

13. RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

- 13.1. Waverley has some of the most attractive and unspoilt countryside in Surrey. The high quality environment is one of the Borough's greatest assets and makes a significant contribution to giving Waverley its distinctive character. This character has formed over several hundred years through the activity of individuals and communities living and working in the countryside.
- 13.2. One of the main objectives of the Local Plan is to safeguard the attractive and diverse landscape of Waverley. Approximately 92% of the area is rural, which is made up of land within the Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB) (63%) and land that is currently designated as Countryside beyond the Green Belt (28%). Waverley is also distinctive because of the significant amount of the countryside that is wooded. Approximately 30% of the area is wooded, which is almost the highest coverage of any district in the country.
- 13.3. The rural landscape in Waverley is diverse, including the following landscape character areas: Greensand Hills, Greensand Plateau, Greensand Valley and Wooded Weald. Within these character areas are large areas of lowland heaths, river corridors and canals, all of which make an important contribution to the rural landscape. The Wey & Arun Canal alone presents a number of opportunities for preserving and enhancing the local landscape heritage.

Policy Context

- 13.4. Agriculture and forestry play a vital role in shaping the rural environment, both visually and socially, and as such, reference should be made to the saved policies of the Waverley Borough Local Plan (2002) aimed at supporting appropriate development in these areas. The Council is supportive of the continued use of, for agricultural purposes, land that is being farmed. Land classifications have been taken into account in the Spatial Strategy and the allocation of strategic sites. When considering non strategic site allocations in Part 2 of the Local Plan, the Council will have regard to the reference in the NPPF to agricultural land classifications and taking account of the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a).
- 13.5. Waverley is rich in ancient woodland, an irreplaceable, wildlife-rich habitat, which supports an important archaeological resource and accounts for 12% of land coverage in Waverley. Areas of ancient woodland, particularly under 2 hectares and not afforded statutory protection by designations such as SSSI's, have been identified as part of a wider survey to inform the revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) for Surrey (June 2011). The AWI has a number of objectives, all of which are aimed at promoting the conservation of these woodlands.

Non Green Belt Countryside

- 13.6. Areas of the Borough beyond the Metropolitan Green Belt will continue to be defined as countryside. Policy RE1 sets out the approach to such land, in accordance with the NPPF.

Policy RE1: Non Green Belt Countryside

The intrinsic beauty of the countryside will be recognised and safeguarded in accordance with the NPPF.

Metropolitan Green Belt

- 13.7. Some 21,000 hectares of Waverley is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and this amounts to some 61% of the borough.
- 13.8. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The NPPF says that local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans and when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, should take into account the need to promote sustainable patterns of development.

Green Belt Review

- 13.9. National planning policy requires that Green Belt boundaries are only amended in exceptional circumstances and that this must be undertaken as part of the Local Plan process.
- 13.10. A review of the Green Belt boundary in Waverley was undertaken in 2014¹. The purpose of the Review was to assess the performance of the Green Belt designation against NPPF criteria and to then consider specific areas of search for boundary adjustments. The study made a number of recommendations and identified:
- land that could be removed from the Green Belt,
 - several villages which could be in-set (thereby amending their current development envelope) and
 - several areas which could be added to the Green Belt.
- 13.11. The Council considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the amendment of Green Belt boundary in some areas in order to facilitate the development that is needed and promote sustainable patterns of development. The Council has considered the recommendations of the Green Belt Review. It is broadly in support of what is suggested, and proposes to make the following changes to the Green Belt:

Removal of land south east of Binscombe, Godalming

¹ Waverley Borough Council Green Belt Review Parts 1 and 2: August 2014

- 13.12. This piece of land is predominantly in agricultural use. It helps to define the western edge of Godalming, but does not contain it. The removal of this piece of land from the Green Belt would effectively round-off the settlement and not affect the openness of the countryside in this area. This area is to be removed from the Green Belt as shown on Plan 1 at the end of this chapter.

Removal of land between Aaron's Hill and Halfway Lane, Godalming

- 13.13. This area of land directly adjoins the boundary with Guildford Borough. There is no physical boundary to show this on the ground.
- 13.14. This piece of land is open, arable landscape with extensive views to the north west. There is the opportunity to re-define the urban edge using Halfway Lane/ Westbrook Lane to the north without significant intrusion into open countryside.
- 13.15. Subject to further discussions with Guildford Borough Council, the area shown on Plan 2 could be suitable for removal from the Green Belt. There is currently insufficient information on its deliverability for housing. Therefore, this matter will be considered further in Local Plan Part 2.

Villages to be inset and removed from the Green Belt

- 13.16. A number of many of Waverley's villages are washed over by the Green Belt designation. However, national planning policy states that only those villages whose open character makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt should be included in the Green Belt. Those that do not should be inset or removed and other development management policies used to restrict any inappropriate development.
- 13.17. The Waverley Green Belt Review identified the large villages of Chiddingfold, Elstead, Milford and Witley which are currently 'washed over' by the Green Belt, as having potential for removal from it without significant damage to its strategic function. These villages already have Rural Settlement boundaries which were designated in saved Policy RD1.
- 13.18. The Council broadly accepts the recommendations of the Green Belt Review relating to the large villages. However, any detailed boundary changes that might be appropriate are to be considered in more detail in Part 2 of the Local Plan. This would involve consultation with the local communities and also sit side by side with work being carried out on the relevant Neighbourhood Plans.

Chiddingfold

- 13.19. The Green Belt Review recommended two areas for inclusion into the village boundary, and as such, removal from the Green Belt. One comprises an area to the north of Woodside Road, where a Green Belt boundary could be set using woodland edges and hedgerows, with local topography limiting the visual exposure of the land.

