New Hart Local Plan



Consultation on Proposed Local Plan Content and Evidence

October 2026

Hart
DISTRICT COUNCIL

www.hart.gov.uk

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the consultation

We want to hear your views on the future of the area and how we should plan for new development. No decisions have been made at this stage. Your feedback will inform a draft Local Plan that will be subject to another public consultation towards the end of 2027.

We are preparing a new Local Plan for Hart. The plan will show where new homes and other development should go, which areas should be protected, and contain planning policies on a range of topics.

We must keep planning policies up to date if we are to effectively manage new development. We need a new Local Plan that aligns with the new National Planning Policy Framework, August 2026 (NPPF) and plans for an increase in housing need numbers set by the Government.

The New Hart Local Plan will replace the adopted Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032 and the Saved Policies of the Hart Local Plan (Replacement) 1996-2006.

This is a statutory consultation required by Regulation 23 Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. It builds on work undertaken to date including a scoping consultation, evidence gathering, and engagement with key stakeholders. We are now seeking views on **'proposed Local Plan content and evidence'** including a vision, a strategy for where development should go, and site options. You can also comment on a range of policy topic areas and the evidence needed to support the plan.

1.2 How to respond

Representations must be received by **11:59pm on Monday 7th December 2026**.

We encourage you to view and submit responses to the consultation via our online consultation platform.

We will also accept comments by email to localplan@hart.gov.uk or by post to Hart District Council, Civic Offices, Harlington Way, Fleet, GU51 4AE.

1.3 What happens next?

All responses will be considered as we prepare a draft Local Plan. We will publish a summary of the responses received and explain how comments made have been considered.

Our Local Plan Timetable sets out the stages of plan preparation. In summary the next stages are:

June 2027	Gateway 2 – a mid-way check by the Planning Inspectorate
September 2027	Public consultation on Proposed Local Plan
January 2028	Gateway 3 - Planning Inspectorate check against legal tests
March 2028	Examination -Planning Inspectorate tests for soundness
October 2028	Adoption - if Plan found sound (potentially subject to changes).

2 Hart District – the Plan area

Hart is a largely rural district in northeast Hampshire, with a population of approximately 104,000 residents. The main towns and villages are Fleet, Yateley, Blackwater, Hook, Odiham and Hartley Wintney. Its neighbouring boroughs and districts are Basingstoke and Deane, Bracknell, East Hampshire, Surrey Heath, Rushmoor, Waverley, West Berkshire and Wokingham – see Figure 1.

Hart is an attractive and prosperous district with a strong economy and highly valued natural and historic environments. The Southampton to London Waterloo railway runs through Hook, Winchfield and Fleet. Blackwater station is on the North Downs line between Reading and Redhill with many services continuing to Gatwick Airport. The M3 motorway runs east-west through the centre of the district.

A detailed assessment of the district's characteristics and future trends is provided in our Baseline Summary.

We understand from responses to the Scoping Consultation (May 2026) the importance of protecting Hart's rural and semi-rural character, landscape quality, biodiversity, settlement identity and access to the countryside, whilst also ensuring that future growth is supported by infrastructure, provides homes that meet local needs and creates sustainable and well-connected communities. We have heard recurring themes on infrastructure provision, climate change, housing affordability, protection of environmental assets and maintaining the distinctiveness of towns and villages throughout the consultation responses. A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is presented at Appendix 1.

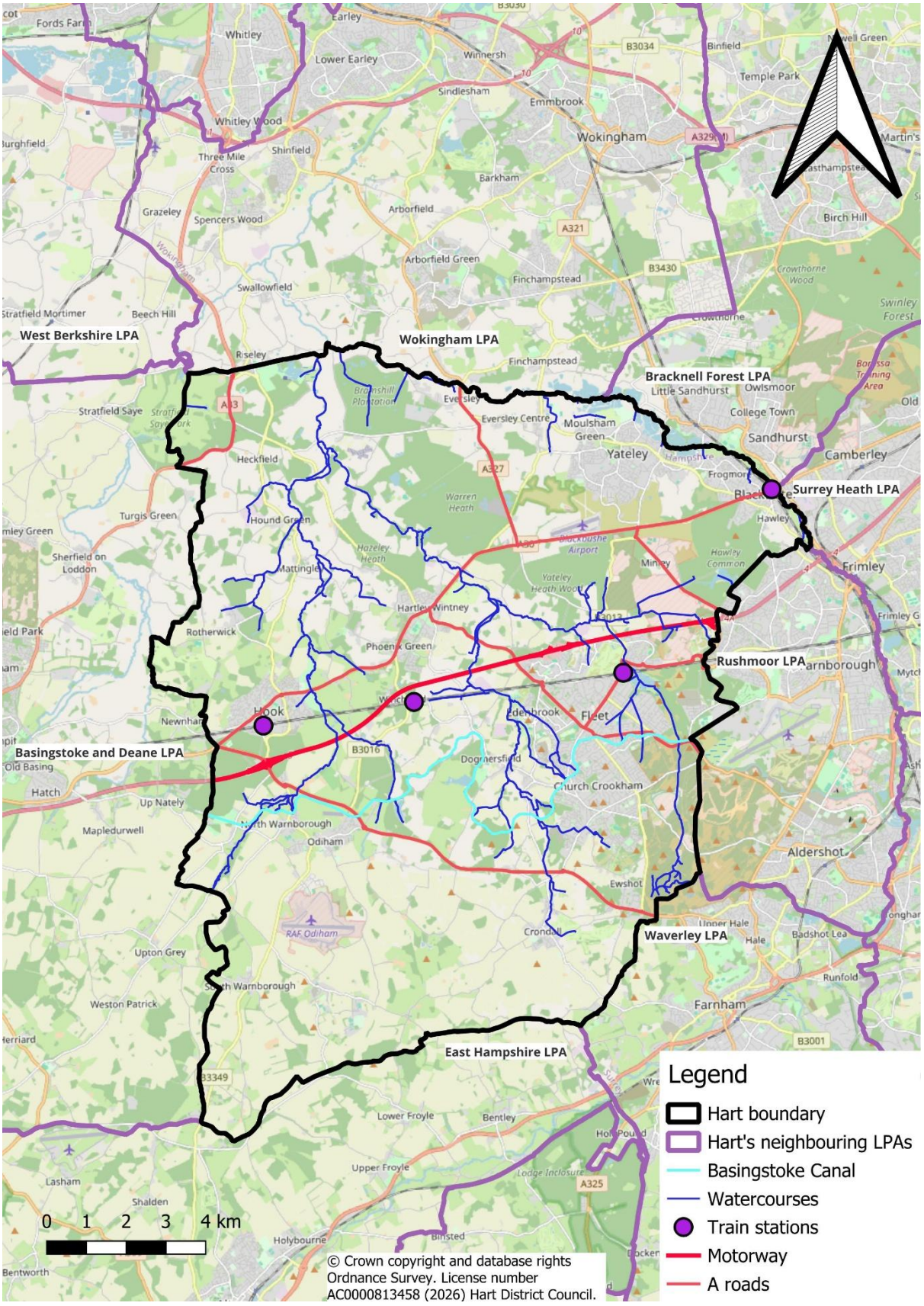


Figure 1 Location of Hart District

3 Policy context

The Local Plan must address certain legal requirements and be consistent with national planning policy. The latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) August 2026 contains plan-making policies that we need to follow when writing our Local Plan. It also contains new National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs) which our Local Plan must not duplicate, substantively restate or be inconsistent with.

The Local Plan is also set in the context of many County and District level strategies including: Local Transport Plan 4, Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire, Public Health Strategy 2023-2026, Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, Hart Housing Strategy 2026-2031, A Prosperous Future for Hart 2025-2035 (Economic Strategy), Green Grid Framework, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

The New Hart Local Plan will form part of the statutory 'development plan' for Hart alongside the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan, the retained South East Plan NRM6 relating to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, and Neighbourhood Plans. Hart currently has made Neighbourhood Plans covering the parishes of Crondall, Crookham Village, Dogmersfield, Fleet, Hartley Wintney, Hook, Odiham, Rotherwick, Winchfield and Yateley. Blackwater and Eversley are designated as neighbourhood areas but without a made Neighbourhood Plan. Existing neighbourhood plans in Hart will likely need to be reviewed to be consistent with the new Local Plan.

The new Hampshire and Solent Combined Authority will prepare a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). This will be a strategic plan for the Hampshire and Solent area. Once adopted, the SDS will form part of the development plan and future Local Plans will need to be prepared in general conformity with it. At present, there is no published timetable for preparation of the SDS.

4 Evidence base

Local Plans must be informed by a proportionate, relevant and up-to-date evidence base. This helps us understand Hart's development needs, opportunities, constraints and wider context. Some of this work has informed the content of this consultation, whilst other studies are still being prepared and will inform future stages of plan-making. The proposed evidence base is listed at Appendix 2. Different aspects of the evidence base are referred to throughout this document. See New Local Plan Evidence Base for studies already published.

4.1 Cross-boundary cooperation

The plan is not prepared in isolation of neighbouring areas; it must address cross-boundary issues. We have engaged with neighbouring plan-making authorities, infrastructure providers, government agencies and other relevant bodies, to identify and address cross-boundary matters such as strategic infrastructure and any unmet needs in neighbouring areas. These discussions have helped shape this consultation document. Statements of Common Ground prepared to date are available to view as

part of the Cooperation Summary Paper. We are committed to working collaboratively with relevant organisations throughout the preparation of the Plan and will continue to review and update Statements of Common Ground as the Plan progresses.

5 Development needs we must address

5.1 New Homes

Using the Government's Standard Method for calculating local housing need gives Hart a figure of 804 homes a year. Over the proposed plan period from 2026 to 2039, this equates to 10,452 homes. Sites for 1,751 homes already have planning permission, which means we need to identify land for a further 8,701 homes.

5.2 Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Our Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment identifies a need for 43 Gypsy/Traveller pitches to 2039. It does not identify any needs for Travelling Showpeople. We will also seek to identify appropriate stopping places for small (up to 5 caravans), medium (6-10 caravans) and larger (more than 10 caravans) encampments.

5.3 Economy

To 2039 we need an additional 8,300 sqm of office floorspace (1.3 hectares of land) and 3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace (0.7 hectares of land). If we assume that extant planning permissions involving a loss of employment floorspace are implemented, these figures increase to 2.4 hectares of land needed for office space and 1.7 hectares of land needed for industry.

5.4 Retail/Leisure

There is only limited need for additional retail floorspace over the plan period. The focus is on maintaining and enhancing existing centres through regeneration, diversification, and an appropriate mix of retail, leisure, community, employment and residential uses, with any unmet need directed to strategic mixed-use allocations.

6 Vision and measurable outcomes

The Local Plan must contain a vision for the future of Hart and up to 10 measurable outcomes, designed to monitor progress towards delivering the vision.

We have drafted a vision and measurable outcomes having considered emerging evidence, early consultation and engagement, national planning policy, and the Council's wider priorities including those in the Corporate Plan. We would welcome feedback on the vision and measurable outcomes.

6.1 Draft Vision

By 2039, Hart will continue to be one of the best places to live, work and enjoy. The district will remain an attractive, predominantly rural and prosperous area with thriving towns and villages, a variety of landscapes and a high quality of life.

We will play our part in meeting local accommodation, social and economic needs through infrastructure-led growth. Development will be directed to the most sustainable and accessible locations, where existing or planned infrastructure, services and community facilities can support thriving and sustainable communities and help create opportunities for current and future generations.

Hart will play its part in responding to climate change by supporting the transition to a carbon-neutral future and adapting to future environmental challenges, including increasing risks from flooding and water scarcity. Nature recovery, environmental enhancement and investment in green infrastructure will help support biodiversity, healthy communities and a more resilient natural environment, including internationally important habitats.

The separate identity and distinct sense of place of Hart's towns and villages will be maintained. The character, quality and diversity of the district's natural, built and historic environment will be conserved and, where possible, enhanced for future generations.

Infrastructure-led growth

Development will take place in the most accessible and sustainable locations where existing or planned infrastructure, services and community facilities can support thriving and sustainable communities, including locations with access to rail stations or opportunities for supporting or enabling wider infrastructure improvements.

Responding to Climate Change

Hart will support the transition to a carbon-neutral future through renewable and low-carbon energy generation, energy-efficient development, sustainable travel choices and climate-resilient places. Development will respond to water scarcity, support climate change adaptation and mitigation, and protect and enhance natural assets for current and future generations.

