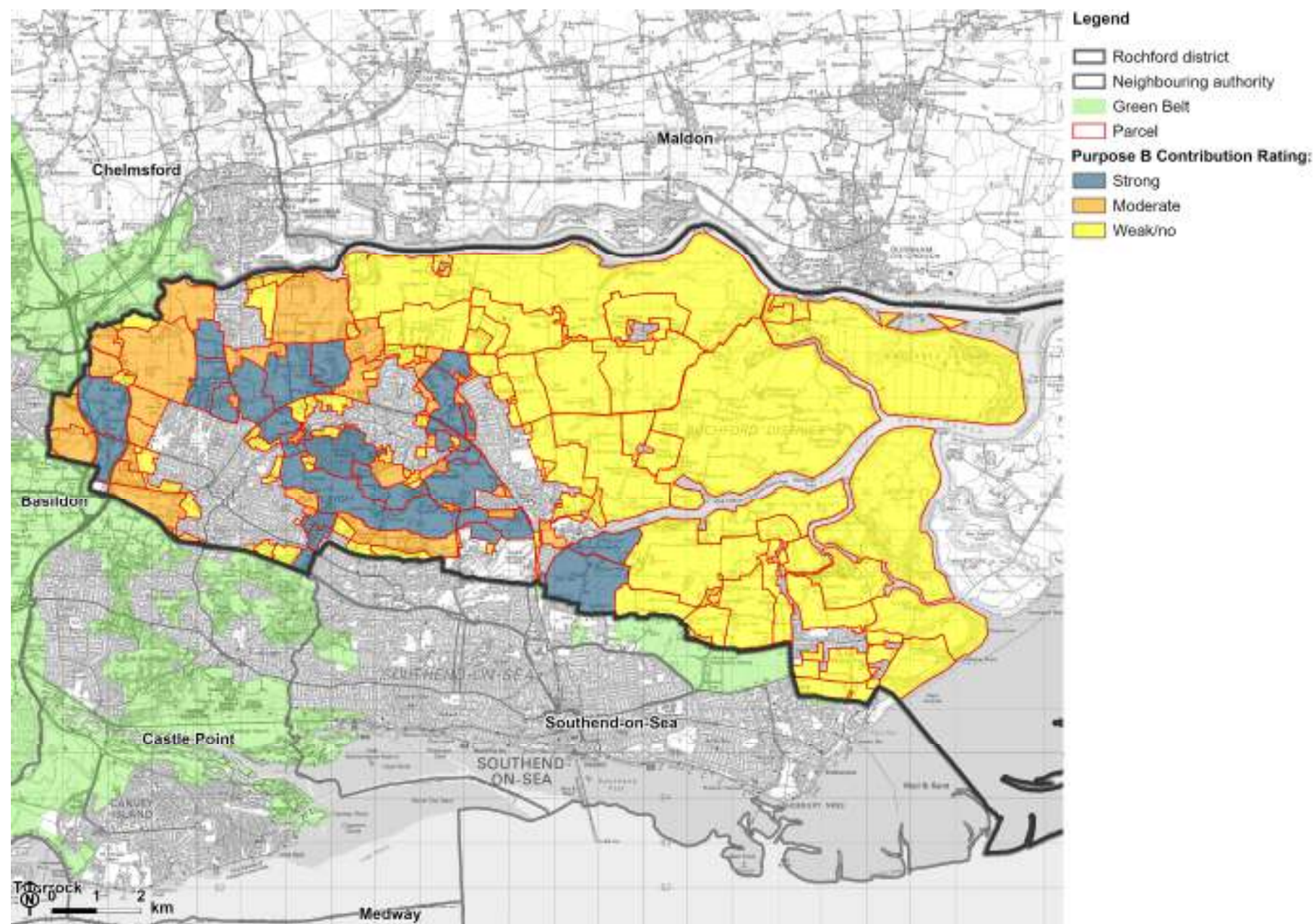


Figure 4.2: Purpose A contribution



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

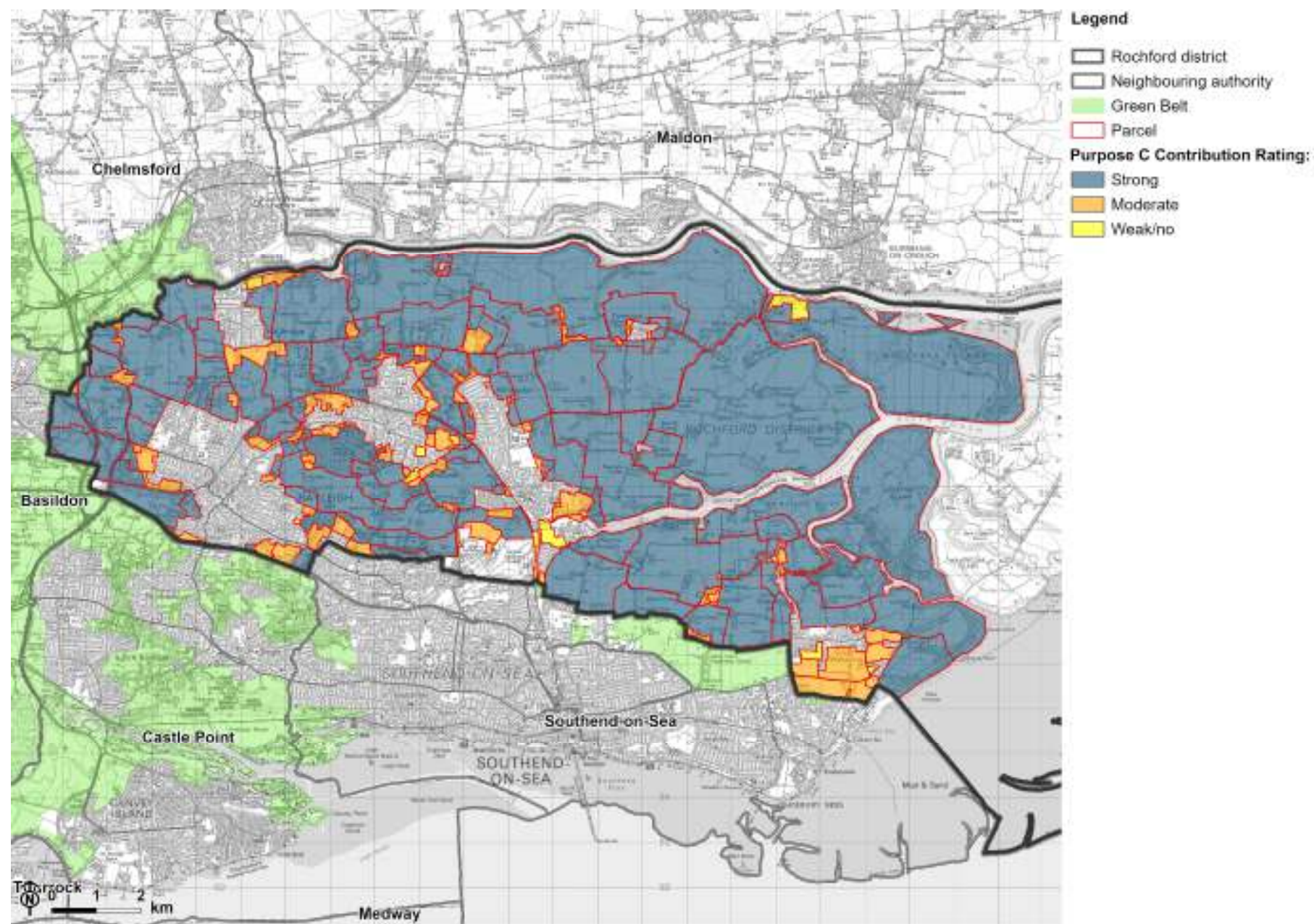
Figure 4.3: Purpose B contribution