- 13.20. The other area suggested is to the west of Coxcombe Lane towards Ballsdown and beyond to the surgery and Field View Close. This area is not one which is currently subject to pressure from development, but which also has a role in containing the southern edge of Chiddingfold.
- 13.21. The two areas recommended for removal from the Green Belt are much larger than would be required to meet Chiddingfold's overall allocation of 100 dwellings made in this Plan. The recommendations of the Green Belt Review and an assessment of sites promoted for development through the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) indicate that the overall allocation is achievable. However, the Council is mindful that Chiddingfold is in the process of producing a Neighbourhood Plan which is considering a number of alternative locations. Therefore, at this stage the existing settlement area is to be removed from the Green Belt, as shown on Plan 3, with any further adjustments to the settlement boundary to be made through Local Plan Part 2 to, hopefully, align with the emerging neighbourhood plan.

Elstead

- 13.22. It is proposed that Elstead is inset from the Green Belt, based on the current settlement boundary, defined in the 2002 Local Plan. There are some sites considered suitable for meeting future housing needs that would require minor adjustment to the existing settlement boundary. These are indicated on Plan 4. The precise definition of the new settlement boundary will be identified in Local Plan Part 2.

Milford and Witley

- 13.23. There are separate established Rural Settlement Boundaries for Milford and Witley. Two areas are recommended in the Green Belt Review for Milford and one for Witley for inclusion into the village boundaries and removal from the Green Belt.
- 13.24. The Review recommended the removal of an area of land to the north west of Milford around Lower Mousehill Lane and to the north of Manor Fields and Amberley Road and the A3.
- 13.25. The other area of land recommended for removal forms part of Milford Golf Course, to the rear of Church Road and Busdens Way and east of Station Lane.
- 13.26. In Witley, the area proposed for exclusion from the Green Belt is to the west of Petworth Road, which is surrounded by development in Wheeler Lane and several residential developments in Cramhurst Lane and Oxted Green.
- 13.27. The Council supports in principle, changes to the settlement boundaries and the removal of some of the land within these broad areas from the Green Belt as indicated on Plan 5. However, in order to meet anticipated needs within these villages, it is not considered that the whole of the areas shown

broadly within the Green Belt Review shall be removed from the Green Belt. It is intended, therefore that the precise boundaries for change in these areas, along with any other minor adjustments to the settlement boundary, be undertaken in Local Plan Part 2.

Other Villages

- 13.28. The Green Belt Review examined all villages in the Green Belt in Waverley, and suggested that Bramley, Womersley and Churt should remain washed over by the Green Belt, with some minor changes proposed to the rural settlement boundaries to allow for selected infill to take place. The Council accepts these recommendations, and these changes will be considered in more detail in Part 2 of the Local Plan.

Land with potential to be added to the Green Belt

- 13.29. The NPPF states that new Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, and that this must be clearly justified. In the Waverley Green Belt Review, three areas were identified for their potential to be added to the Green Belt in order to resist undesirable change and strengthen the existing Green Belt. The Council is broadly in agreement with two of the recommendations and the detailed changes to the boundaries will be made in Part 2 of the Local Plan.

Land to the north of Cranleigh

- 13.30. The area between the Common and Rowly including Cranleigh School and land to the west of the B2128 is potentially at risk of further urbanisation which would extend the footprint of Cranleigh northwards to meet the current Green Belt boundary. There is pressure for development (both realised and potential) around the northern edge of Cranleigh and there is a danger that this extends in places to the poorly defined southern edge of the Green Belt. Redefinition of the Green Belt in places would help to strengthen its role in this area. It is proposed therefore, that the Green Belt be extended to incorporate the land identified on Plan 6.

Land to the north east of Farnham around Compton

- 13.31. It is proposed that the land to the west of the River Wey and south of the A31 is designated as Green Belt, protecting the land from further intrusion and reinforcing existing Green Belt to the west. This would give opportunity for a modest extension of the eastern edge of Farnham, providing a long term boundary for its long-term containment. This would also complement the existing Green Belt land to the south and east, along with the wider Green Belt in Guildford Borough. The area of land to be included in the Green Belt is identified on Plan 7.

Policy RE2: Green Belt

The Metropolitan Green Belt as shown on the adopted Local Plan Proposals Map will continue to be protected against inappropriate development in accordance with the NPPF. In accordance with national planning policy, new development will be considered to be inappropriate and will not be permitted unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.

The following changes to the Green Belt are made in this Plan:

- **Removal of land south east of Binscombe, Godalming**
- **Removal of Chiddingfold, Elstead, Milford and Witley (within the current Rural Settlement boundaries)**
- **Addition of land to the north of Cranleigh and land to the north east of Farnham around Compton.**

The following changes to the Green Belt will be made in Local Plan Part 2, with the boundaries to be defined following consultation with local communities:

- **Removal of land at between Aaron's Hill and Halfway Lane, Godalming, and**
- **Detailed adjustments to the Green Belt boundaries (and Rural Settlement boundaries) around Chiddingfold, Elstead, Milford and Witley.**

The Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Great Landscape Value

- 13.32. The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting landscape areas will be judged. It goes on to say that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty².
- 13.33. A substantial part of the rural area is within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and/or the area designated as Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). The Surrey Hills AONB was designated in 1958. It is a national designation, which recognises its high quality landscape. The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 prepared by the Surrey Hills AONB in collaboration with its constituent planning authorities, including Waverley, sets out the vision, policies and plans for the management of the AONB. The Plan has been formally adopted by the Council and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- 13.34. Applications for major development in the AONB will be refused unless where exceptional circumstances are demonstrated and the development is proven to be in the public interest. Proposals will be assessed against the criteria set out in NPPF paragraph 116.