Supporting Nature Recovery

The quality and connectivity of our natural assets will be protected and where possible restored and enhanced, including the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), chalk streams, heathlands and other protected habitats. Nature recovery will be delivered at a strategic scale through biodiversity net gain, habitat creation and enhancement, stronger green infrastructure networks and the implementation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Meeting Local Accommodation Needs

We will have played our role in meeting accommodation needs of current and future residents, including affordable housing, specialist accommodation, homes for older people, and housing that supports younger people and families to remain in the district, helping to create balanced, inclusive and sustainable communities.

Supporting Inclusive Economic Growth

Hart's economy will remain productive, resilient and innovative, building on the district's highly skilled workforce, strategic location and role within the North Hampshire M3 and Blackwater Valley innovation corridor. The best employment sites will have remained in employment use and there will be enhanced opportunities for businesses in rural areas.

Fleet will have maintained and strengthened its role as Hart's principal town centre, providing a diverse mix of employment, retail, leisure, community and cultural opportunities. Hart's other centres, including Yateley, Blackwater, Hook, Hartley Wintney and Odiham, will have retained and enhanced their vitality and viability, providing services that meet the day-to-day needs of our communities.

High-Quality, Healthy and Connected Places

Hart's settlements will continue to be attractive, healthy and well-designed places that respond positively to local character, landscape and heritage. The separate identity of towns and villages will be maintained, whilst communities benefit from good access to homes, jobs, services, facilities and open spaces through walking, cycling, public transport and digital connectivity. Development will support health, wellbeing, inclusion and the high quality of life for which Hart is recognised.

6.2 Proposed measurable outcomes

1. At least 10,452 net additional homes are delivered between 2026 and 2039, reflecting the housing need calculated using the Government’s Standard Method.
2. A mix of homes are delivered that meets identified needs for affordable housing, specialist accommodation and at least 43 additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches.
3. Sufficient employment land is allocated and safeguarded to support the delivery of approximately 8,300 sqm of office floorspace and 3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace by 2039.

4. The majority of new homes and jobs are delivered in sustainable and accessible locations, including locations with access to rail stations or opportunities for supporting or enabling wider infrastructure improvements.
5. The proportion of journeys made by walking, cycling and public transport increases over the plan period.
6. Growth is supported by the timely delivery of infrastructure, services and community facilities identified through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Development is planned and phased to respond to water resource and wastewater constraints, supporting the long-term resilience of communities and infrastructure.
7. All new development is delivered in accordance with the Local Plan and national policy's environmental performance requirements, including standards relating to energy efficiency, water efficiency and climate resilience.
8. Where necessary, development is delivered with the mitigation needed to avoid an adverse effect on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area including through the delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace.
9. Development contributes towards the protection, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity, ecological networks and wider nature recovery priorities.

Consultation Questions

Q.1. Do you have any comments on the Vision?

Q.2. Do you have any comments on the measurable outcomes?

7 Where should new development go?

This chapter explains the suggested approach for deciding where growth should go and asks for views on that approach, the evidence and any reasonable alternatives. No pattern of growth has been chosen, and no decisions have been made about which sites should be proposed for development.

A new Local Plan gives Hart the opportunity to plan homes, jobs, services, infrastructure and environmental improvements together, so that growth helps address pressures and is shaped by an agreed plan rather than by separate planning applications.

The Government's standard method sets the minimum housing need figure that Hart is required to use when preparing the Local Plan: 10,452 new homes between 2026 and 2039, an average of 804 homes a year. This is the starting point for preparing the Local Plan and informing its housing requirement. Current evidence identifies planning permission for 1,751 homes expected to contribute to supply between 2026 and 2039, leaving at least 8,701 further homes for which land needs to be identified. We will update these figures to reflect completions, lapsed permissions, and the latest evidence on when homes are likely to be built.

7.1 How far ahead should the plan look?

We are seeking views on how far ahead the Local Plan should look. The figures used in this consultation are based on a plan period from 2026 to 2039. This option would focus on meeting needs to 2039, drawing on the available evidence about sites, infrastructure and when development could be delivered.

An alternative would be to extend the plan period to 2044. Based on the current annual housing need figure of 804 homes per annum, this would mean planning for around 14,500 homes; around 4,000 more than the 2039 option. Looking further ahead could provide a clearer framework for larger developments that take longer to prepare, require major infrastructure, and would continue delivering homes beyond 2039. It could also help coordinate investment in roads, schools, healthcare and other services alongside new homes. Delivery from these 'strategic' sites beyond 2039 would contribute to the additional 4,000 homes to 2044 – which means we wouldn't need to find additional land for the full 4,000 additional homes.

No decision has been made on whether the Local Plan should run to 2039 or 2044. We welcome views on which approach would best support housing delivery, infrastructure planning, environmental protection, community certainty and the timing of future plan reviews.

What the housing numbers mean:

Government formula:	804 homes per year = 10,452 homes between 2026 and 2039
Existing permissions expected to contribute:	1,751 homes to 2039
Current balance to find land for:	At least 8,701 homes to 2039
Final Local Plan housing requirement	We currently expect the housing requirement—the number of homes the Local Plan will plan for—to meet Hart's housing need in full. We will keep this under review as evidence develops, including on infrastructure capacity, the improvements needed and when homes can realistically be delivered. Infrastructure pressures will inform the location, scale and timing of growth; they do not, by themselves, mean that fewer homes should be planned for. We will also consider any confirmed unmet housing needs from neighbouring areas, taking account of the evidence and national policy.

In simple terms:

- **local housing need** is the number produced by the Government's formula – we must try to meet this need.
- the **housing requirement** is the number the Local Plan will ultimately plan for.
- a **site allocation** is land proposed in the Local Plan for a particular type of development.

If the plan period remains 2026 to 2039, the Local Plan must show that the homes can be delivered over that period. Different sites will come forward and build out at different rates, depending on their size, availability, infrastructure needs and the time needed to prepare and build them. We will therefore plan for a realistic mix of locations and site sizes, considering when each site could start delivering homes, how quickly it could build out and how many homes it could contribute within the plan period.

We are seeking your views and local knowledge on the choices the Council must make when planning for growth. Your responses will be considered alongside the supporting evidence and assessments, including on:

- where the required growth should go;

- how suitable brownfield and greenfield opportunities should be balanced;
- what role existing settlements, accessible locations and possible new settlements should play;
- what infrastructure must be provided, when it is needed and how it will be funded and delivered;
- how development should respond to Hart's communities, environment and character; and
- ultimately, which sites should be proposed for development in the draft Local Plan.

We will consider the options, consultation responses and supporting evidence before deciding on a final pattern of growth.

7.2 Our suggested approach

We suggest a balanced approach that would:

- make the best use of suitable previously developed land;
- focus growth in places that are, or can become, well connected to everyday services, with practical access and opportunities to improve travel choices;
- use infrastructure capacity and opportunities for improvement to guide the location, scale and timing of development;
- respond positively to environmental, landscape and heritage considerations, and manage effects on local character and identity;
- consider land that is suitable, genuinely available and capable of supporting well-planned development; and
- provide a mixture of different sizes and types of development opportunity.

Planning for growth means balancing different needs and opportunities. The approach should give clear direction while allowing well-planned growth where effects can be managed, infrastructure improved and clear benefits secured.

Different growth patterns offer different opportunities. They could support regeneration, sustain existing communities, improve infrastructure and services, improve travel choices, or enable the comprehensive planning of new communities.

Growth could be shared across Hart's towns and villages, focused more at larger settlements, accommodated through one or more new settlements, or delivered through a combination of these approaches. We suggest exploring a balanced combination rather than relying on a single option, but we have not yet made a choice.

7.2.1 How we will choose our approach

We ask questions throughout this document about a vision and priorities, a strategy

for growth, our options and context. The answers we receive will represent local aspirations and add to our evidence on local context. We will look at the answers we receive alongside all the other evidence we have gathered.

We will then finalise our vision and strategy on that basis. The strategy we will choose is the one that will most realistically help us to achieve that vision and meet local needs and aspirations, within the local context, with the sites that are available to develop.

The key guiding principles that will help us make that choice of a preferred strategy will be contained in the finalised vision and its objectives.

7.2.2 Infrastructure-led growth

Infrastructure will help determine where development goes, how much a location can accommodate and when development can take place.

The Council will work with infrastructure providers to identify:

- existing capacity and opportunities to strengthen it;
- the improvements needed to support different patterns and levels of growth;
- when new or improved infrastructure must be available;
- who will be responsible for delivering it; and
- how it could be funded.

This includes transport, schools, healthcare, water and wastewater, drainage, utilities and community facilities.

Flood risk, drainage, water supply and wastewater capacity will help shape the location, design, timing and scale of growth. These issues will not automatically rule out development, and growth may help fund or coordinate improvements.

We will consider the combined effects of growth across an area, not just one site at a time. The timing and scale of growth will reflect when essential infrastructure and improvements can realistically be provided.

New development will help provide the infrastructure needed to support growth. Developer contributions will form an important part of the funding, alongside investment by infrastructure providers, public funding and contributions from other organisations.

Transport measures should be realistic and sustainable over the long term. The Council will not rely on temporary developer-funded bus services unless there is a credible basis for those services to remain viable after the initial funding ends.

7.2.3 Brownfield first

National policy requires plans to make effective use of suitable brownfield land, but Hart must still identify enough deliverable land to meet its housing needs. Suitable

brownfield land offers a strong opportunity to deliver new homes within existing communities, support regeneration, and make effective use of already developed land.

Vacant or underused land within settlements, centres and employment areas could strengthen existing communities, support local services and investment, and reduce the need for greenfield land.

We will fully explore each suitable brownfield opportunity, considering whether it is available, can be delivered within the plan period, has suitable access and can be supported by the necessary infrastructure. The assessment will also consider likely costs and timing, environmental effects and the value of existing employment, community or wildlife uses.

Brownfield sites offer valuable regeneration opportunities, although some can take longer and cost more to develop where buildings need to be removed, contaminated land treated or other constraints addressed. Greenfield sites may be quicker and less costly to prepare, while often requiring significant new infrastructure. As current evidence indicates that brownfield land can meet only part of Hart's housing need, we will compare both types of opportunity positively and realistically so that each can play its most effective role.

7.2.4 Greenfield opportunities

As brownfield land can meet only part of the Government-set housing need, the Council must also assess suitable greenfield opportunities. Suitable greenfield land offers an opportunity to create well-designed places, provide affordable homes and secure the infrastructure and environmental improvements needed to support growth.

Greenfield development could support a range of site sizes, extend existing communities in a planned way and, where development is of sufficient scale, provide new services, transport connections, green spaces and other benefits for existing and new residents.

We will explore suitable greenfield opportunities and compare the different growth patterns they could support. This will include how development could relate well to existing communities, opportunities for walking, cycling and other travel choices, infrastructure needs, whether and when development can be delivered, and the wider community and environmental benefits it could secure.

We will assess each option on its merits and compare it with other realistic choices before selecting a preferred strategy. National policy requires the Local Plan to provide opportunities across a range of site sizes, including for small and medium-sized builders. Smaller and medium-sized sites will therefore need to contribute alongside development of sufficient scale to provide wider benefits.

7.2.5 Well-connected locations

We will consider how well connected a location is overall, including practical

access to jobs and everyday services in the same settlement or nearby towns and villages. A location does not need an existing bus service to be suitable, particularly where there are realistic opportunities to improve connections.

7.2.6 Station-based opportunities

National policy establishes a default in favour of housing within reasonable walking distance of well-connected railway stations and sets minimum expectations for development in these locations. We must therefore assess which, if any, opportunities around Hart's stations meet the national criteria and are suitable for development. The scale, design and timing of any development will depend on infrastructure capacity, environmental considerations and effects on nearby communities.

7.2.7 Hart's towns and villages

Hart's towns and villages offer opportunities for well-planned growth that supports investment, sustains local services and strengthens the vitality of existing communities.

Growth in larger settlements could bring more homes closer to jobs and everyday services while making effective use of existing infrastructure. Appropriate development at smaller settlements could help sustain local schools, shops, community facilities and rural communities, including where residents rely on services in nearby villages or towns.

We will explore what scale and form of growth different settlements could support. We will consider their services and infrastructure, practical access to everyday services in nearby towns and villages, opportunities for improvement, local character, environmental considerations and what can realistically be delivered.

7.2.8 New settlements

New settlements offer a particularly strong opportunity to plan homes, infrastructure, services, green space and community facilities together from the start, providing a clear long-term direction for growth.