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

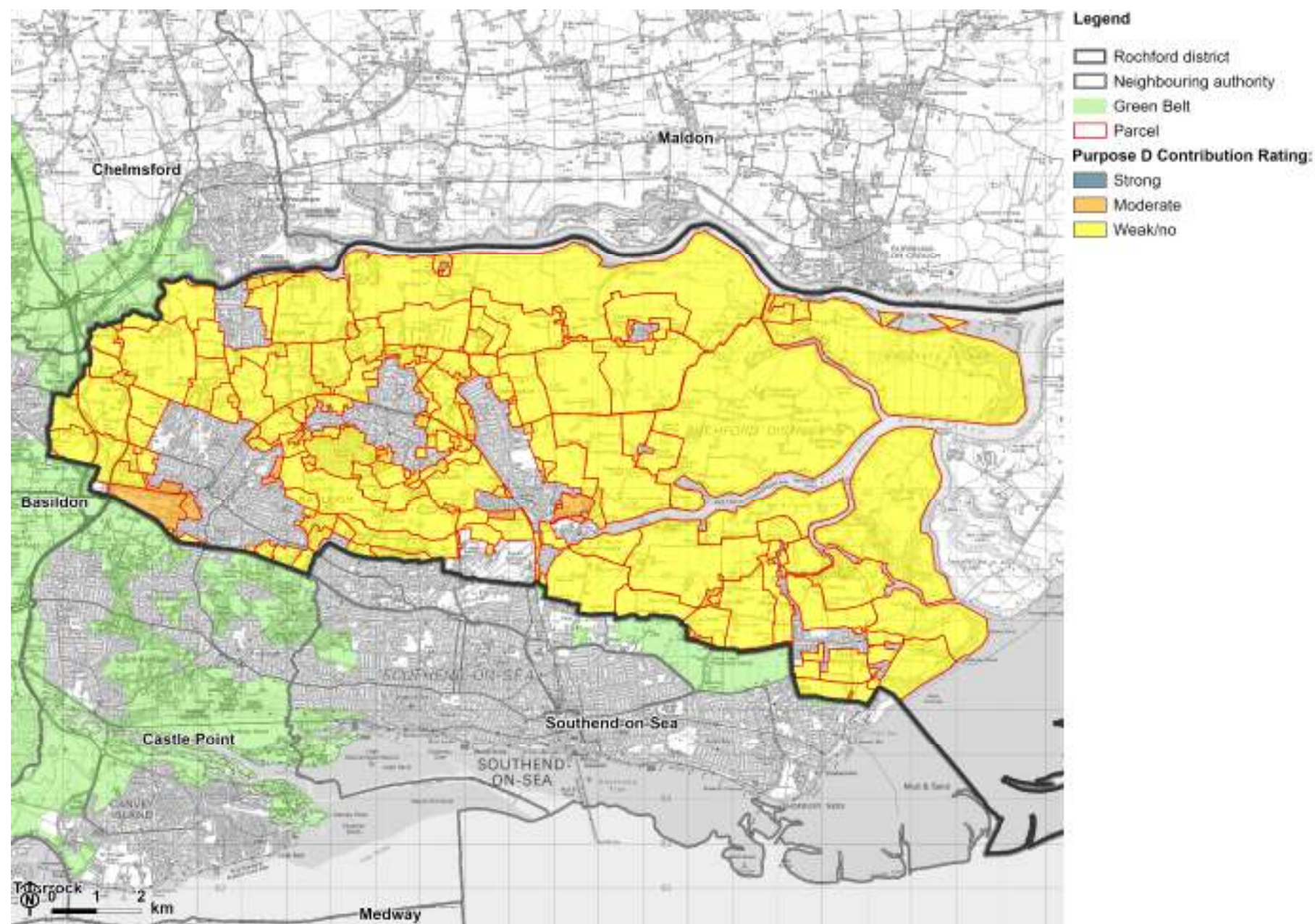
Figure 4.4: Purpose C contribution



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights. Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