² National Planning Policy framework 2012, paras 113 and 115

- 13.35. In 1958 and 1971 the County Council designated parts of Surrey as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) for its own intrinsic value. Additional areas in Waverley were designated in 1984. The AGLV is a local landscape designation that complements the AONB. It affects six of the Surrey districts. For much of the area in Waverley, the AONB and AGLV designations are contiguous. However, there are significant areas around Farnham and Godalming, and in the south eastern part of the Borough where the AGLV designation extends beyond the AONB and therefore under the NPPF does not have the same status of protection.
- 13.36. In 2007 a countywide review of the AGLV was undertaken, to consider the qualities of the landscape within the AGLV. As a result, the areas within the AGLV were placed within three categories:-
- Parts of the AGLV that shared identical characteristics with the AONB;
 - Parts of the AGLV sharing some characteristics with the AONB; and
 - Parts of the AGLV sharing few or no characteristics of with the AONB.
- 13.37. The assessment recommended an urgent review of the AONB boundary and that no areas should be removed from AGLV designation until the case for an amended AONB boundary has been considered. With the introduction of the NPPF in 2012 the need for the review has become even greater as those areas that are only AGLV can not be afforded the same protection as the AONB.
- 13.38. In 2013 Natural England agreed for there to be a Landscape Character Assessment and Evaluation of natural beauty of neighbouring areas to the AONB. Following this assessment recommending 38 candidate areas for inclusion in the AONB, Natural England decided to include the boundary review in its corporate plan to 2018.
- 13.39. Therefore until the AONB Review is completed, the AGLV will be retained in the Local Plan. This approach recognises the landscape quality of the AGLV, the role it plays as a buffer to the AONB and that parts have been recommended in the above assessment for inclusion in the AONB. Once the AONB review is completed any remaining parts of the AGLV not included in the AONB will have less status. However, the landscape character of the countryside outside the AONB will be protected through criteria based policies and local designations in Part 2 of the Local Plan: Non Strategic Policies and Site allocations, where evidence demonstrates that this would be appropriate.
- 13.40. It is important that there is a consistent approach to the AONB and AGLV across the local authorities that are affected by the existing AGLV designation. Three of these (Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead and Mole Valley) have already adopted Core Strategies, containing policies applying the same principles to protecting the AGLV as the AONB, pending a review of the AONB boundary. Guildford also proposes this approach in its submission Local Plan: Strategy and Sites - June 2016. Those plans also support government policy to protect the setting of AONBs from

development outside their boundaries which impact upon views from and into the AONB. .

Local Landscape Designations

- 13.41. The NPPF states that in preparing plans to meet development requirements, the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, and that criteria based policies should be set against which proposals for any development on or affecting landscape areas will be judged. There is strong support for the retention of these local designations among Waverley residents.
- 13.42. In addition to the AGLV, there are currently several other local landscape designations in Waverley. The Local Landscape Designation Review was carried out in 2014³, and it reviewed these areas as part of a high level strategic review of the non statutory landscape designations in Waverley.

The Farnham/ Aldershot Strategic Gap

- 13.43. The Farnham/Aldershot Strategic Gap is a local policy designation which identifies an area between Farnham, Badshot Lea and Aldershot. It is vulnerable to pressure for development, but has played an important role in preventing the coalescence of Farnham and Aldershot. The current saved Local Plan Policy C4 seeks to protect the Strategic Gap from inappropriate development through the application of the normal countryside policy (Local Plan Policy C2) as well as promoting enhancement of the landscape and conservation of wildlife sites; and promoting improved public footpaths and bridleways.
- 13.44. In the light of the recommendations of the Review of the Local Landscape Designations it is recommended that a much more focussed policy be developed to safeguard the strategically important land separating Farnham from Aldershot. The detailed designation for this new Gap will be set out in Local Plan Part 2. However the broad location of the proposed Gap is identified on Plan 8. Pending this review, through Local Plan Part 2, the existing defined area and accompanying saved Local Plan Policy C4 will be retained.

Area of Historic Landscape Value

- 13.45. The historic landscape in Waverley also contributes to the distinctive character of the Borough. These extensive areas encompass whole landscape types and play an important part in maintaining the overall historic character of the area. Examples of distinct historic landscapes include prehistoric Bronze Age barrow sites; medieval droveways; and eighteenth century designed landscapes.

³ Waverley Borough Council Local Landscape Designation Review: August 2014 (Amec Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited)

- 13.46. There are two extensive areas of land in Waverley that are designated as Historic Landscapes. These include Farnham Park and Frensham Common. They are currently protected by saved Policy HE12 of the 2002 Local Plan.
- 13.47. The Local Landscape Designation Review confirms that both areas continue to make a strong contribution to the purpose of the designation. The Council supports this and will retain them.

Area of Strategic Visual Importance (ASVI)

- 13.48. The Area of Strategic Visual Importance (ASVI) designation affects certain areas of land around Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh. The areas are designated because they are considered to play an important role in preventing the coalescence of settlements or because they are areas of open land that stretch into the urban area. They are considered to be 'strategic' because of the role they play in maintaining the urban character of Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh.
- 13.49. The Local Landscape Designation Review concludes that the majority of the Areas of Strategic Visual Importance do make a contribution to the purposes of their designation, but that some make a more significant contribution than others.
- 13.50. Only one of the designated areas, that to the south of Holy Cross Hospital in Haslemere is considered to make only a limited contribution due to the already developed nature of this area. It is a wooded area and is not subject to pressure for development. The Council supports the removal of this area from the ASVI. It is therefore proposed that the area of land identified in on Plan 9 be removed from the ASVI.
- 13.51. The Review concludes that there are sound reasons for the ASVI designation in the remaining areas. It recognises the importance that this land continues to play in defining the character of the main settlements. However, a more detailed review of the precise boundaries of the remaining ASVI areas will take place in Local Plan Part 2 to address any anomalies that have arisen since the original designation.

Godalming Hillsides

- 13.52. Godalming's historic core lies in the Wey Valley and it is surrounded by steep wooded hillsides. All the long views from the town centre feature attractive wooded slopes and the encircling woodland gives the town centre a special distinctive character. This area was originally designated in 1984.
- 13.53. The Local Landscape Designation Review supports this designation and confirms that the wooded hillsides help to give a unique landscape character around the town.

- 13.54. The Council agrees that the designation should be retained although its precise boundaries will be reviewed in Local Plan Part 2 to reflect any new developments that have taken place.