We are currently exploring two opportunities: potential growth around Winchfield Station and the promoted Rokeham New Village proposal for around 1,500 homes between Crondall and Odiham. We will assess the potential of each on its merits and consider whether one, both or neither should contribute to Hart's future growth strategy.

At sufficient scale, a new settlement could bring homes together with schools, community facilities, shops, jobs, walking and cycling connections, green infrastructure, open space and utilities. This could create a strong basis for coordinating major infrastructure investment with new homes and services.

Delivery would be carefully phased over a number of years, allowing homes, infrastructure and services to be coordinated as the community grows. It could make a contribution within the plan period and build momentum over time, particularly

where several builders are active and infrastructure is provided at the right stages, while supporting continued investment and growth over the longer term.

We will make realistic assumptions about when building could start, how delivery could increase and how many homes could be completed within the plan period. Each opportunity would also need good practical access to jobs and everyday services, whether on site or in nearby towns and villages, a realistic way to fund and provide the necessary infrastructure, and a deliverable first phase. Connections would be considered overall, including walking, cycling, rail and other travel choices where relevant.

We want to understand the benefits, delivery opportunities and infrastructure requirements of each location before deciding what role, if any, either should play in Hart's growth strategy.

7.2.9 Draft settlement hierarchy

The draft settlement hierarchy shows where growth could best use services, transport connections, and investment opportunities. It is based on population, local facilities and the Government's approach to assessing connectivity.

The hierarchy groups settlements by size, services, facilities, and connections. It is one piece of evidence and does not determine where development should go or how much growth any settlement should receive.

The proposed hierarchy is:

Tier 1: Fleet

Tier 2: Blackwater, Yateley and Hook

Tier 3: Hartley Wintney and Odiham

Tier 4: North Warnborough, Crookham Village, Eversley Centre, Crondall, Mill Lane, Eversley Cross and Up Green, Dogmersfield, Hartland Village, Beauclerk Green and Station Road, and RAF Odiham.

Tier 5: Rotherwick, Hartfordbridge, Ewshot, Greywell, South Warnborough, Broad Oak, Winchfield Hurst, Winchfield Court, Hazeley Bottom and Long Sutton

Tier 6: Eversley Street and Lower Common, Mattingley, Heckfield, Hazeley and Hazeley Lea, and Hound Green

The supporting Settlement Hierarchy paper shows the locations of the named settlements and explains how they have been assessed.

We suggest using the hierarchy in the following way:

- any new settlement should be planned as a well-served community in its own right. We suggest that, as a minimum, its planned range of everyday services and facilities should be comparable to that of a Tier 3 settlement. This should include provision for shopping, education and community life, alongside practical access to healthcare and jobs. The scale of provision should reflect

the settlement's eventual size, with services, facilities and infrastructure phased to support residents as the community grows;

- substantial growth at a smaller settlement should be accompanied by significant improvements in infrastructure, services and connections, including better access to everyday services where needed;
- settlements in Tiers 1 to 5 would have settlement boundaries, within which development would be considered in accordance with the relevant Local Plan policies; and
- Tier 6 settlements would not have settlement boundaries and national planning policy for the countryside would apply.

We suggest exploring all suitable options around Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 settlements, together with modest growth at Tier 4 settlements where this reflects their size and services. More substantial growth at a Tier 4, Tier 5 or Tier 6 settlement would require significant improvements to infrastructure, services and connections. Improvements within the settlement or in nearby communities could strengthen access to everyday services and, over time, help a settlement move to a higher tier.

We welcome views on the proposed hierarchy and how much weight it should carry when decisions are made about the location and scale of growth.

7.2.10 Maintaining the identity of settlements

Good planning can help Hart's towns and villages retain their character and distinct identity as the district grows. However, meeting the scale of housing needed may require changes to existing settlement boundaries and extent of some existing gaps between settlements. We will undertake a study of the gaps between settlements to help identify where separation matters most and how planned growth can be accommodated while maintaining distinct communities. The findings, alongside other evidence and consultation responses, will inform the gap boundaries and policies proposed in the new Local Plan**.**

7.2.11 Protecting and improving Hart's environment

Growth should respond positively to the qualities that make Hart distinctive and, wherever possible, improve the environment. We will consider effects on landscape, biodiversity, habitats, heritage, flood risk, agricultural land, climate, water and wastewater, and the character of communities, while also looking for opportunities to create better green spaces, support nature recovery, improve climate resilience and increase public access to nature.

7.2.12 Protecting the Thames Basin Heaths

New development will need appropriate measures to ensure that it does not adversely affect the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is accessible open space provided

as an alternative place for recreation, helping to reduce pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths. Development of sufficient scale may provide its own SANG, while smaller developments may contribute towards shared provision.

The Land Availability Assessment identifies around 200 hectares of potentially available land for SANG. The location and capacity of this provision will need to be considered alongside the eventual distribution of development.

7.2.13 Jobs and town centres

Growth provides an opportunity to secure new jobs, strengthen Hart's town centres and provide the modern business space needed to support a successful local economy.

To 2039, the evidence identifies a minimum need for the following additional business space:

- 8,300 square metres of office floorspace, equivalent to about 1.3 hectares of land; and
- 3,000 square metres of industrial floorspace, including logistics, equivalent to about 0.7 hectares of land.

If existing planning permissions involving the loss of employment floorspace are implemented, the additional land requirements would increase to about 2.4 hectares for offices and 1.7 hectares for industry.

We suggest the following approach:

- make better use of existing allocated and safeguarded employment areas;
- provide additional employment land as part of accessible developments of sufficient scale that combine homes, jobs and other uses, where necessary;
- allow flexible logistics space in suitable locations with good access to the main strategic roads, reflecting the level of need identified by the evidence and the environmental and transport effects of individual proposals;
- support retail development that maintains and improves existing centres and provides appropriate facilities where development is of sufficient scale. Proposals outside existing centres will be considered through the national town-centre policy tests;
- update town, district and local centre boundaries to reflect the current pattern of town-centre uses, identify investment opportunities, and clarify where town-centre policies should apply, and introduce primary shopping areas where appropriate.

7.2.14 Gypsy and Traveller accommodation

Providing suitable Gypsy and Traveller accommodation offers an opportunity to support established communities, family life and access to schools,

healthcare and everyday services.

Current evidence identifies a need for 43 additional pitches between 2026 and 2039. If the Local Plan period is extended to 2044, the identified need would rise to 57 pitches.

We must plan positively for suitable, well-designed Gypsy and Traveller accommodation that gives families greater certainty, supports practical access to schools, healthcare and everyday services, and helps meet needs through fair and well-managed arrangements. We will explore whether needs can be met through specific Traveller sites, sites that include Traveller accommodation alongside other uses, or developments of sufficient scale where appropriate. Provision should be reasonably well connected to services and community life, rather than isolated. Sites should enable practical access to schools, healthcare, shops and other everyday facilities, whether in the same settlement or in nearby villages and towns, while respecting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities and relationships with neighbouring communities. We will also take account of environmental effects, deliverability and the distinction between permanent pitches and, where needed, managed temporary stopping places.

7.2.15 From the spatial strategy to individual sites

The Local Plan should identify enough sites to meet Hart's development needs. We will first decide the right overall pattern of growth for Hart and then assess individual sites against it. The sites put forward will not determine the strategy.

The Land Availability Assessment identifies possible development opportunities from the call for sites and other sources. The call for sites currently remains open, so further land may still be put forward.

The sites presented through this consultation provide a range of options for discussion and an opportunity to shape the choices before the draft Local Plan is prepared. The Council will use the evidence and consultation responses to decide which sites should be included in the plan.

The 5 maps below show:

- Key opportunities and constraints
- Known housing site options (housing-led mixed use sites and sites for market, affordable, specialist and supported housing, self and custom build)
- Known options for economic uses e.g. offices, industrial, laboratories, warehousing, distribution / logistics, data centres, retail, leisure
- Known options for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation - these sites have been submitted as options for a range of uses including Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.
- All known site options for other uses such as renewable energy generation,

hotels, leisure and community facilities.

These are all sites understood to be available and not ruled out at this stage by a major constraint, but they will still need to be assessed further before any decisions are made.

Please use our online consultation platform to view maps if possible – there are interactive maps where you can comment directly on individual sites.

The Land Availability Assessment assesses other sites which have not been presented here because they are too heavily constrained to be developed, or because we have no confirmation of their availability. If you wish to comment on any sites not shown in this consultation please send those comments via email or post.

No sites have been submitted solely for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. Some sites promoted for other or mixed uses may nevertheless offer opportunities to meet Traveller needs and will be assessed accordingly.

We will decide on a final pattern of growth after considering the options, evidence, assessments and consultation responses. Individual sites will then be assessed against that strategy before any are proposed for development in the draft Local Plan.