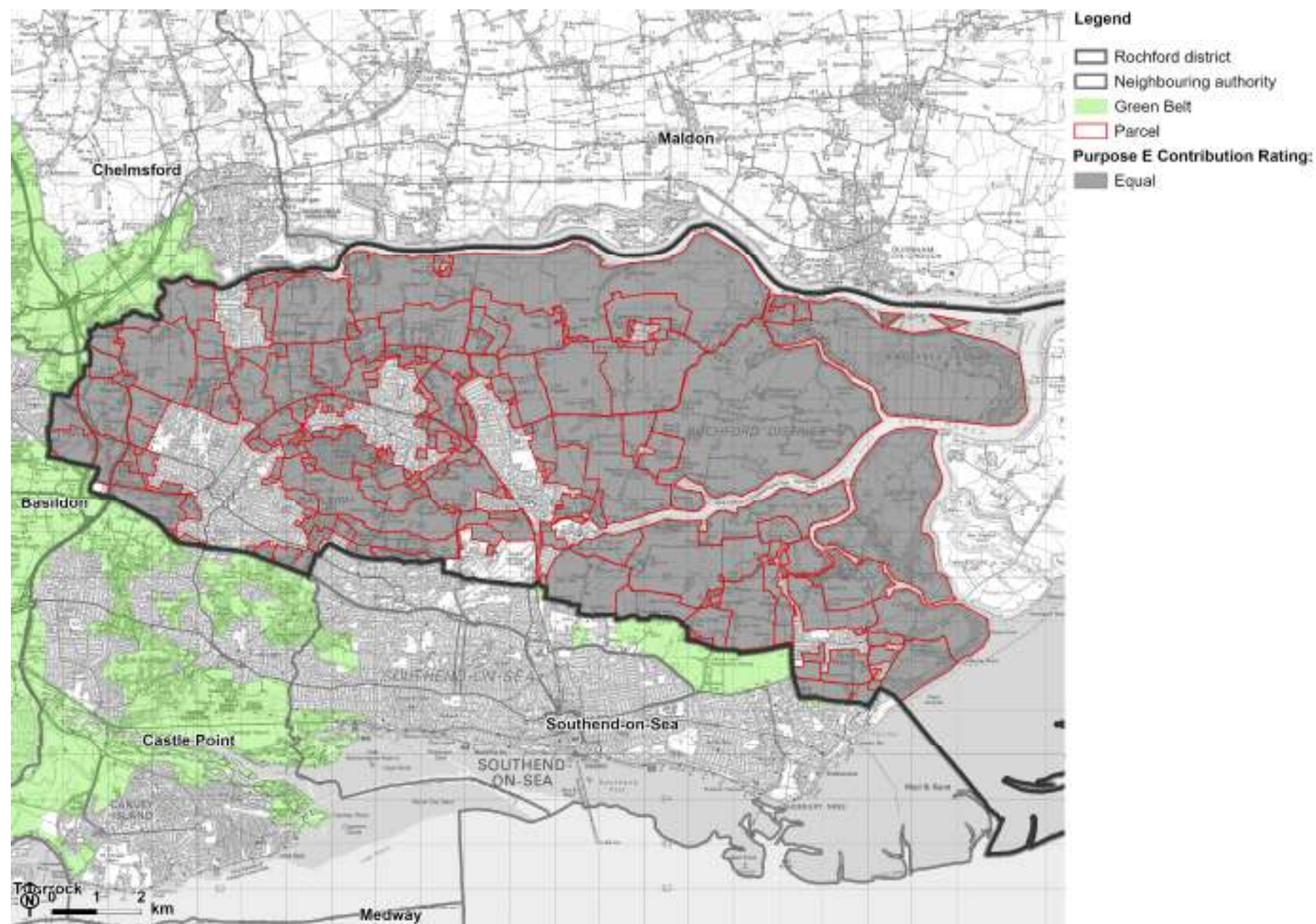
Figure 4.5: Purpose D contributions



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

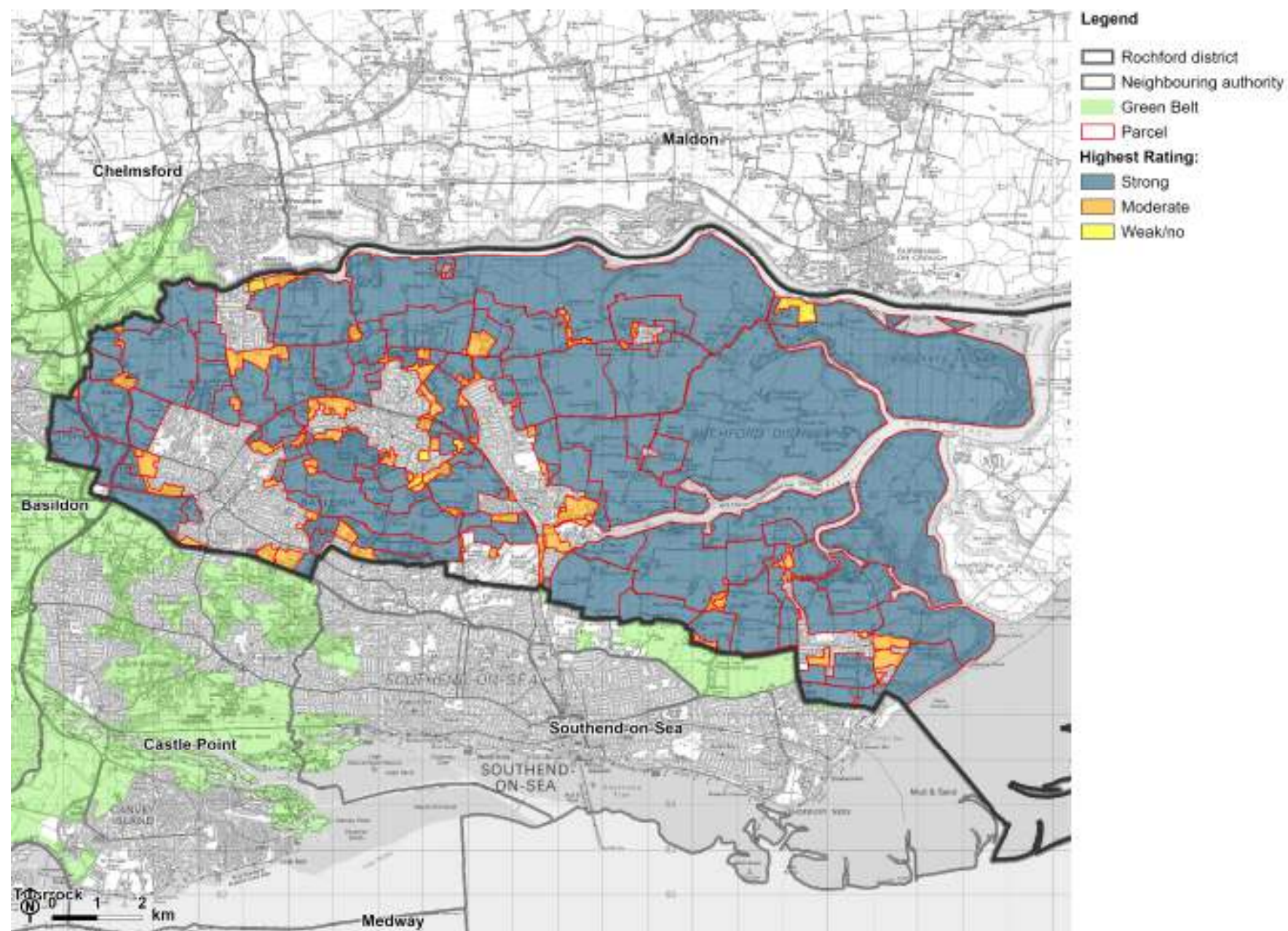
Figure 4.6: Purpose E contribution



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

Figure 4.7: Highest contribution rating



Created by LUC - 16322_Rochford_OverviewMaps/16322_r0_Fig4 29/07/2026

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC0000808122. © MHCLG 2026.

Potential for Fundamental Impacts

4.7 As noted in Chapter 3, in the absence of specific development proposals, the variations in contribution to each Green Belt purpose identified in this assessment highlight the areas where Green Belt contribution is at its greatest within the Local Plan area. These areas of highest contribution help give an indication of where release or development could fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) across the plan area as a whole. This is considered by geographical areas in the paragraphs below.

Between Rayleigh, Hockley, Rochford and Southend

4.8 Rayleigh, Hockley and Rochford constitute all of the towns in the Rochford Green Belt, and the urban area of Southend extends into the district at the airport and adjacent business park and in residential development at the western tip of the city. The relationship between these settlements is, therefore, very significant in terms of the function of the Green Belt in the district.

4.9 The gaps along connecting routes between Southend and Rayleigh, between Rayleigh and Hockley, between Hockley and Rochford and between Rochford and Southend are all very fragile, forming a largely developed ring around what is a fairly substantial area of countryside. Woodland blocks (including the sizeable Hockley Woods) and elevated landform give much of this countryside area a strong sense of separation from urban development, despite the extent and proximity of the latter, meaning that it plays an important role in maintaining a sense of distinction between the surrounding towns despite their very fragile separation from each other where gaps are narrowest.

4.10 Parcels of land that maintain the remaining fragile gaps between neighbouring towns, helping to preserve some sense, however brief, of leaving one urban area before entering the next, are playing a vital role in preventing the merger of towns. Loss of these gaps would be most evidently detrimental to Purpose B – preventing the merger of neighbouring towns – but in combining currently separate large built-up areas there would also be an impact on Purpose A – checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.

4.11 That sense of sprawl would be equally if not more substantial were there to be release or development that weakened the extent to which tree cover and landform create a strong sense of separation from any urban area for the countryside within the ring of towns. Any development creating an increased sense of urban containment for remaining open land, especially development on higher ground with

strong visibility, would weaken the separation of towns where it is currently strongest, presenting a threat as significant as the loss of gaps along main connecting roads.

4.12 Although Purpose C, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, is not a consideration when identifying grey belt, it is still relevant when considering overall impact of development on the Green Belt purposes. The narrow gaps between towns are in places subject to significant urbanising influence but are still important in preserving physical and visual links between the more substantial area of countryside within the ring of towns and the wider Green Belt to the north, north-west, south-west and east.