South Downs National Park

- 13.55. Parts of the Borough are adjacent to the South Downs National Park and therefore it is necessary to ensure that development does not have an adverse impact on its setting.

Policy RE3: Landscape Character

New development must respect and where appropriate, enhance the distinctive character of the landscape in which it is located.

i. Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape is of primary importance within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), reflecting its national status. The character and qualities of the AONB will be protected, including through the application of national planning policies and the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan. The setting of the AONB will be protected where development outside its boundaries harm public views from or into the AONB.

ii. The Area of Great Landscape Value

The same principles for the AONB will apply in the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), which will be retained for its own sake and as a buffer to the AONB, until there is a review of the Surrey Hills AONB boundary.

iii. The Farnham/Aldershot Strategic Gap

Pending a more focused review in Local Plan Part 2, the Farnham/Aldershot Strategic Gap will continue to be protected by resisting inappropriate development in accordance with Policy RE1: Non Green Belt Countryside. Within the Strategic Gap the Council will promote:-

- o Measures to enhance the landscape and the conservation of wildlife sites.**
- o Improved public footpaths and bridleways for informal recreation.**

iv. The Area of Strategic Visual Importance

Pending a review of the detailed boundaries in Local Plan Part 2, the Areas of Strategic Visual Importance will be retained, other than land to the south of Holy Cross Hospital, Haslemere as shown on Plan 9, which will be removed in this Plan. The appearance of the ASVI will be maintained and enhanced. Proposals for new

development within the ASVI will be required to demonstrate that the development would not be inconsistent with this objective.

v. Godalming Hillside

The Godalming Hillside designation will be retained, with its detailed boundary to be reviewed in Local Plan Part 2. Development will not be acceptable on the Godalming Hillside, as shown on the Policies Map, unless the Council is satisfied that the development would not diminish the wooded appearance of the hillside and result in a loss of tree cover to the detriment of the area and the character and setting of the town.

vi. Historic Landscape

The Council will seek to preserve the distinctive historic landscape character and archaeological features of the Areas of Special Historic Landscape Value, through continued application of Policy HE12 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan (2002).

vii. South Downs National Park

Where development affects the setting of the South Downs National Park great weight will be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty.

Delivery

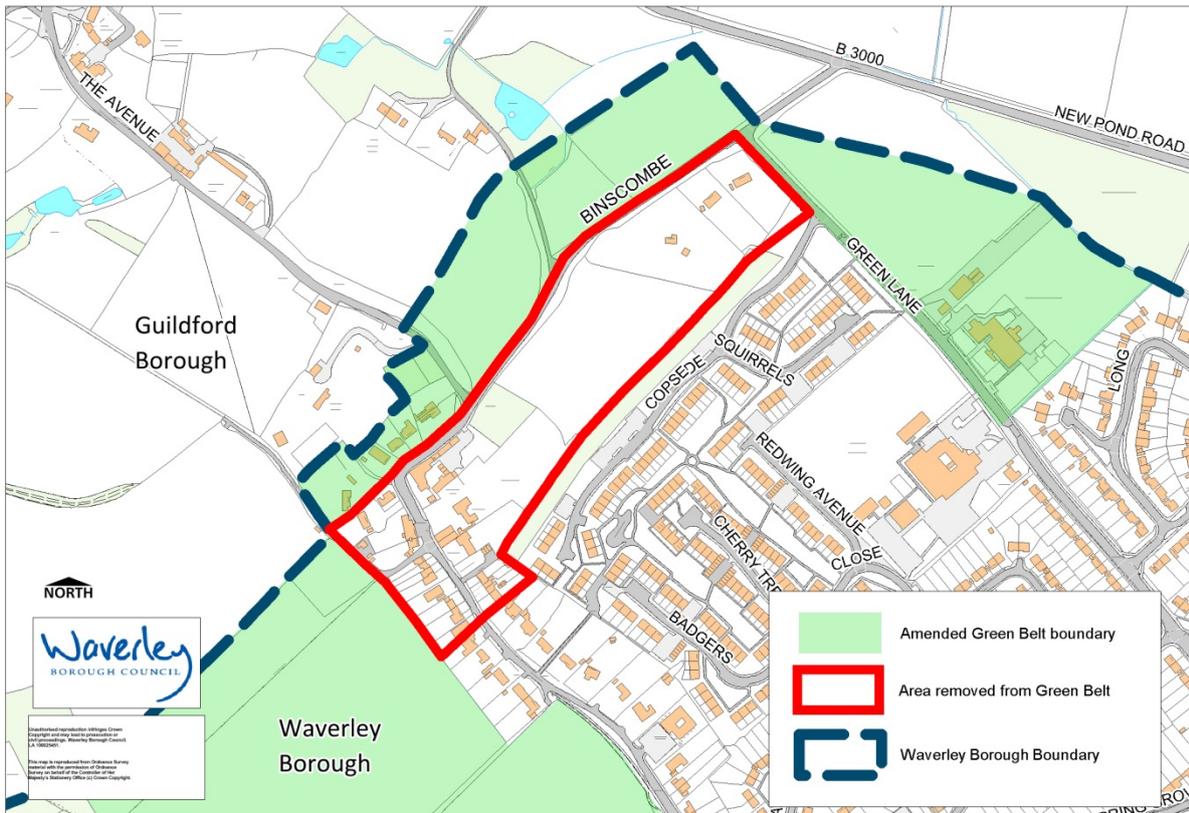
This policy will be delivered by:

- Decisions on planning applications
- Local Plan Part 2
- The Council working with the Surrey Hills AONB Board, partner local authorities, landowners and developers.