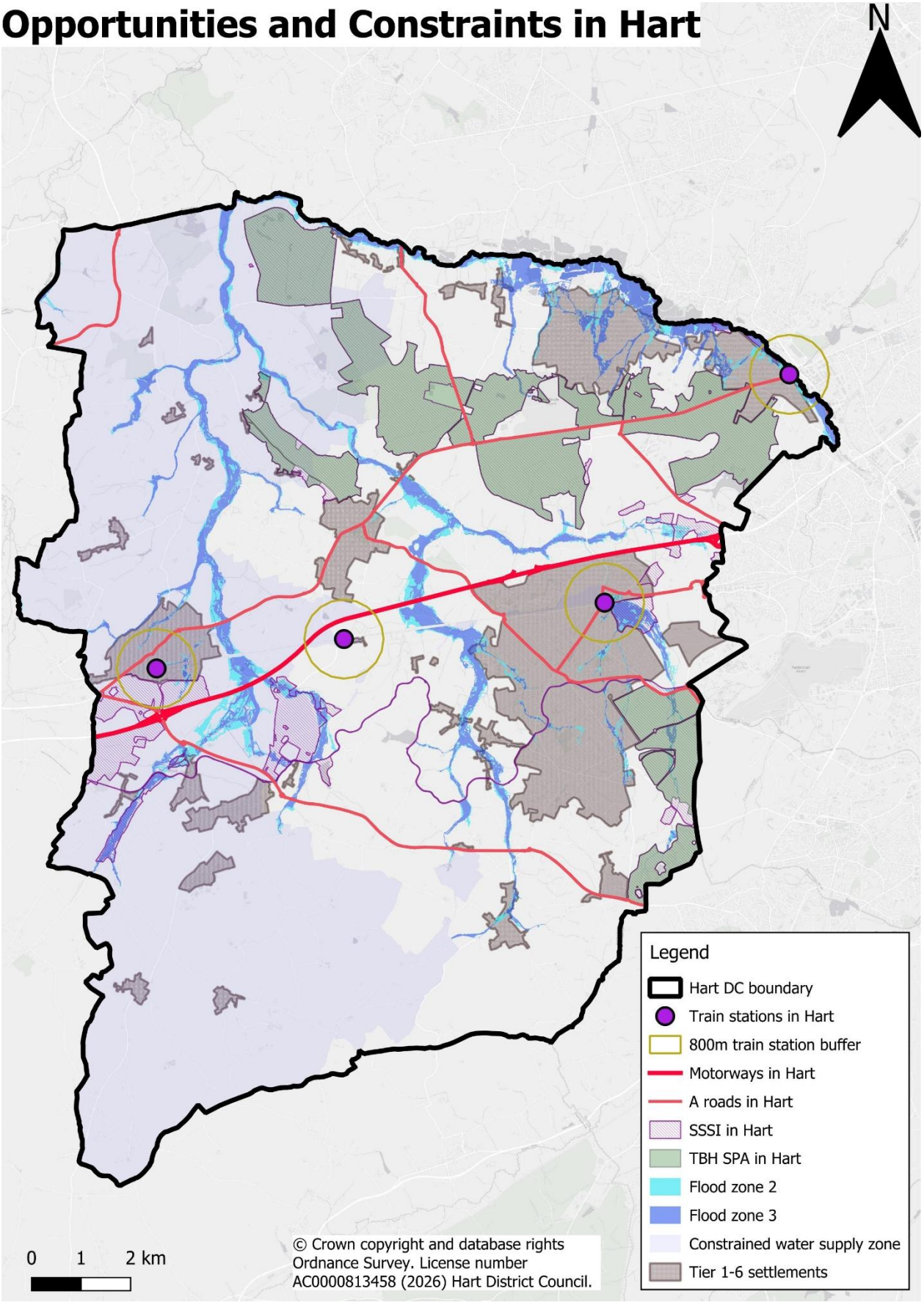


Figure 2: Opportunities and Constraints

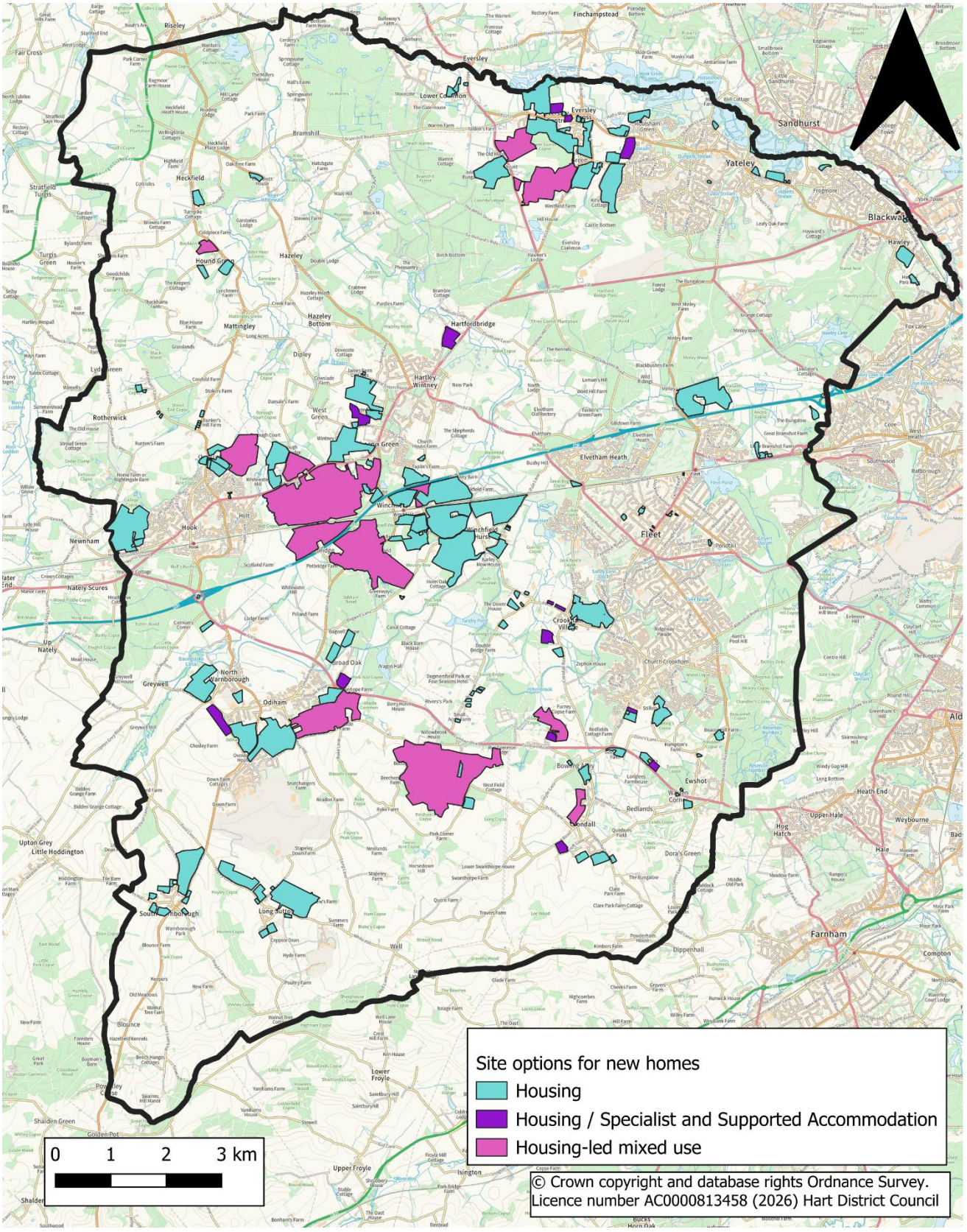


Figure 3: Site options for new homes

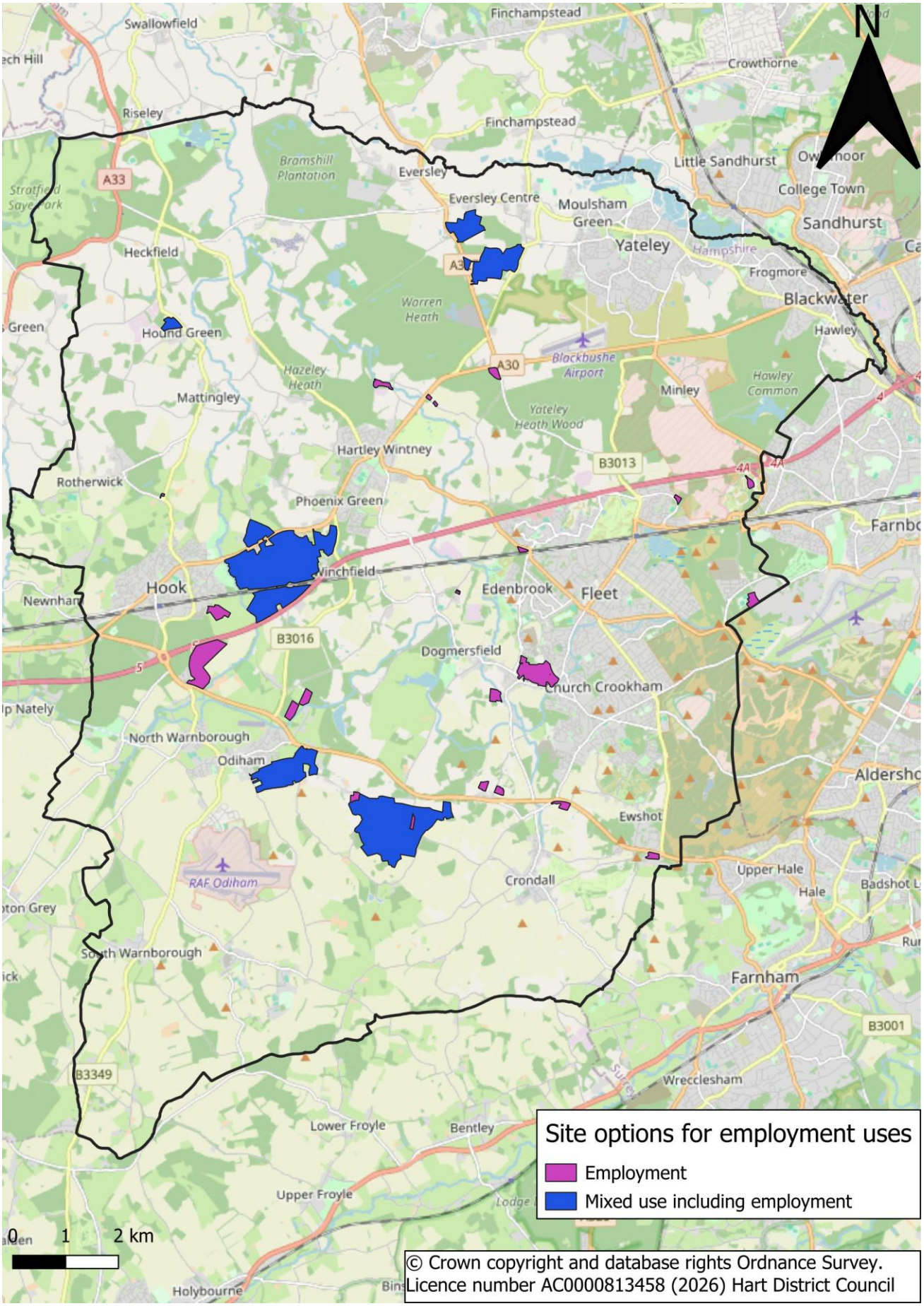


Figure 4: Site options for employment uses

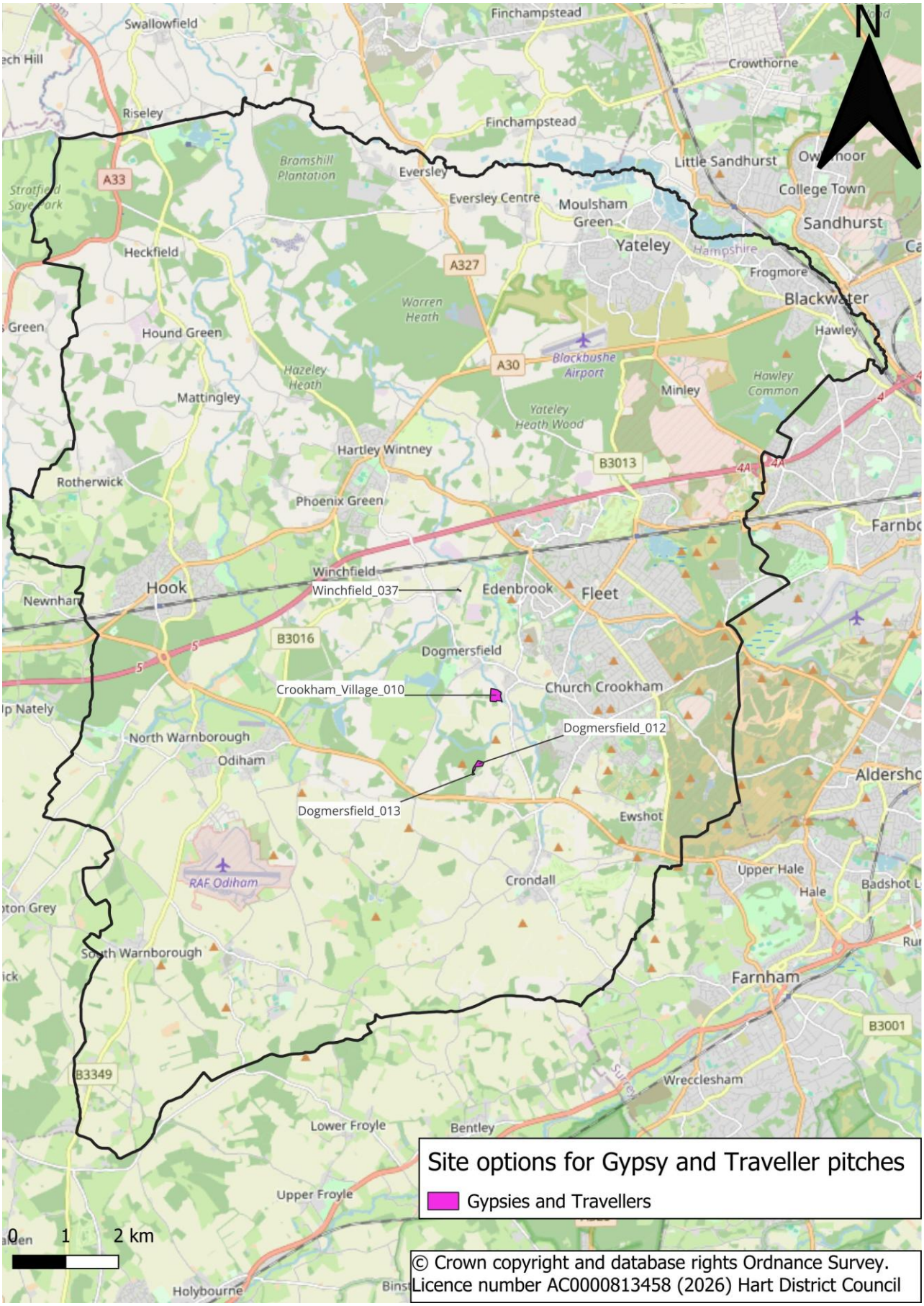


Figure 5: Site options for Gypsy and Traveller pitches

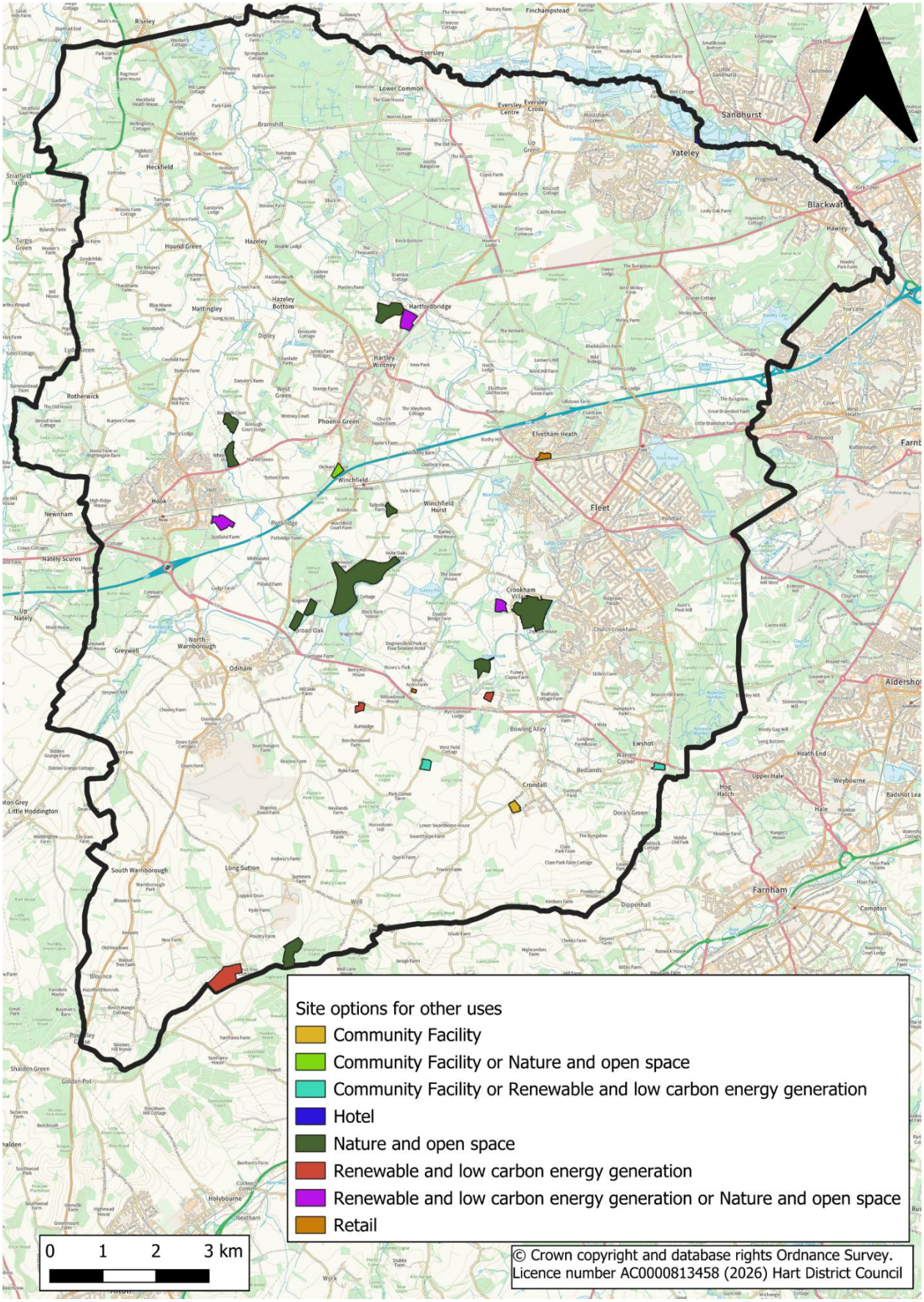


Figure 6: Site options for other uses

7.2.16 Do we have enough sites to meet housing needs?

The housing site options could eventually provide around 17,000 homes, but this does not mean that 17,000 homes would be built during the Local Plan period. Large-scale developments would take many years to develop, with homes continuing to be built beyond 2039 and, in some cases, beyond 2044.

What matters is how many homes could realistically be built during the plan period. Based on our current estimates, the site options together broadly match the number of homes we need to plan for.

There may still be choices about which sites are taken forward. We are inviting further sites to be put forward through the consultation, and we will review assumptions about how many homes each site could accommodate and how quickly they could be built. We will also factor in 'windfall' development on brownfield sites within settlements that the local plan cannot predict, such as office to residential conversions and small site redevelopments.

Feedback from this consultation will help inform site choices and the next stage of the local plan.

7.2.17 Have your say

The Government sets the housing need starting point and important national rules about where and how development should be considered. Hart must plan positively for this growth, while making important local choices about how and where it should be accommodated and how its effects should be managed.

Everyone can contribute: local experience, examples, concerns and ideas are valuable, no technical evidence or expertise is needed, and you can answer the questions most relevant to you. If you want to see more information you can view the evidence base published so far.

Your views and local knowledge will help us compare the options and choose a final growth pattern. We will then consider individual sites against that strategy before deciding which should be proposed for development in the draft Local Plan.

Consultation Questions

Q.3. Which plan period should Hart use: to 2039 or to 2044? Please explain which option would better support housing delivery, infrastructure planning, environmental protection and future updates to the plan?

Q.4. Do you have any comments on, or alternatives to, the proposed balanced approach to deciding where growth should go? For example, what role should brownfield land, greenfield land, existing settlements, station-based opportunities and new settlements each play in the final growth strategy?

Q.5. How should the Local Plan positively plan for suitable, well-designed Gypsy and Traveller accommodation? Please tell us about needs, locations, access to services, permanent pitches, or managed temporary stopping places

if relevant?

Q.6. What locations or types of development would best support jobs, business space and successful town centres?

Q.7. Do you have any comments on individual site options? (within our online consultation platform you can click on sites and submit comments)

8 Emerging Policy Directions

This chapter sets out an overview of the matters we propose to have policies on in the new Local Plan. Before drafting those policies, we seek views on the scope of proposed policies and their current 'direction of travel'.

These policy areas have been informed by national planning policy, relevant plans and strategies, experience with current Local Plan policies, emerging evidence, engagement with key organisations and responses to the scoping consultation.

The new Local Plan will be our first prepared in the context of the new NPPF. The new NPPF has 'plan-making' policies and 'decision-making' policies (the latter are called National Decision Making Policies or NDMPs for short). Policy PM6 of the NPPF sets out that plan makers should:

- Not include policies that duplicate, substantively restate or are inconsistent with the content of National Decision Making Policies, unless directed by other policies in the Framework;
- Only address matters, and include policies, that are necessary and relevant to the plan being prepared, and that avoid unnecessary duplication of other parts of the development plan; and
- Only include policies that extend beyond site or location-specific requirements where these are necessary and where plan-makers consider there is a clear and justified reason for inclusion.

This resulted in a list of 15 proposed policy directions, on:

1. Spatial Strategy
2. Housing
3. Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation
4. Economy and Employment
5. Town, District & Local Centres
6. Infrastructure & Community Facilities
7. Transport & Accessibility
8. Biodiversity
9. Green & Blue Infrastructure
10. Flood risk and sustainable drainage
11. Landscape
12. Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
13. Sustainable Water Use
14. Historic Environment
15. Design

Within each of these policy directions, on the following pages we introduce the topic and suggest matters to be covered. In this, we consider policies in the NPPF (primarily National Decision Making Policies) which are relevant to the specific proposed Local Plan policy direction, particularly where the NPPF already provides sufficient direction and where the Local Plan evidence therefore does not justify the Local Plan adding anything further. We also explore the emerging justification and evidence, in some case highlighting areas where the Local Plan may require more evidence to support a policy.

8.1 Spatial Strategy

8.1.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The suggested direction of this policy is discussed in the previous section of this document on where development should go.

The spatial strategy will be illustrated schematically in a key diagram within the Local Plan. Boundaries of specific policy areas, land-use designations and allocations (some identified in other policy areas) will be identified on a policies map.

8.1.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

This is a policy area on which the NPPF gives directions for Local Plans but does not provide National Decision Making Policies. The spatial strategy is one of the areas outlined by the NPPF as a matter for Local Plans to determine on the basis of local evidence and priorities.

8.1.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy will

- Set out the amount of development being planned for in the context of Hart's development needs and any unmet needs in neighbouring areas. At present we propose to meet our own development needs. For housing this means a housing requirement that fully addresses the Government's Standard Method housing need. As the plan progresses we will continue to engage with neighbouring authorities on the question of any unmet needs.;