4.13 Significant loss of openness in both the narrow gaps between towns and in the more rural core of the ring of towns would, therefore, be likely to fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of Green Belt across the plan area as a whole.

North of Southend in the east of the district

4.14 Heading east from Rochford, the district becomes significantly less settled, and the separation of towns is not a significant consideration. A large area is low-lying farmland and marshland subject to footnote 7 area policies that would be likely to prevent any substantial development. Landscape quality is not a consideration in Green Belt assessment, as its protection is not one of the defined purposes, but the homogeneous physical character of this area adds to its sense of distinction from urban areas so any development impinging on land close to or contained by the major rivers (the Roach and the Crouch) and their tributaries would be liable to fundamentally undermine Purpose C.

4.15 Development closer to Southend and Rochford, whilst it might extend into areas that make a strong contribution to Purpose A and Purpose C, would be less likely to fundamentally undermine the purposes. A finger of inset development extends a significant distance north of Great Wakering, as far as Barling, and Great Wakering in turn has only fragile separation from Southend, so development merging the two settlement areas would in effect leave Barling as the tip of a finger of development extending out from Southend. Land preventing this merger makes a strong contribution to Purpose A but, given the narrowness of the current gap, the impact of development that did not extend Great Wakering further north into the creek sides would be unlikely to cause any fundamental undermining.

Between Rayleigh and Wickford

4.16 The gap between these towns is more substantial than that between the towns within Rochford District but there is localised development that has some urbanising influence. The A1245 and A130 in effect divide the gap east-west into thirds, so expansion of either town into the middle 'third', between the A1245 and the A130, would be a substantial sprawl beyond a strong boundary feature that would significantly threaten the remaining gap between towns. Substantial development that was not linked to either town would nonetheless be close enough to both to cause harm to Purposes A and B, increasing urbanising containment around remaining land between the towns. Development in this area has potential to fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes.

Between Rayleigh, Hockley and Hullbridge

4.17 Hullbridge lies very close to the town of South Woodham Ferrers, but the River Crouch and associated floodplain constrain development that could otherwise in effect result in the two becoming one larger settlement with a river running through it. Limited expansion of Hullbridge east or west would not, therefore, fundamentally undermine the purposes; however, any expansion substantial enough to result in a town-sized settlement would be considered a fundamental change to the settlement pattern. Plotland development is a significant feature between Hullbridge and both Rayleigh and Hockley, so if Hullbridge were to be treated as a town and large built-up area, its separation from those existing towns would be more fragile than the distance between them might otherwise suggest.

4.18 Regardless of whether Hullbridge were to expand enough to be considered a town, development in the gap between Hullbridge and Rayleigh, and to a lesser extent in the gap between Hullbridge and Hockley (where woodlands and rising ground strengthen separation) could result in Hullbridge being considered close enough to a large built-up area for land east and west of it to also be associated with the nearby large built-up area. This change would reflect an urbanisation of the settlement pattern that could also be considered to fundamentally undermine the Green Belt purposes. In the absence of strong, consistent settlement edge boundaries there is scope for some settlement expansion without this scenario occurring, but judgement would be needed to ensure retention of a clear sense of leaving one urban area and passing through countryside before reaching the other urban area.

Making judgements

4.19 An impact on all Green Belt purposes is not necessary for the proposed development to be considered to fundamentally undermine the purposes. Impact on multiple purposes can be considered more likely to represent a fundamental impact than impact on a single purpose, but a strong enough impact on a single purpose could be enough to have this effect.

4.20 It is not possible to make any more definitive judgements on what constitutes a fundamental impact without a clearer understanding of the exact location of release or development in the district, its scale and land use, including what Green Belt land would remain within a plan area.

4.21 Once the Council is in a position to evaluate specific proposals for Green Belt release or development, it will be possible to make a more definitive judgement as to whether they would (individually or cumulatively) fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area as whole. It is therefore recommended that an updated assessment of potential fundamental impacts is undertaken at that time.

Chapter 5

Next Steps

5.1 This chapter sets out the key issues that the Council will need to consider when considering the findings of this report and if they decide to proceed with the release of Green Belt land.

Exceptional circumstances

5.2 In considering the potential release of Green Belt land, whether identified as grey belt or otherwise, the Council will need to weigh a number of interrelated factors to ensure decisions are both robust and consistent with national policy.

5.3 For plan-making purposes, the first step will be to consider whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries. Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states that:

“Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development”

5.4 This includes considering: a) the prioritisation of brownfield sites and underutilised land outside of the Green Belt; b) optimisation of the density of development; and c) having discussion with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate any of the identified need for development.

5.5 Further detailed work undertaken by the local planning authority may identify additional smaller areas of Green Belt land (less than one hectare) as having potential for definition as grey belt land. Conversely, further detailed work undertaken may justify why areas identified in this study as having potential for definition as grey belt land do not meet the definition, for example due to effects on NPPF footnote 7 areas and assets.

Prioritisation

5.6 Should it be considered that exceptional circumstances for development or release of Green Belt land are justified, then priority should be given to Green Belt land in the following order:

- Previously developed land (PDL), including land that is grey belt;
- Grey belt which is not previously developed land; and
- Other Green Belt locations (prioritising least strong areas).

5.7 PDL, by definition, generally makes a more limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and is generally regarded as being more suitable for development, subject to detailed considerations. Where PDL is not available or insufficient to meet identified needs, attention may then focus on other areas of grey belt.