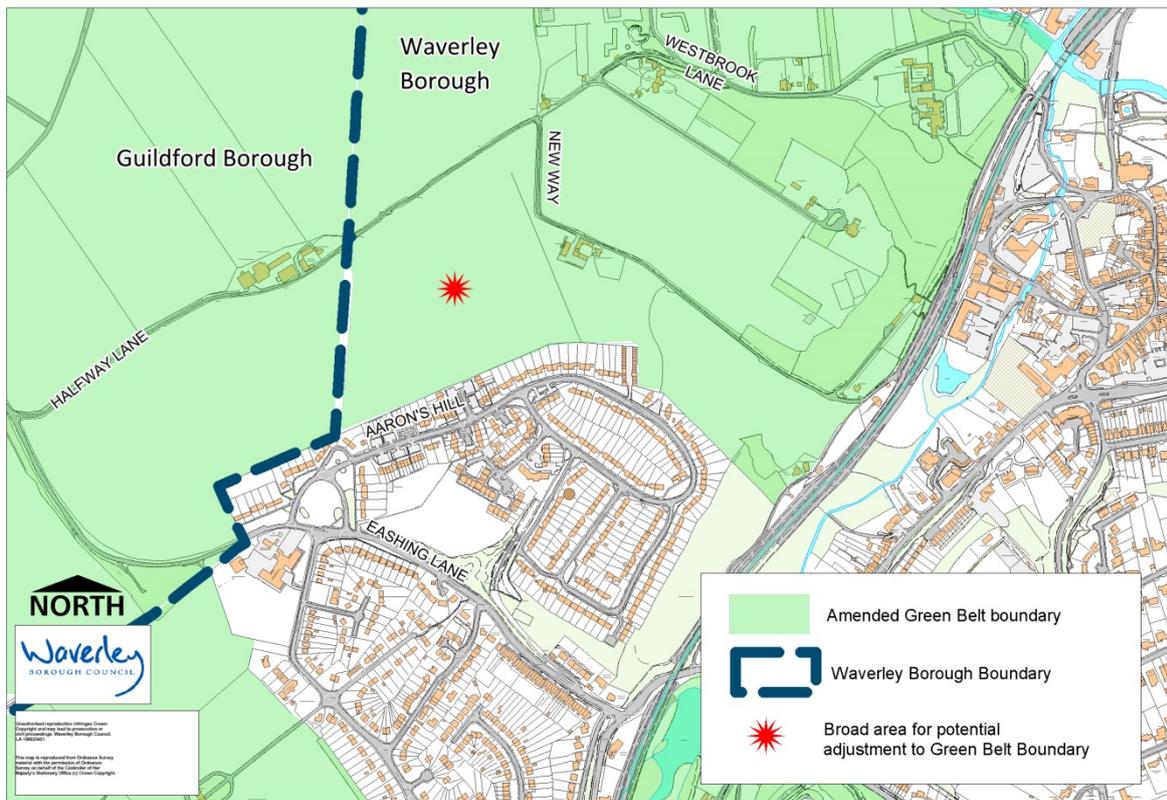
Evidence

- The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2009 - 2014
- The Surrey Hills AGLV Review 2007 (Chris Burnett Associates)
- Revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Surrey (June 2011)
- Waverley Green Belt Review: August 2014 (Amec Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited)
- Waverley Borough Council Landscape Study: August 2014 (Amec Environment and Infrastructure UK Limited)
- Waverley Borough Council Local Landscape Designation Review: August 2014 (Amec Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited)

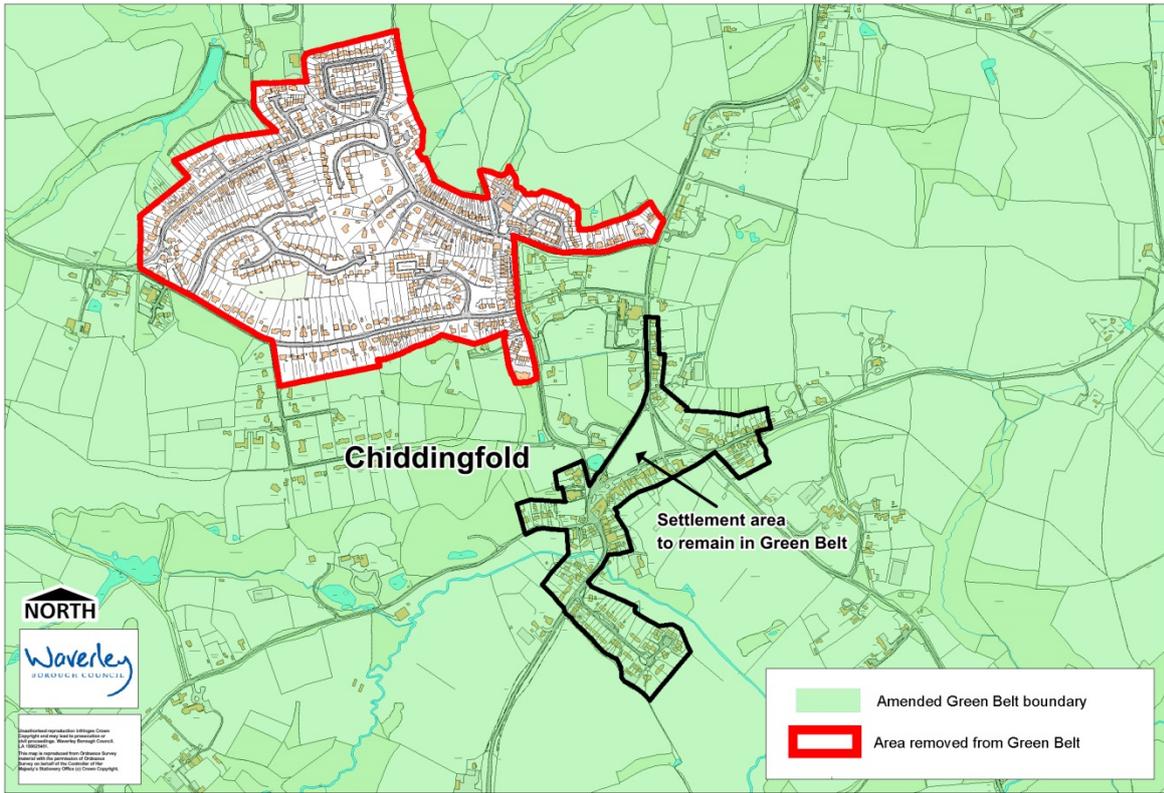
Plan 1. Removal of land south east of Binscombe, Godalming