- Identify settlements in Hart, their hierarchy and boundaries;
- Set out expectations for proposed broad locations of growth and development patterns, including land around well-connected stations and town centres;
- Include strategic directions for growth beyond the plan period where this is appropriate, like where larger scale growth and associated infrastructure is proposed that will require longer lead in times;
- Outline broad expectations for land which is proposed not to be developed but instead used for other purposes, for instance for the provision of Suitable Alternative Greenspace (SANG) to reduce recreational pressure on a protected wildlife site, or gaps between settlements.
- Provide housing requirements for Neighbourhood Plan Areas, for development sites under a proposed strategic site capacity threshold, above which the Local Plan will provide allocation.

8.1.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The policy will build on the vision and outcomes for the district over a minimum of 10 years and, where appropriate beyond. The policy direction is driven by the priorities in the Hart Corporate Plan 2026-2031 and 'A prosperous future for Hart', which is the

district’s economic strategy.

The policy direction will also be underpinned and justified through evidence included in Hart’s emerging Land Availability Assessment (LAA), Settlement Hierarchy, Boundary and Coalescence and Gaps Review, Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, and Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment, as well as Hampshire’s Local Transport Plan (LTP4), Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), area based transport strategy and schemes for the district, and associated transport models and tools.

Alongside our technical evidence, we have also taken emerging consultation and engagement evidence into account. Our early engagement with neighbouring authorities has raised related matters including the potential for unmet needs arising from the wider housing market area and the need to communicate and coordinate our approach to planning infrastructure with cross-boundary significance, including transport and water. Spatial strategy and the associated scale and distribution of housing was also one of the key areas on which we received feedback as part of our scoping consultation. Many respondents stated that they accept the need for additional housing, but views differed on the scale, pace and location of growth. There was strong support for prioritising brownfield land, existing settlements and infrastructure-led development, while protecting the countryside, local settlement and landscape character and habitats. Settlement identity and evidence-based planning were also recurring themes, with respondents supporting the retention of strategic and local gaps between settlements.

Consultation Question

Q.8. Are there any additional important matters relating to our proposed policy on spatial strategy that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.2 Housing

8.2.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area is intended to set out the approach to delivering housing in the district, in the locations that will be chosen in line with our proposed spatial strategy. The policy area will set out what specific kinds of housing we will need over the plan period to cater for the identified needs of Hart's population over the plan period, including of specific groups. We will also make housing allocations on specific sites including for specialist accommodation and include site-specific requirements to ensure what is delivered is locally appropriate. Our proposed approach to housing provision will focus on meeting the needs of the district by creating and supporting healthy and inclusive communities as well as mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

We intend that the allocations will particularly identify specific deliverable sites that can meet our housing needs over the first five years from adoption of the plan, as well as for the rest of the plan period. We propose that the largest sites and sites with very specific requirements will have their own individual allocation policies. For all other sites we propose a grouped allocation policy approach.

We propose that this policy area will also include detail on the circumstances where on- and off-site provision or contributions are expected from development to meet affordable and other specialist housing requirements. The policy area will further set out the circumstances in which review mechanisms apply for affordable housing requirements, which are used to recoup additional funds from developments after completion if viability has improved since planning permission was granted.

Hart is a popular place to live with a high quality of life, which is reflected in high and rising levels of housing need and low housing affordability. Additional influences on the housing market include the presence of an aging population and constraints in terms of infrastructure and environment on where and how much we can build.

Groups for which specific accommodation needs have been considered in Hart include those requiring affordable housing, older and disabled persons and other vulnerable people requiring specialist housing provision or housing to a certain accessibility standard, students, looked after children, people interested in self and custom build housing, and essential local workers who may be in low to medium incomes.

As already outlined in our spatial strategy, applying the Government's Standard Method gives Hart a local housing need figure of 804 homes per year, significantly higher than the housing requirement in our previous Local Plan. Our Housing Needs Assessment provides further evidence about the different types of housing needed within that overall figure. Within this wider need, the assessment also identifies significant need for affordable housing in Hart across both social/affordable rented (304 per year) and affordable home ownership tenures (potential demand for 412 per year). Our evidence suggests that in order to deliver the estimated need for social and affordable rented homes from households in acute housing need, the majority of

new Affordable Housing will need to be delivered as this tenure, prioritising Social Rented housing where possible, subject to viability and the impact on overall delivery.

Hart is projected to experience substantial growth in its older population over the plan period, leading to a need for specialist housing for older people of 786 to 815 units (to 2039) or approximately 60 to 63 homes per year, as part of overall housing need. A mix of specialist accommodation is needed to provide different levels of support, as well as mainstream housing built to accessible and adaptable standards. The evidence recommends that all new housing should be built to M4(2) adaptable standards, with at least 3% of new homes built to M4(3) wheelchair accessible standards, subject to viability and other relevant considerations.