5.8 If the necessary exceptional circumstances for making alterations to the Green Belt are identified, consideration may then be given to:

- Defining grey belt land at a more granular level, including the exclusion of land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in NPPF footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. The application of policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 could provide a strong reason for restricting development and this may require further analysis.
- Address the potential for the purposes of the Green Belt to be fundamentally undermined across the plan area as a whole by considering the cumulative effect of specific proposed allocations.
- Defining defensible boundaries for the masterplans associated with allocated sites and safeguarded land.
- Identifying opportunities within and around proposed releases and developments to minimise the harm to the wider Green Belt designation.

Sustainability

5.9 Notwithstanding the above hierarchy of Green Belt land, in all instances the need to promote sustainable development in accordance with Paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF is determinative. In short, where land is not in a location that is, or can reasonably be made, sustainable, its release for development would be inappropriate. The question of sustainability should be judged in relation to local context and the characteristics of the site or proposed development (particularly if development is 'significant'), though authorities are expected to maximise opportunities for sustainable transport solutions in line with NPPF paragraphs 110 and 115 (albeit whilst acknowledging these opportunities will vary between urban and rural areas).

5.10 It is important to recognise that despite grey belt policy seeking to unlock more Green Belt locations for development, in practice the Council is still required to meet its development needs in a sustainable way. This is explicit in paragraph 148 of the NPPF which concludes:

“Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary”

5.11 Where identified need cannot be met through PDL and Grey Belt land alone, and other Green Belt locations are required, using the Sustainability Appraisal underpinning the Local Plan Evidence Base alongside this assessment will allow for the identification of alternative site options in a manner that likely achieves the sustainable development objectives sought by paragraphs 110, 115 and 148 of the NPPF.

Definition of Green Belt boundaries

5.12 Finally, should the Council conclude that Green Belt release is necessary, close attention must be given to the redefinition of Green Belt boundaries. Paragraph 149 of the NPPF makes clear that new boundaries must be defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent. Establishing clear and defensible boundaries is central to ensuring the long-term integrity of the Green Belt.

5.13 Boundary treatment can help to limit the impact of development on remaining Green Belt land, so the Council could give consideration to the following:

- Using landscape to help integrate a new Green Belt boundary with the existing edge, aiming to maximise consistency over a longer distance. This can help to maintain a sense of separation between urban and open land. A boundary that is relatively homogeneous over a relatively long distance, such as a main road, is likely to be stronger than one which has more variation.
- Strengthening boundaries at weak points – for example where ‘breached’ by roads. This can help reduce opportunities for sprawl. The use of buildings and landscaping can create strong ‘gateways’ to strengthen settlement-edge function.
- Defining Green Belt edges using strong, natural elements which form a visual barrier – for example a woodland belt. This can help to reduce the perception of

urbanisation and may also screen residents from intrusive landscape elements within the Green Belt (for example major roads). Boundaries that create visual and movement barriers can however potentially have detrimental effects on the character of the enclosed urban areas and the amenity of residents so this needs to be carefully considered.

- The ownership and management of landscape elements which contribute to Green Belt purposes. Control of boundary features can help to ensure the permanence of Green Belt: trees and hedgerows require management to maintain their value in Green Belt terms, and the visual screening value that can be attributed to them is more limited if they are under private control (for example within back gardens).
- Use of sustainable drainage features to define/enhance separation between settlement and countryside. This can help to strengthen the separation between urban and open land. It is important however to determine if local topography and ground conditions are suitable.

Enhancement of Green Belt

5.14 Paragraph 151 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial uses of the Green Belt. Aligned with this, the 'Golden Rules' (set out in paragraph 156), which are applicable where land is released for development through plan preparation or review, include a requirement for contributions to the provision of accessible green spaces.

5.15 The 'Golden Rules' are supported by the PPG which suggests the following considerations:

- New residents and the wider public should be able to access good quality green spaces which are safe; visually stimulating and attractive; well-designed; sustainably managed and maintained; and seek to meet the needs of the communities which they serve.
- Accessible green spaces are areas of vegetation set within a landscape or townscape, often including blue space, which are available for public use free of charge and with limited time restrictions.
- Where possible access to green spaces should include safe active travel routes and should be served by public transport, which also means providing the necessary infrastructure (such as footpaths and bridleways).
- Proposals should consider how the creation or enhancement of existing green spaces can contribute to the priorities for nature recovery set out within the

relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategies, providing greater benefit to nature and contributing to the delivery of wider environmental outcomes.

- Where appropriate, authorities should consider the use of conditions or planning obligations. The Community Infrastructure Levy can also be used to fund improvements to existing greenspaces or the provision of new ones. Local authorities should consider arrangements for the long-term maintenance of green spaces.

5.16 It is therefore important that the Council considers where and how the district's Green Belt can be enhanced, particularly the relationship between the Council's preferred sustainable pattern of development and the designations' potential for new and improved appropriate uses. Introducing or enhancing uses of Green Belt land that add to its value will strengthen the case for that land's future protection. Some examples are provided in the list below:

- Improving access. Enhancing the coverage and condition of the rights of way network and increasing open space provision is a key enhancement opportunity.
- Providing locations for outdoor sport. Some outdoor sports can represent an urbanising influence; an emphasis on activities which do not require formal facilities is less likely to harm Green Belt purposes.
- Landscape and visual enhancement. Using landscape character assessment as guidance, intrusive elements can be reduced and positive characteristics reinforced.
- Increasing biodiversity. Most Green Belt land has potential for increased biodiversity value – for example the management of hedgerows and agricultural field margins, provision of habitat connectivity and planting of woodland. There may also be opportunities to link enhancements with requirements to deliver 'biodiversity net gain' associated with development proposals.
- Improving damaged and derelict land. Giving land a functional, economic value is a key aspect in avoiding damage and dereliction through lack of positive management, but this needs to be achieved with minimum harm to characteristics/qualities which help it contribute to Green Belt purposes.