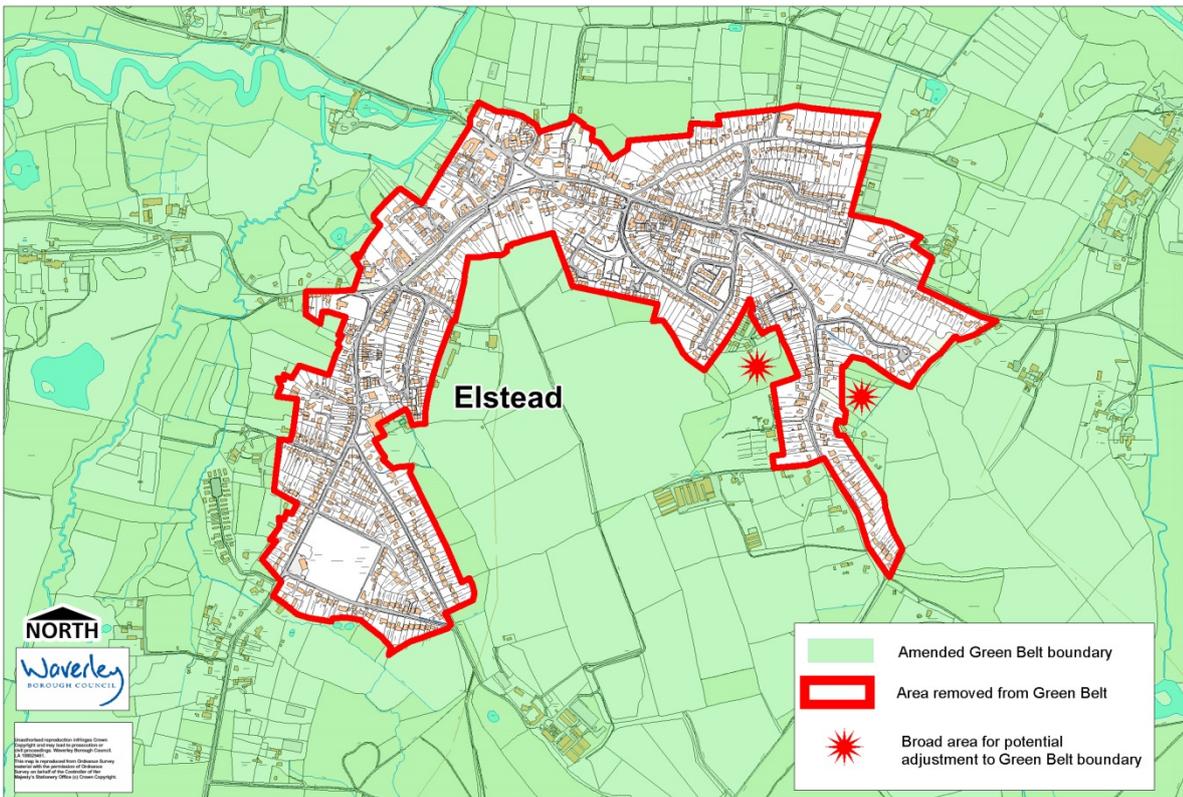
Plan 2. Removal of land between Aaron's Hill and Halfway Lane, Godalming



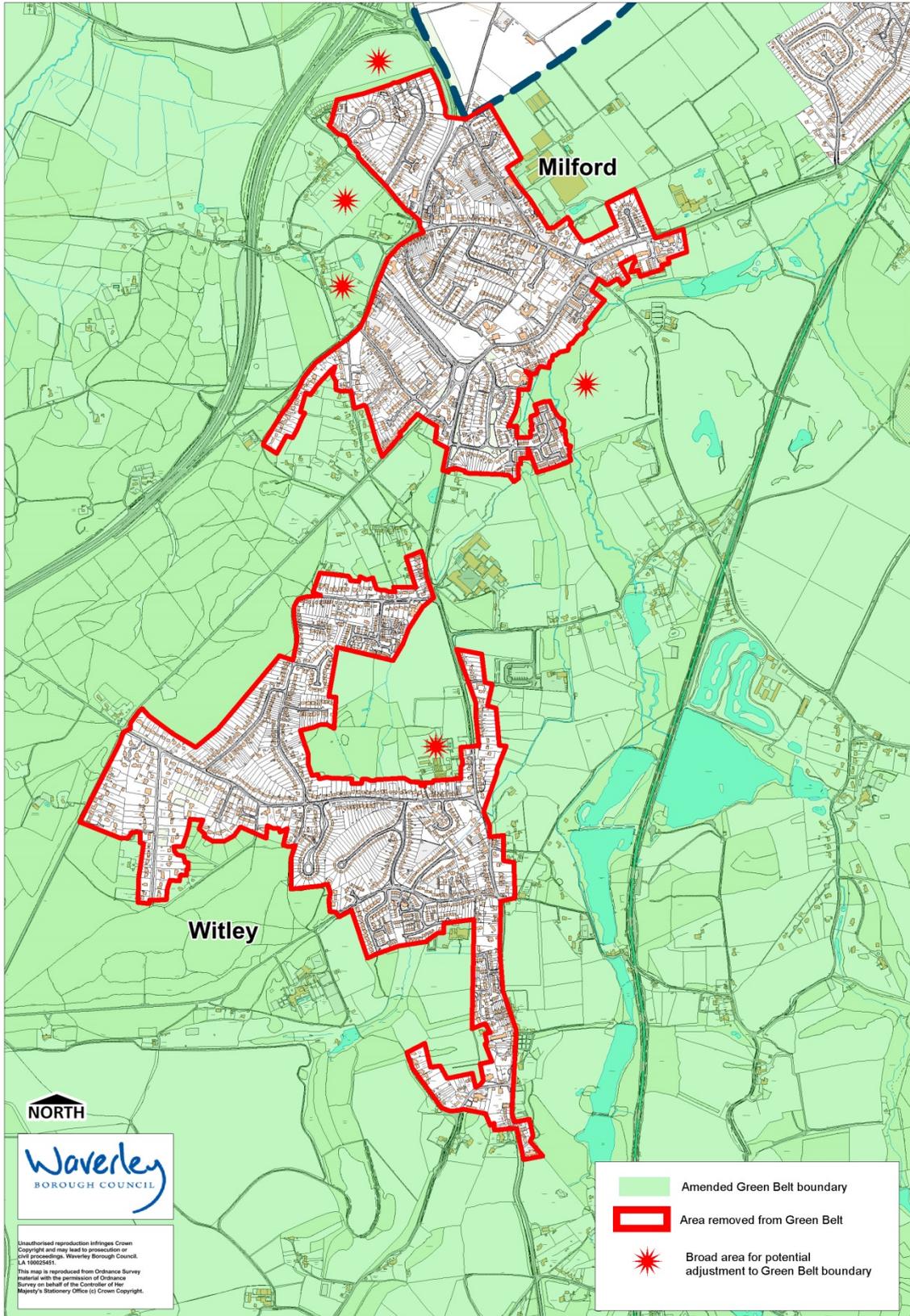
Plan 3 . Removal of land within Chiddingfold from Green Belt