Our Housing Needs Assessment does not identify significant demand for specific accommodation aimed at students, service families, other key or local workers, looked after children or for self and custom build housing in Hart at present, outside of what can be met through mainstream, affordable, and accessible housing delivery.

Hart's housing stock is currently dominated by larger houses which impacts on affordability and choice. In order to add choice and flexibility and improve affordability, we propose that future housing should include a greater mix in terms of size, type and tenure.

8.2.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

NPPF Policy HO3 requires development plans to outline proposed phasing of housing delivery and HO5 requires plans to address housing needs of different groups. National Decision Making Policies already set out requirements specific to housing, including Policy HO7 on meeting the needs for homes, HO8 on providing affordable homes, HO9 on specialist forms of accommodation, and HO13 on build out of residential and strategic sites. The New Hart Local Plan will complement these national policies with provisions as proposed below.

8.2.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy area will set out:

- The size, type and tenure mix of residential accommodation required, including affordable housing and associated review mechanisms;
- The specialist housing requirements for the district including for older, disabled, and vulnerable persons;
- The proportion of housing which should be delivered to M4(2) and M4(3) accessibility standards;
- Allocations to meet the Local Plan housing requirement; and
- Site-specific requirements, which may include specifications relating to the use, capacity, layout, mix, on- and off-site infrastructure facilities and other developer contributions, design, heritage, environmental management,

phasing and delivery considerations on particular allocation sites, as appropriate.

8.2.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The policy direction will be underpinned and justified through evidence included in our Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment, which analyses the housing needs of the district including for affordable housing and specialist accommodation, as well as evidence to inform the mix of new housing. Other relevant evidence includes the Hart Housing Register, Supported Housing Needs Assessment, the associated Local Supported Housing Strategy, the Self and Custom Build Register, Hart's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, and the emerging Plan Viability Assessment and Climate Impact Site Assessment.

Alongside this technical evidence, we are also taking into account evidence gathered through our Scoping Consultation and engagement with neighbouring authorities. Discussions with neighbouring authorities are highlighting that they are also facing challenges in meeting their own development needs, creating potential cross-boundary planning pressures. Housing was also one of the most discussed and contested issues within the scoping consultation, although most comments related to our spatial strategy and the quantum and distribution of housing, rather than to the type, size, tenure and accessibility of housing. Affordability emerged as a key concern, with calls for more affordable, social and first-time-buyer homes. Respondents highlighted the challenges faced by young people, key workers and lower-income households, and supported a wider range of housing to meet the needs of different groups, including older people, families, disabled residents and Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Consultation Question

Q.9. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on housing that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.3 Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation

8.3.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople are planned for and met throughout the Local Plan period. The policy provides a framework for delivering sufficient pitches and plots to meet identified needs and to safeguard existing provision where appropriate. By increasing the availability of authorised sites to meet need, the policy will also help reduce the likelihood of unauthorised encampments.

There are well-established Gypsy and Traveller communities living in Hart District. The Census 2021 identifies an estimated population of 233 people who identify as Gypsy or Irish Traveller or Gypsy/Romany living in Hart District, and approximately 90 households. The latest Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) identifies 53 current pitches across 7 sites, as well as 1 Travelling Showpersons yard with 3 plots, and a number of households living in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation.

The GTAA identifies a need for 43 pitches to 2039 assuming a 10 year plan period from adoption. The greatest level of need arises within the first five years, when 27 pitches are required. No specific need for new Travelling Showpersons yards is identified but the GTAA recognises there is a national shortfall.

The GTAA recommends that the Council should plan positively to meet identified need and also identify appropriate stopping places for different sized encampments (up to 5 caravans, between 6 and 10, and more than 10 caravans). It further advises that needs can typically be met through a combination of three broad delivery routes:

- Intensification and turnover of existing authorised sites
- Regularisation of suitable unauthorised developments and
- Allocation and delivery of new sites.

We will take a positive approach to meeting the accommodation needs identified through the latest GTAA. In order to do this, we are undertaking a proactive site search, taking account of all possible sources of sites that could be allocated to address need. This includes considering sites for potential allocation that have been brought forward in the Call for Sites, public sector land which might be appropriate for release, existing sites which could have potential to expand or be intensified, unauthorised encampments seeking to be formalised, as well as land within larger sites considered for allocation for a mix of uses.

8.3.2 What is already covered by the NPPF?

NPPF Policies HO1 and HO5 require local planning authorities to assess accommodation needs and ensure that Local Plans identify and maintain a sufficient supply of sites to meet the needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

The new National Decision Making Policies within the NPPF, including HO12:

Traveller Sites, provide a framework for assessing planning applications for Traveller sites, covering matters such as location, access to services, local need, relocation of authorised sites and unauthorised development. Given that development management considerations are now addressed in the NPPF, there is limited justification for duplicating them within the Local Plan, unless our evidence identifies specific local requirements which would bring added value to the policies already in the NPPF.

8.3.3 Topics and Issues Proposed to be Covered in the Policy

Our Local Plan policy is proposed to focus on delivering, maintaining and monitoring site supply to meet identified need and:

- Set out how identified pitch requirements (27 over the first five years from adoption, 43 over the first 10 years from adoption) will be delivered through the Plan.
- Consider need for and potential supply of land for stopping places.
- Allocate sites to meet identified needs and make site specific requirements where appropriate, to ensure sites provide locally appropriate, sustainable and healthy accommodation.
- Safeguard the existing authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites and Travelling Showpeople yard.
- Monitor needs, permissions, completions and the ongoing requirements for and supply of pitches.
- Respond to updated evidence, changing circumstances and national policy changes where necessary.

8.3.4 Emerging Evidence and Justification to Support this Proposed Approach

The principal existing evidence supporting this approach is the Hart GTAA. Once potential sites have been identified through our ongoing site search and assessment, a Pitch Delivery Assessment will be carried out to assess their deliverability and inform the next stage of the new Local Plan.

Early engagement with neighbouring authorities and Scoping Consultation responses highlighted the importance of meeting Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs through evidence-based planning and suitable site provision. Key themes included the need for direct engagement with Traveller communities, for careful consideration of site location and management, and for greater clarity on local need, existing provision and policy requirements.

Consultation Question

Q.10. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.4 Economy and Employment

8.4.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area is intended to set out our approach to economy and employment in the district. Hart's economy is robust, with high economic activity and employment rates, and a business profile dominated by micro-enterprises. Hart's economy is also highly productive, with a Gross Value Added significantly above the UK average. This is driven by strengths in high-value sectors such as professional services, digital technology, and defence, by a well-qualified workforce, and by Hart's advantageous position in the North Hampshire M3 and Blackwater Valley technology corridor.

Our proposed policy approach is intended to implement economic growth in a way that is appropriate to Hart's local economy and supports the wider Local Plan objectives of creating healthy communities and combating climate change by ensuring that options for employment are located close to where people live and supported by active and public transport opportunities and wider services.

This policy area proposes to enable the district to retain and attract higher value jobs, support business expansion, and improve productivity. The policy proposes to build on the existing strong base of micro and small firms in the district. The presence of these firms suggests that Hart has a viable entrepreneurial environment that can support job creation if the right premises, infrastructure, skills, and conditions are in place.

Hart is part of a wider North Hampshire functional economic area and has close relationships with other authorities on the M3 corridor including Basingstoke and Rushmoor. There is a significant degree of commuting across the area.

The industrial market in Hart is relatively small but healthy, with a concentration of industrial activity around Blackbushe Business Park, Osborne Way, Bartley Wood Business Park, Murrell Green and the edge of Fleet town centre, high and rising rents and a market geared toward smaller occupiers. Vacancy is low for light and general industrial space, providing very little room for growth. However, storage and distribution space is focused on small storage premises with few medium spaces and no large strategic logistics assets, and a higher vacancy above the wider economic area average.

The office market is dominated by small and medium-sized premises. It has declined by around a third over the past decade, reflecting shifts toward home working and redevelopment of older stock. However, as a result, office vacancy rates in Hart are now significantly below those across the wider economic area. Over 35% of workers in the South East report that they are mainly working from home. The policy area proposes development that enables the ability to work from home and flexibly, as a key part of promoting sustainable travel patterns. We also propose to focus office development near major population centres and public and active transport options, potentially in Fleet town centre and accessible business parks. We will further closely monitor office-to-residential conversions, to consider whether we may need to introduce Article 4 Directions or other policy tools to protect remaining stock.

We propose that the plan will allocate sites for employment sufficient to meet identified local needs (as set out in the spatial strategy section of this consultation document) and will safeguard existing employment sites where they merit protection. Opportunities will also be taken to enhance and intensify existing employment land within the district and monitor evolving vacancies across different uses.

8.4.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

Policy E1 of the NPPF requires that development plans should set out a clear economic vision and strategy to encouraging sustainable economic growth. Policy E1 requires plans to address barriers to investment and allocate employment sites to meet identified needs, including for clusters, networks and sites for knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries, freight and logistics. National Decision Making Policies E2, E3, E4 and CC2 already set out the approach to decision making when considering the need for business land and premises, freight, logistics, rural business development, and on improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings and do not need to be repeated in the Local Plan.

8.4.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy area will set out:

- How it will meet need for employment land in the district in line with our spatial strategy, reflecting and addressing local economic barriers and opportunities;
- Areas to focus office growth, potentially in Fleet Town Centre and accessible business parks with strong public transport links and nearby amenities;
- Areas appropriate for intensification, infilling, refurbishment and / or redevelopment of existing employment uses to modern workspaces, logistics or mixed-use developments;
- Potential for commercial-led mixed-use sites;
- Broad areas with access to the strategic road network appropriate for limited delivery of flexible new B8 logistics space to address evidenced demand;
- Safeguarding for existing designated employment space and new designations for some key non-designated existing employment spaces;
- Allocations for new employment land of varying types and sizes, including for small and medium industrial uses, encouraging flexibility (in line with our spatial strategy, focusing allocations on land within large mixed use strategic sites, with good accessibility by active and public transport); and
- Associated site-specific requirements which could include specifications relating to the use, capacity, layout, mix, on- and off-site infrastructure facilities and other developer contributions, design, heritage, environmental, management, phasing and delivery considerations on allocated employment sites, as appropriate.

8.4.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

Primary evidence for this policy area comes from the emerging Hart Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment, Hart Employment Land review, Hart Climate Impact Site Assessment, the Hart Economic Strategy (Prosperous Future for

Hart) and the Hampshire Transport Strategy with reference to freight and logistics.

Alongside this technical evidence, we are also taking into account evidence gathered through our Scoping Consultation and early engagement with neighbouring authorities, which has raised a number of matters related to employment and the economy. Respondents generally supported economic growth that builds on the existing characteristics and strengths of Hart's economy. Many favoured local jobs, small and independent businesses, professional services, high-technology industries and suitable employment space, while expressing concerns about large-scale warehousing and industrial development in sensitive locations.

Infrastructure and connectivity were also seen as essential to economic success. Respondents highlighted the need for good transport connections, broadband and other supporting infrastructure to improve access to employment and support businesses. Many also supported employment growth that reflects local skills and needs, helping to retain key workers and provide a diverse range of job opportunities across Hart.

Issues beyond the scope of the Local Plan were also raised. These included requests for more apprenticeships, training opportunities and support for younger people entering the workforce. While important to the local economy, these matters are primarily addressed through education, skills and economic development programmes rather than planning policy.

Consultation Question

Q.11. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Economy and Employment that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.5 Town, District and Local Centres

8.5.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The purpose of this policy is to support the long-term vitality and viability of Hart's network of six Town, District and Local Centres. These centres provide a focus for shopping, services, community facilities, employment, leisure activities and social interaction, helping to meet the day-to-day needs of residents, businesses and visitors. The policy is intended to provide a locally specific framework to support investment, regeneration and positive change whilst ensuring centres remain active, attractive and sustainable places.

The Council proposes to maintain a hierarchy of centres comprising Fleet as Hart's principal Town Centre; the District Centres of Blackwater, Hook and Yateley; and the Local Centres of Hartley Wintney and Odiham. The policy will also clarify the role, function and boundary of each centre; primary shopping areas; and locally justified impact threshold to support the application of national town centre policy.

Evidence indicates there is limited quantitative need for additional retail floorspace during the plan period, partially due to how the market is changing due to online retail. We propose that the focus of this policy will therefore be on maintaining and enhancing existing centres through regeneration, diversification and an appropriate mix of retail, leisure, community, employment and residential uses. Any need that cannot be met in existing centres is proposed to be met on land within wider strategic mixed-use allocations.