5.17 Beneficial uses could be achieved through planning conditions, Section 106 obligations and/or the Community Infrastructure Levy.

5.18 There is benefit in early engagement with landowners and other interested parties, to obtain the necessary local consents, establish a detailed scope of works and identify a means of funding design, construction and management.

Appendix A

Glossary

Golden Rules

Whilst not directly concerned with undertaking Green Belt Assessments, the most recent version of NPPF (Dec 2024) introduced requirements for major development involving the provision of housing either on land within the Green Belt or on land released from the Green Belt. These requirements include provision of a minimum level of affordable housing exceeding that required in other parts of the Local Plan area, the provision of necessary improvements to local and national infrastructure, and the provision of new/improvements to existing green spaces accessible to the public – with the expectation that new residents should be able to access good quality green spaces within walking distance of their home. These are referred to as the ‘Golden Rules’ at paragraph 151 and are set out at paragraphs 156-159 of NPPF and below.

Grey belt

The concept of ‘grey belt’ was only introduced into the NPPF in December 2024. It is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey belt’ excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development’.

Not inappropriate development

New buildings are inappropriate in the Green Belt. There are exceptions to this which are set out in the list in paragraph 154 of NPPG:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages;
- limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites);
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt; and,
- Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:
 - i. mineral extraction;
 - ii. engineering operations;
 - iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
 - iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
 - v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
 - vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

In addition, paragraph 155 states the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where:

- The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
- There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and
- Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157.

Previously developed land

The NPPF glossary defines Previously Developed Land (PDL) as land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

Habitat Site

The NPPF definition of a 'Habitat Site' specifies: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.

Heritage Asset

The NPPF definition of 'Heritage Asset' specifies: A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

Appendix B

Historic Towns Assessment

Purpose D preliminary analysis

B.1 Preliminary analysis comprising a combination of documentary evidence review, high-level assessment and professional opinion has been applied in order to identify settlements that can be considered 'historic towns' for the purposes of this assessment. This has provided a preliminary assessment of whether towns are for the purposes of this study:

- Historic towns, which will be subject to comprehensive further study to determine contribution to Purpose D.
- Likely to be historic towns, with several aspects to their historic interest that merit further study.
- Unlikely to be historic towns but further study, limited to their few aspects of historic interest, will verify whether any land makes a contribution to Purpose D.
- Not historic towns and no further study is required.

B.2 Each town has been assessed against the following criteria:

1. The town is named in the Hansard/government list of historic towns.
 - Source: Existing data/publications.
 - Reason: This list of historic towns was identified in Parliament by the Secretary of State for Environment in 1988 with reference to green belts in England.
 - Limitations: This list includes only six towns in England and has not been reviewed since the 1980s.
2. The town has an Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) with a study area that may relate to the Green Belt.
 - Source: Existing data/publications: Archaeology Data Service.
 - Reason: This national programme of surveys launched in 1992. It is funded by Historic England and is carried out by District Councils, County Councils and Unitary Councils across England. The programme's aims span the implementation of national planning policy and guidance, and the planning of regeneration and conservation initiatives. As each EUS is a substantial piece of work, Historic England and the relevant Council must be satisfied that the town

that is the subject of the EUS is of sufficient historic interest. Each EUS has a study area, which may overlap, border or be proximate to or have intervisibility with the green belt. Where an EUS covers a historic centre that is remote from the green belt, especially considering topography and intervening development, they may be scoped out.

- Limitations: The survey generally excludes larger conurbations. The ongoing nature of the EUS programme means not all counties have complete sets of EUSs. In the study area there are EUSs for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, but not County Durham.
3. The extent or proportion to which the town is covered by area-based designations and contains clusters of individual designated heritage assets.
- Source: Professional opinion with reference to the National Heritage List for England and the conservation area designations of the local planning authorities.
 - Reason: The greater the number, variety, coverage and pervasiveness of historic environment designations there are in a town, the more likely it is to be historic. Area-based designations include world heritage sites, registered parks and gardens, battlefields and conservation areas. Individual heritage assets include scheduled monuments and listed buildings. It should be noted that scheduled monuments can cover substantial features of the townscape, such as defences, religious institutions and complexes, earthworks, industrial sites and infrastructure, and therefore be larger in scale than a single structure, building, or open space. Wide coverage of the town by area-based designated, and/or dense clusters of individual heritage assets are initial indicators that a town is historic.
 - Limitations: It excludes non-designated heritage assets, including townscape that is historic in character but is not within an area-based designation.
4. Historic Maps indicate expansive pre-1900 development relative to the overall geographical scale of the settlement today.
- Source: Professional opinion with reference to present-day maps and historic maps held by the National Library of Scotland.
 - Reason: The greater the proportion of the current extent of the town that was developed pre-1900 as opposed to post-1900, the more likely the character and townscape of the town is to be perceived as 'historic'.

- Limitations: Settlement and urban expansions erected post-1900 can be of historic value. Assumes the pre-1900 townscape identified remains largely pervasive with limited redevelopment.

5. Heritage assets that link the town with the Green Belt.

- Source: Professional opinion with reference to present-day maps and historic maps held by the National Library of Scotland, the National Heritage List for England and the conservation area designations of the local planning authorities.
- Reason: Some heritage assets, whether designated or undesignated or historic activity that has since ceased, can provide tangible links between the urban core of a settlement and its present day green belt. These include routes and infrastructure such as highways, navigations, canals, tramways, railways; 'green wedges' of parkland; landscape features such as Hadrian's Wall; or industrial valleys. These serve to either extend the activity of the town out into the green belt, or bring the green belt into the urban area. Historic 'green wedges' and linear heritage assets or linear areas of historic townscape or landscape will be of particular relevance to green belt review, and are therefore important to consider in identifying historic towns.
- Limitations: Local knowledge and need for site survey.