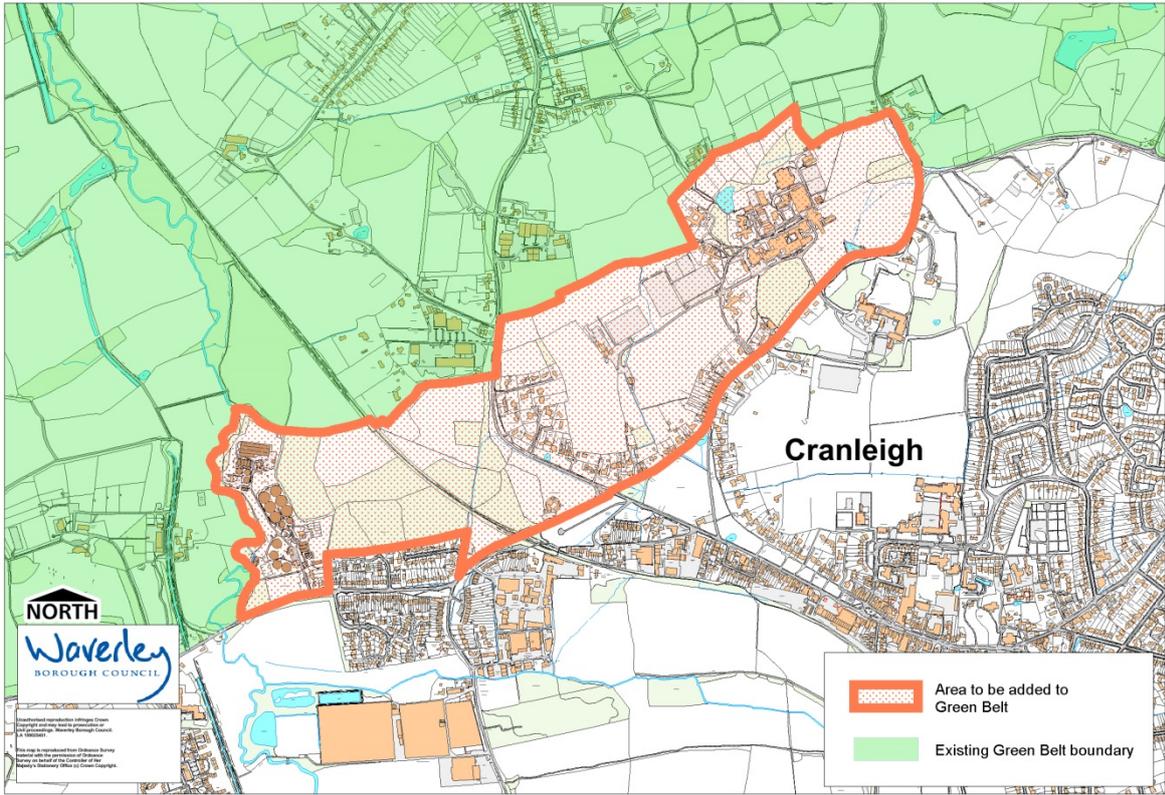
Plan 4. Removal of land within Elstead from Green Belt