We propose to place particular emphasis on strengthening Fleet's role as the district's principal centre and supporting opportunities that increase activity, investment and footfall and enhances Fleet's attractiveness as a destination. As part of this, we propose to support cultural, leisure and evening economy uses; office uses; and mixed-use redevelopment opportunities including well-designed higher density residential accommodation. This would help strengthen the role and attractiveness of centres and support their long-term resilience, increasing footfall and dwell time.

8.5.2 What is already covered by the NPPF?

The NPPF places significant emphasis on supporting the vitality and viability of town centres and ensuring they can adapt to changing economic, social and consumer trends. NPPF plan-making requirements in Policy TC1 require Local Plans to include a locally specific strategy for town centres, including identification of hierarchies, boundaries, areas for change and improvements, allocations and impact thresholds.

NPPF Policies TC2, TC3 and TC4 are National Decision Making Policies making detailed requirements for development applications in town, district and local centres. This includes directions on supporting the vitality and viability of centres; on town centre diversification and intensification including for housing; on the sequential approach to main town centre uses; on impact assessment requirements for retail and leisure development outside centres; and on the assessment of development

that may affect investment, trade, consumer choice and the health of existing centres.

As these matters are already addressed by national policy, they should not be repeated or contradicted in the Local Plan. The Local Plan's focus is on implementing the requirements of Policy TC1 and adding locally specific policy detail.

8.5.3 Topics and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

The Local Plan policy is proposed to:

- Provide a hierarchy of centres,
- Set out Town, District and Local Centre boundaries – Please see Appendix 3 for boundary maps,
- Identify primary shopping areas – Please see Appendix 3 for boundary maps,
- Support Fleet's role as Hart's principal centre and the role other centres play in serving local communities,
- Improve accessibility and connectivity of centres by supporting walking, cycling and public transport access, enhancing the quality of public spaces and overall visitor experience,
- Support a more diverse mix of retail, food and beverage, leisure, community and other complementary town centre uses, including the repurposing of existing premises and mixed-use development; and
- Establish a locally justified impact threshold for retail and leisure development outside centres, to protect the vitality of our local centres and ensure that retail and leisure can be accessed by as many people as possible by active or public transport.

8.5.4 Emerging Evidence and Justification to Support this Proposed Approach

The primary evidence supporting this policy is the Retail and Leisure Needs Study. The study concludes that Hart's existing centre hierarchy remains appropriate. The evidence supports updating centre boundaries and Primary Shopping Areas to reflect changing town centre roles and national policy reforms.

The study also identifies no need for additional retail allocations, as future demand can largely be accommodated within existing centres and vacant premises. Instead, it recommends focusing on maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of centres and introducing a locally defined impact threshold of 350 sqm gross floorspace for retail and leisure proposals outside designated centres.

Alongside this technical evidence, we have also taken into account evidence from early consultation and engagement. Responses from the Scoping Consultation highlighted strong support for vibrant and sustainable town and village centres. The most frequently raised matters on this topic related to town centre regeneration and

the reuse of vacant premises; support for local businesses; support for improved walking, cycling and public transport connections; the need for adequate and affordable parking; and the need for sufficient provision of local services and community facilities to accompany growth. Respondents also emphasised the importance of infrastructure provision in general, of protecting local settlement character and heritage, and avoiding the loss of settlement identity through inappropriate growth.

Some respondents also raised matters such as business rates, commercial rents and parking charges. While these issues influence the health of centres, they largely fall outside the scope of the Local Plan. The policy can, however, support the underlying objectives expressed through the consultation by promoting regeneration, supporting a mix of uses and associated infrastructure, improving accessibility, encouraging investment and protecting the long-term vitality and viability of Hart's centres.

Consultation Question

Q.12. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Town, District and Local Centres that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.6 Infrastructure and Community Facilities

8.6.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area will propose the type, extent and broad location of infrastructure needed to enable local development and serve the communities of Hart. The policy area intends to cover a broad cross section of infrastructure requirements, including transport, utilities, emergency services, leisure, green infrastructure, healthcare, education and other social infrastructure. Some of these topics will also be picked up in more detail in other policy areas, including transport, water, Green and Blue Infrastructure, and Sustainable Alternative Natural Green Space.

The New Hart Local Plan is intended to take an infrastructure led approach to development, to enable the creation of healthy, inclusive and climate change resilient communities. This policy area will set out the infrastructure required to deliver this approach and enable the overall vision and spatial strategy of the Local Plan. Part of this will be setting out what infrastructure should be delivered on-site and paid for to be delivered off-site through developer contributions, to mitigate the impact of growth, and how we propose to secure delivery and longer-term management arrangements.

Infrastructure in Hart is important at all different scales. Some infrastructure has local or strategic importance within the district, and some has significance over a wider area or even the whole country. For instance, national defence infrastructure like RAF Odiham and areas of training estate located across the district are assets strategically significant to national security. At the same time, within wider infrastructure requirements, the policy area proposes to identify local community facilities and assets needed for a healthy and inclusive community. Some of these are generally included in formal assessments of infrastructure, such as schools and health centres, and others can sometimes be overlooked, such as public houses and other meeting places, local shops or public toilets.

Hart, as a largely rural district, faces certain infrastructure related issues and opportunities. Infrastructure, services, and sustainable travel opportunities for reaching these are typically concentrated in the settlements higher up in our emerging settlement hierarchy, including Fleet, Yateley, Blackwater (including Hawley, Frogmore and Darby Green), Hook, Odiham, and Hartley Wintney. Smaller villages and hamlets are scattered throughout the district, often constrained by environmental factors, reliant on larger centres for access to most infrastructure and services.

Certain environmental issues, such as drought, overheating and flooding are projected to increase over the plan period as a result of climate change, which may increase pressures on and costs of certain infrastructure and constrain development in some locations. Hart's population is also aging, with those aged 75+ projected to increase by 27.1% by 2039, which will drive increasing and changing demand for certain kinds of infrastructure, particularly in health and adult social care services.

On the positive side, the district is one of the least deprived areas in the country, with

residents enjoying high life expectancy and low mortality rates, and the vast majority reporting good or very good health. The Council's ambition for a carbon-neutral district by 2040 also offers opportunities to promote renewable and low-carbon energy generation, energy-efficient development, and more sustainable travel choices to aid climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Infrastructure provision to support future growth in Hart is proposed to be closely intertwined with the wider spatial strategy approach to guiding growth in this Local Plan. The Plan will consider the need to divide requirements for infrastructure based on whether they are plan-wide; site-specific; or tied to different types of development or locations. The Plan will also need to be realistic in considering that existing infrastructure, and resources to provide new infrastructure, are limited, and therefore need to be prioritised in those places where they can benefit the most people and accessed in as sustainable way as possible.

The policy area will look to address issues and deficits faced by local infrastructure and facilities which present barriers to the growth we are planning for. The policy further proposes to identify opportunities for growth to enable or sustain and enhance specific local infrastructure and facilities.

We will consider the need for longer-term infrastructure beyond the plan period where appropriate, to ensure that growth is sustainable long term and that the most appropriate infrastructure solutions are identified to enable growth. The council is also working closely with neighbouring local authorities and infrastructure providers to identify specific cross-boundary infrastructure issues and requirements where appropriate.

The policy area will propose sites to be allocated or safeguarded to meet specific infrastructure requirements identified and link to infrastructure requirements in allocation policies for housing and employment growth. Further, the policy is proposed to identify areas which are suitable for renewable and low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure in Hart, to enable the transition to clean power.

8.6.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

NPPF Policies S1, PM2 and PM10-13, HO4, E1 and HC1 require Local Plans to identify on-and off-site infrastructure needed to support growth and the creation of healthy and inclusive places. They also require planning authorities to engage with infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities on cross boundary infrastructure. Infrastructure is central to the NPPF and plays a key part in supporting its priorities on climate change, housing and economic growth.

A number of National Decision Making Policies in the NPPF, including Policies HC3-8, place detailed requirements on development proposals in relation to the protection and provision of infrastructure. Our proposed Local Plan policy should not repeat or contradict these requirements, but will seek to add necessary local detail as needed.

It is worth noting that the NPPF does not contain specific policies for nationally

significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), which are determined in accordance with the Planning Act 2008. NSIPs are large scale major development projects to provide energy, transport, waste, water, and wastewater infrastructure. In Hart, this may for instance be of relevance for the Western Relief Scheme being proposed by South East Water to tackle water resource issues in the district.

8.6.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

Our Local Plan policy is proposed to set out:

- The type, extent and broad location of infrastructure to enable development and serve communities in line with our vision, spatial strategy and understanding of future needs over the plan period;
- Local issues and deficits and the infrastructure needed to address them;
- Infrastructure specifically to aid climate change mitigation and adaptation, including renewable and low carbon energy;
- On-and off-site infrastructure provision and contributions expected from development;
- Infrastructure requirements which extent beyond the plan period and / or the plan boundary; and
- Allocation and/ or safeguarding provisions if needed to meet specific infrastructure requirements (excepting infrastructure for transport, water, or Green and Blue Infrastructure, where allocations are proposed to be made in separate policy areas dedicated to these infrastructure types).

8.6.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The policy area will be informed by a range of evidence being produced to support our New Hart Local Plan. This includes our emerging Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Strategic Transport Assessment, Water Cycle Study, Integrated Impact Assessment, Open Spaces Study, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, Playing Pitch Strategy, Landscape Sensitivity and Character Assessments, Indoor Built Facilities Assessment, and Settlement Hierarchy and Boundary Review. Many of these evidence base documents are still in the process of being developed however several have been produced in early draft / scoping stages.

Alongside technical evidence, we are also taking into account evidence from engagement and consultation, including the results of our engagement with neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers and representations received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Ongoing engagement with neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers has identified cross border issues such as the planned relocation of the Frimley Park Hospital and is exploring how the Council will work with partners to tackle them. Areas of agreement and matters for ongoing discussion are set out in Statements of Common Ground with the relevant

organisations.

Infrastructure was a key theme in the responses received to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents generally supported an infrastructure-led approach to development, with improvements to transport, schools, healthcare, utilities and drainage delivered alongside growth. Many highlighted existing capacity pressures and the need to understand how future needs will be met.

Transport and accessibility were frequently raised, particularly road congestion, junction capacity, road safety and parking. Respondents also supported improvements to bus services, rail connections, walking routes and cycle networks, with a preference for development in locations that are well connected to existing settlements and services.

Community facilities and delivery were also important considerations. Responses highlighted the need for adequate healthcare, education, community and leisure facilities, as well as reliable water, wastewater, energy and digital infrastructure. Many respondents sought greater clarity on how infrastructure will be planned, funded and delivered to support future development.

Consultation Question

Q.13. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Infrastructure and Community Facilities that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.7 Transport and Accessibility

8.7.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area proposes to set out the approach the Local Plan intends to take to promote sustainable transport and travel. Sustainable travel plays a key part in combating climate change and creating healthy and inclusive communities and ensuring development has access to sustainable transport options is a key aspect of infrastructure-led growth. Therefore, transport is a crucial aspect of implementing the vision and spatial strategy of our Local Plan. It is also a matter with cross-boundary implications, as many aspects of transport infrastructure, such as strategic rail and road networks, cross district boundaries.

As a largely rural district, active and public transport opportunities for accessing school, work and services in Hart are concentrated in certain more accessible places, including those close and linked to town, district and local centres, and the railway stations at Fleet, Winchfield, Hook, and Blackwater. Smaller villages and hamlets are scattered throughout the district, with residents largely reliant on car travel to access local centres, services and employment.

This policy area will identify opportunities for promoting sustainable movement and enabling sustainable transport choices for residents, minimising the number and/or length of journeys and widening transport choice where possible to include public transport by train and bus and active travel by walking, wheeling and cycling. The policy area will identify transport infrastructure required to enable sustainable travel in the district, including specific schemes, priorities and improvements.

8.7.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

Policy TR1 of the NPPF requires that transport should be an integral part of a Local Plan's strategy for creating well-designed, sustainable, inclusive and popular places. This should be done through:

- Early engagement on sustainable transport as part of the plan process,
- Locating development where it can support sustainable patterns of movement,
- Identifying and protecting sites / routes to widen sustainable transport choice,
- Supporting a mix of uses to minimise the number and length of journeys, and
- Providing for any transport facilities that need to be located in the area.

Policy TR2 of the NPPF refers to the need for plans to set local parking standards (including maximum standards) for development to promote sustainable transport.