6. The existence of a medieval market charter and continued market activity.

- Source: Existing data: publications: Gazetteer of Market and Fairs in England and Wales to 1516.
- Reason: The historic status of a settlement as a functional town (and is therefore a historic town today) is usually linked to whether it was granted by the monarch the right to hold weekly markets and annual fairs. This function elevated a village to a town, and was usually given to an important religious institution or member of the nobility. If the market prospered, it brought with it a growing and more diverse economic base, and with it, more people and development. It is therefore reasonable for a settlement granted a market charter in medieval times that operated into the 20th century (or still operates) can be identified as a historic town.
- Limitations: this excludes post-1516 market charters that were usually granted to settlements that grew exponentially in their populations as a consequence of the industrial revolution.

B.3 A town is considered a historic town if it:

- Meets criteria 1 or 2; OR

- Criteria 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide sufficient evidence to suggest the town may be historic.

Purpose D conclusions

B.4 Applying the above methodology to the study area, the following towns have been determined as historic towns and were relevant to the assessment of Purpose D:

- Rochford; and
- Rayleigh.

B.5 The following towns that lie within neighbouring council conurbations have been determined as historic towns and therefore relevant to the assessment of Purpose D:

- Southend-on-Sea.

Appendix C

Parcel Assessments

Parcel assessment outputs

C.1 The individual parcel proformas include:

- Map of each parcel with footnote 7 designations, and an aerial view;
- Locational description, and description of the relationship between the parcel and the settlement, and with the wider countryside;
- Parcel ratings for contribution to each of the Green Belt Purposes, and summary of the key factors supporting the assessed contribution ratings; and
- Concluding text to indicate whether the parcel is identified as grey belt, or potential grey belt, on the basis of its contribution ratings and in line with the February 2025 PPG.

Copyright information: Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights, Ordnance Survey license number AC000811014. © Natural England 2025. © Environment Agency 2025. © Historic England 2025. © MHCLG 2025. Maxar, Microsoft.

Additional map information: Not all NPPF footnote 7 designations are mapped in the assessment outputs. This is due to a number of factors, including the unavailability of data or irrelevance of data sets to the study area. Available listed building point data has been mapped to draw attention to the location of these NPPF footnote 7 assets. As covered in the methodology of this assessment, footnote 7 assets and areas and their relevant settings and buffers must be considered when detailed site assessment is undertaken in determining release or development on Green Belt land.

References

- 1 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- 2 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2026) Planning Practice Guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>
- 3 LUC (2020) Rochford District and Southend-on-SA Borough Joint Green Belt Study. Available at: <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/media/2804>
- 4 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) Green Belt Rochford. Available at: <https://www.planning.data.gov.uk/entity/610048>
- 5 NPPF definition of 'Habitat Site': Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.
- 6 NPPF definition of 'Heritage Asset': A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).
- 7 Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.
- 8 Some Irreplaceable Habitat data sets are more up-to-date than others. Consequently, their extent mapped in this study may require refinement following detailed site-specific work through the typical development management process.
- 9 Robin Buchanan, January 2025 with regards to Suite 1, The Stables, Cannons Mill Lane, Bishop's Stortford CM23 2BN (Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/W/24/3339916)
- 10 The Court of Appeal decision in R (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority) v Epping Forest DC [2016] EWCA Civ 404 included reference to openness in relation to appropriate development, with the judgement that appropriate

development cannot be considered to have an urbanising influence and therefore harm Green Belt purposes.

- 11 The Court of Appeal decision in R (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority) v Epping Forest DC [2016] EWCA Civ 404 included reference to openness in relation to appropriate development, with the judgement that appropriate development cannot be considered to have an urbanising influence and therefore harm Green Belt purposes.
- 12 Hansard HC Deb 08 November 1988 vol 140 c148W 148W; referenced in Historic England (2018) response to the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan – Green Belt Review – Stage 3.
- 13 The Planning Inspectorate (2018) Report to the Council of the London Borough of Redbridge, File Reference: PINS/W5780/429/10. Available at: <https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/media/pdoc4did/redbridge-local-plan-inspectors-report.pdf>

Report produced by LUC

Report produced by LUC

Bristol

12th Floor, Beacon Tower, Colston Street, Bristol BS1 4XE
0117 389 0700

Cardiff

Room 1.12, 1st Floor, Brunel House, 2 Fitzalan Rd, Cardiff CF24 0EB
0292 254 0920

Edinburgh

Atholl Exchange, 6 Canning Street, Edinburgh EH3 8EG
0131 326 0900

Glasgow

5th Floor, The Garment Factory, 10 Montrose Street, Glasgow G1 1RE
0141 403 0900

London

250 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8RD
020 7199 5801

Manchester

4th Floor, 57 Hilton Street, Manchester M1 2EJ
0161 802 2800

Sheffield

32 Eyre Street, Sheffield, S1 4QZ
0114 392 2366

Email address for general enquiries: hello@landuse.co.uk

landuse.co.uk

Landscape Design / Strategic Planning & Assessment / Transport Planning
Development Planning / Urban Design & Masterplanning / Arboriculture
Environmental Impact Assessment / Landscape Planning & Assessment
Landscape Management / Ecology / Historic Environment / GIS & Visualisation