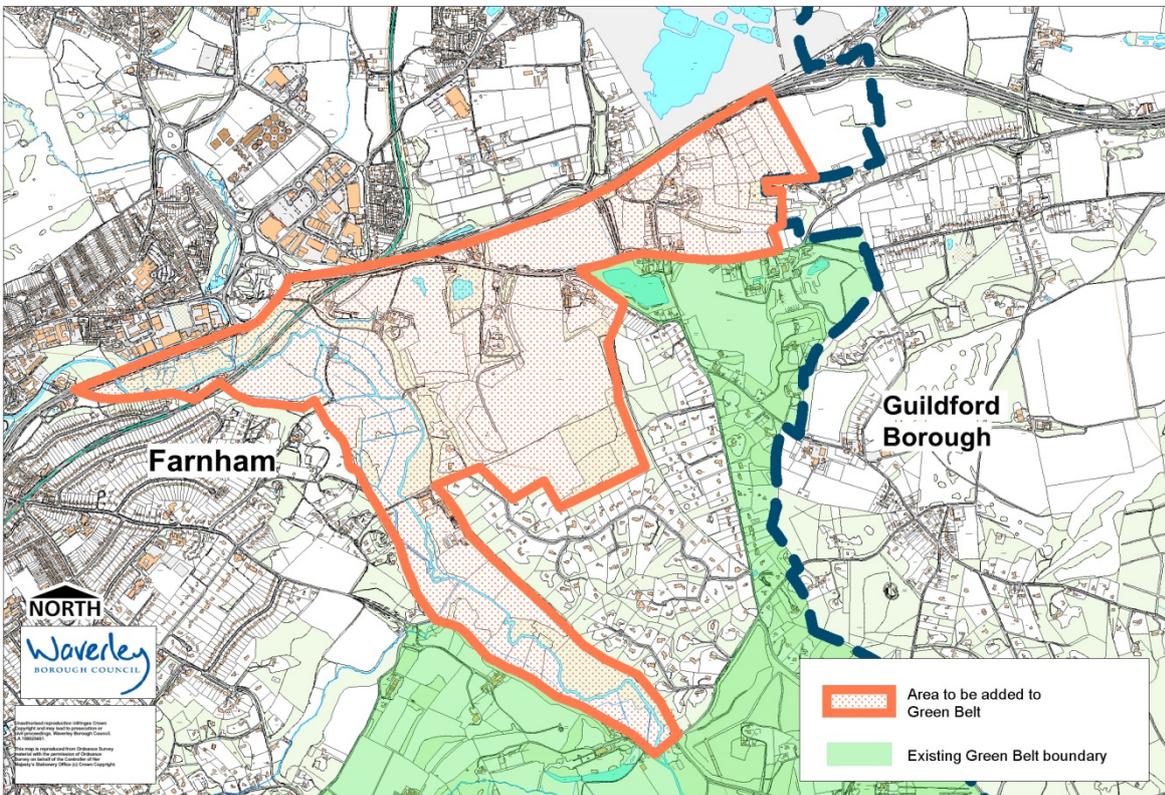
Plan 5. Removal of land within Milford and Witley from Green Belt



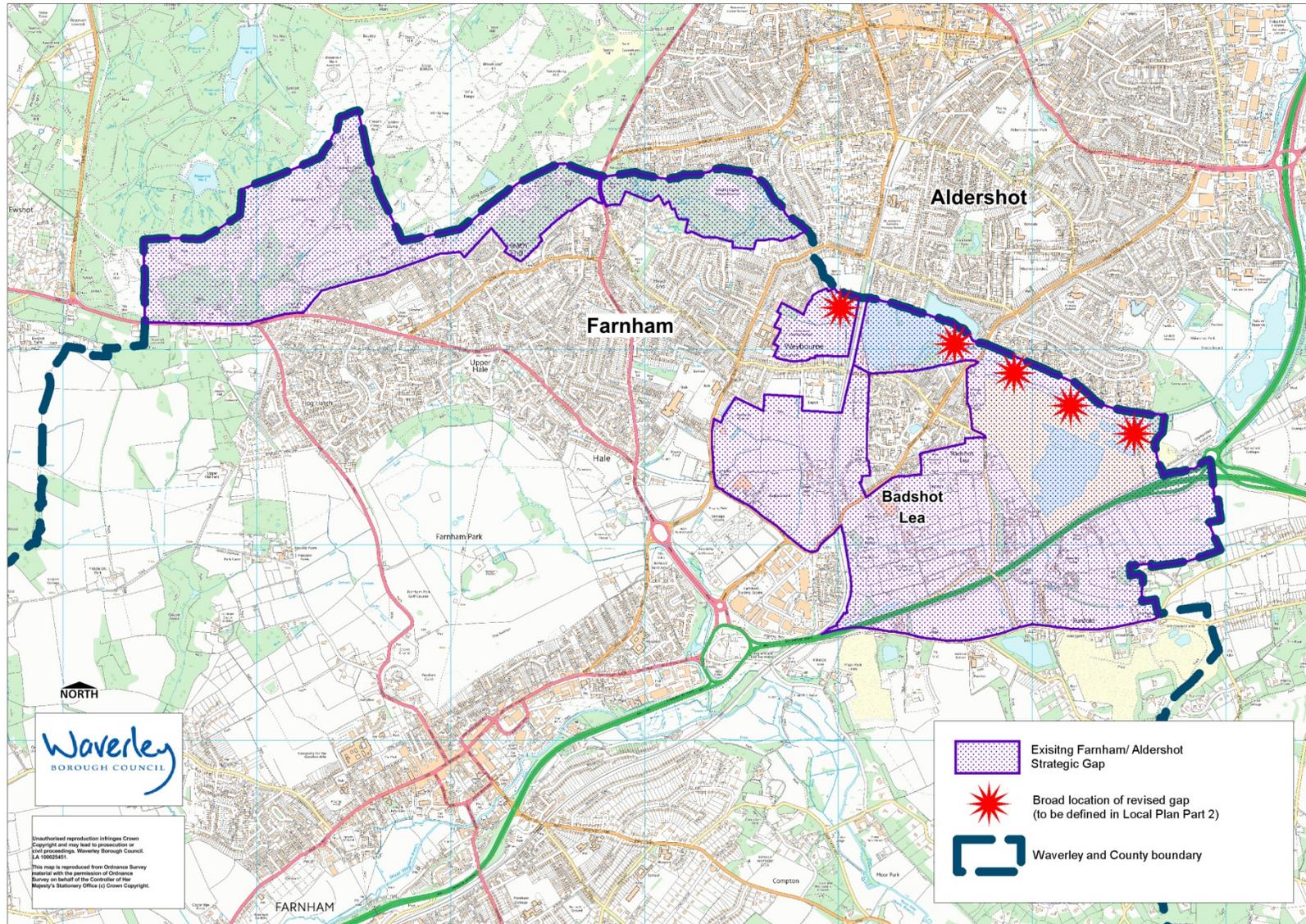
Plan 6. Area of Cranleigh to be added to the Green Belt



Plan 7. Area of Compton, Farnham to be added to the Green Belt



Plan 8. The Farnham/ Aldershot Strategic Gap



Plan 9. Holy Cross Hospital Area of Strategic Visual Importance