Transport related National Decision Making Policies within the NPPF include TR3-8, directing development proposals on locating development in sustainable locations; Street design, access and parking; roadside facilities; assessing transport impacts; marine ports, airports and other aviation facilities; and public rights of way. The Local

Plan's role is to add local detail and evidence to allow these national policies to be most effectively implemented.

8.7.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We propose that this policy will:

- Identify opportunities for promoting sustainable movement and enabling genuine travel choice for residents;
- Promote an active travel first approach to development;
- Identify specific transport infrastructure schemes, priorities and improvements, including those required to support economic objectives;
- Set local parking standards for residential and non-residential development, potentially varying by location within the Plan area, dependent on use and / or location of development and the local transport context;
- Identify cross boundary strategic transport requirements where relevant;
- Set local thresholds for what constitutes 'significant amount of movement arising from new development' in Hart (this is to allow aspects of NPPF policies TR3 and 6 to be implemented, which only apply to development proposals which could generate a significant amount of movement, in the context of the area within which they are situated); and
- Set out allocation and/ or safeguarding provisions if needed to meet specific transport infrastructure requirements.

8.7.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

A variety of existing and emerging evidence supports this policy area, including Strategic Transport Assessment to identify the transport challenges facing the district, to create a framework to guide the selection of appropriate transport solutions and ensure that proposed measures are aligned with the desired transport outcomes for the area. Other evidence includes the Hart Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Parking Standards Review (plus further work on parking standards in light of that review) and Climate Impact Site Assessment, as well as Hampshire's Local Transport Plan, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Alongside technical evidence, the policy will also take into account engagement with neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers and wider consultation on cross boundary transport issues, and prioritising sustainable transport. Cross-boundary transport matters raised in cooperation discussions included the M3 and its junctions. Transport and accessibility were also important issues reflected in the representations received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents frequently identified road congestion, junction capacity, road safety and the potential impacts of additional development on the transport network. Many highlighted the need for transport improvements to be planned alongside growth. There was also

support for providing a wider range of travel options. Respondents identified the need for improvements to bus and rail services, as well as better walking and cycling routes, with a preference for development in locations that are well connected to existing transport links and services.

Accessibility and connectivity were recurring themes. Responses highlighted the needs of rural communities, disabled and less-mobile residents, and those without access to a car. Parking provision remained important in areas with limited public transport, while some respondents also supported increased electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Overall, respondents favoured an integrated transport network that improves connectivity while reflecting Hart's rural settlement and landscape character.

Consultation Question

Q.14. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on sustainable transport that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.8 Biodiversity

8.8.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The purpose of this policy area is to ensure that biodiversity assets are appropriately protected, safeguarded and enhanced throughout the Local Plan period.

The district has an established network of international, national, and locally designated sites and areas of importance for geodiversity and biodiversity. These designations include the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC). Local habitats of importance that require particular consideration in Hart include chalk streams, heathland, mature trees, and hedgerows.

We propose that this policy will focus on the opportunities and priorities for conservation, restoration and recovery of biodiversity in the district, potentially including allocations or safeguarding of land for this purpose and site-specific requirements.

8.8.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

NPPF Policies N1 and PM2 require local planning authorities to set out specific proposals for conserving and improving the environment at a local level. This includes setting out a hierarchy of natural environment designations; identifying opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of sensitive waterbodies, habitats and priority or threatened species; and steering the location of development towards land of lower environmental value.

National Decision Making Policies within the NPPF provide a framework for assessing planning applications affecting biodiversity assets, include Policies N2, N3 and N6. These national policies make detailed requirements on the improvement of the natural environment, on trees in new development, and on areas of particular importance for biodiversity and geodiversity. In addition, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Environment Act 2021, and other legislation relating to protected species and habitats such as the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) make further relevant requirements on Local Plans and development applications, including requiring biodiversity net gain.

Many development management considerations are therefore already addressed in national policy or legislation. There is limited justification for duplicating or expanding on these requirements within the Local Plan, unless our evidence identifies specific local requirements which mean that a specific local policy could add value.

8.8.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

The policy proposes to focus on those aspects of biodiversity where a locally specific approach is needed, including to set out:

- A hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance for biodiversity value in Hart;

- Local opportunities and priorities for conservation, enhancement and recovery of local habitats and threatened species (potentially including in relation to habitat restoration, nature-based solutions, ecological networks, carbon storage and local specifications such as for the width of hedgerows, and biodiversity considerations relevant across plan boundaries);
- The Council's position on the impacts of water abstraction on Hart's biodiversity, habitats and species and how this could affect local opportunities and priorities;
- The likely impacts of climate change on Hart's biodiversity and set out opportunities and priorities related to climate resilience;
- The local features of value which require particular consideration, including their location, value, and role within wider networks, and their relationship with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy areas of importance for biodiversity and areas that could be of importance to biodiversity, as well as associated requirements (this could for instance include buffers for chalk streams);
- Allocations and/or safeguarding for environmental purposes such as for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG, which is also discussed in our policy direction on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area), for nature recovery, or for local green space; and
- Associated site-specific expectations and requirements.

8.8.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

Our policy approach is informed and supported by a range of evidence, including Hart's Land Availability Assessment, Habitat Regulations Assessment, Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, Open Space Study, Ecology Assessment, Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Impact Site Assessment, Local Nature Recovery Strategy and ongoing engagement with statutory stakeholders, including Natural England and neighbouring authorities on issues such as cross boundary SANG. Once Local Plan allocation sites have been identified through on-going Land Availability Assessment and site selection work, some sites will also be subject to further high-level ecological assessment, which will add to the relevant evidence of the Plan.

The Council is further taking account of consultation representations received alongside other evidence. Biodiversity and nature conservation were important themes reflected in responses to the Local Plan Scoping Consultation, with respondents supportive of protecting habitats, designated sites, ancient woodland, veteran trees and locally important species, and emphasising the need to consider ecological constraints when planning future development. Development impacts and habitat protection were frequently raised matters. Responses called for robust ecological evidence, protection of sensitive habitats, and measures to avoid or minimise the impacts of development on wildlife including the cumulative effects of growth.

Nature recovery and ecological networks were also widely supported. Respondents highlighted the importance of protecting local chalk streams, rivers, ponds, woodlands and hedgerows, supporting habitat restoration, biodiversity net gain and wildlife corridors. Many also emphasised the need for long-term management,

monitoring and clear delivery arrangements to ensure biodiversity improvements are achievable and maintained over time.

Consultation Question

Q.15. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on biodiversity that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.9 Green & Blue Infrastructure

8.9.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to Green and Blue infrastructure (GBI) across the district over the plan period. GBI is defined as a network of multifunctional urban and rural green and blue spaces and features, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

Green infrastructure assets and networks include parks, gardens, green spaces, green corridors, street trees and community orchards. Blue infrastructure assets and networks include rivers, canals and other water-courses and bodies, and other water management provisions.

Note that our policy approach to GBI is presented in a separate policy area from our approach to biodiversity, although there are some interrelationships (for instance, chalk streams are primarily habitats but also constitute blue infrastructure). GBI policy is focused on benefits of green and blue spaces for people and nature, while biodiversity policy is nature-led and focuses specifically on conservation and recovery of species, habitats and ecosystems. There is also an interrelation with flood risk, as water bodies are subject to flooding and local flood and drainage measures form part of GBI.

Emerging evidence shows that Hart, as a predominantly rural district, has a high coverage of existing GBI assets including woodlands, watercourses, playing fields and other sports facilities, cemeteries, golf courses and allotments. However, many of these assets are not currently publicly accessible and many are fragmented, with very few green corridors. Fragmentation restricts ecological connectivity, limiting species dispersal and reducing ecosystem resilience across Hart. Other issues include the risk of overheating, drought and flooding which are expected to increase as a result of climate change.

These issues in turn present an opportunity to enhance the current GBI network through improving the provision, connectivity and accessibility of GBI assets and linking these together through new and improved green corridors to mitigate expected issues. However, this has to be balanced against our policy approach to protecting biodiversity, so accessibility of some green and blue spaces should remain limited for that purpose.

We propose that this GBI policy will outline the specific characteristics of and needs for GBI in Hart, identifying opportunities for high quality, accessible, multi-functional and connected GBI provision and nature-based solutions. We propose that the policy will identify current assets and networks alongside areas proposed for allocation or safeguarding to meet GBI need and to deliver public protection measures, such as local flood alleviation or pollution management schemes.

8.9.2 What is already covered by the NPPF?

NPPF policies provide direction for plan-making through Policies PM2, PM13, CC1,

HC1, N1, HO4, P1 and F2. Collectively, these policies require Local Plans to

- Accommodate development needs and conserve and improve the environment;
- Set appropriate standards in relation to GBI to complement and / or incorporate national standards for recreational land;
- Identify opportunities for GBI provision and nature-based solutions which can safeguard and improve carbon storage, support nature recovery and resilience and which take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies;
- Secure a connected network of greenspace provision;
- Address strategic environmental opportunities and safeguards for strategic sites for housing-led development;
- Consider wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise or other forms of pollution (such as through opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions); and
- Use GBI opportunities to link with measures to reduce causes and impacts of flooding.

The new National Decision Making Policies HC7, HC8, W4, N2, DP3, N3, N6 and F4-F8 within the NPPF make detailed requirements to be used for assessing planning applications with respect to GBI. Requirements relate to recreational land and facilities, Local Green Space, water infrastructure, improving the natural environment, design, trees in new development, areas of importance for biodiversity and geodiversity, flood risk and flooding. The Local Plan should not repeat or contradict these national policies but can add local detail.

8.9.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

The policy is proposed to set out a local approach to GBI in helping to meet Hart's requirements for carbon storage; nature recovery; climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience; protecting and improving air and water quality, wider pollution management; and supporting connected networks of recreation and green infrastructure, within the district. It is also proposed to link to our biodiversity policy, in setting out the role of local GBI in strengthening habitats and biodiversity, and how conflicts with recreational requirements will be managed. Finally it is proposed to link to our flood policy, through the role of local GBI in reducing flood risk and providing forms of sustainable drainage.

We propose that this policy area will cover:

- Local GBI assets, networks, characteristics and needs for Hart;
- Opportunities for improving existing and providing new GBI to be of high quality, accessible and multi-functional, incorporating nature-based solutions;
- Allocations and safeguarding to meet GBI requirements ;
- Associated site-specific expectations and requirements;

- Setting local standards where appropriate and justified by evidence;
- Our approach to long term asset and network management for local GBI; and
- Links, interactions and potential conflict between GBI and other Hart policy areas and how we propose to manage these, including how to best deliver GBI alongside SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) where that is required to mitigate impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

8.9.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The principal evidence supporting this policy approach is Hart's emerging Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, Land Availability Assessment, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Open Space Study, Climate Impact Site Assessment and Water Cycle Study, as well as data from the Hampshire Biodiversity Centre, relevant national standards (such as Green Infrastructure Standards for England published by Natural England) and ongoing engagement with statutory consultees and other stakeholders including water companies, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

Alongside technical evidence, we are also taking into account the representations made in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents supported the protection, enhancement and management of local parks, open spaces, habitats, rivers, chalk streams and other natural assets, while expressing concerns about the impacts of development on biodiversity, landscape character and water environments.

Connectivity and multifunctional benefits of GBI were also frequently highlighted. Respondents supported linked networks of green spaces, wildlife corridors, footpaths and rights of way that can contribute to biodiversity, recreation, health and wellbeing. Trees, woodlands and hedgerows were widely valued for their recreational as well as environmental and landscape benefits.

Water environments and sustainable drainage were another key area of interest. Responses emphasised the importance of protecting rivers, chalk streams, ponds and wetlands, improving water quality and supporting sustainable drainage measures. Many respondents also favoured planning and integrating GBI as part of new development from the outset, with appropriate long-term management and maintenance arrangements.

Consultation Question

Q.16. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Green and Blue Infrastructure that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.10 Flood Risk and Sustainable Drainage

8.10.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

We propose that the policy will identify locally specific flood risk issues and opportunities for flood prevention and management, notably through surface water management and drainage. As part of this, the policy would identify areas in Hart most at risk from or contribute most to the causes and impacts of flooding, particularly surface water flooding as well as risks associated with reservoirs, canal embankments and other infrastructure that performs a flood risk management function. Its purpose would be to support the management of water within upper sub-catchments to help reduce flood risk and its impacts. Sub-catchments are smaller parts of a river catchment, upstream where rainfall and surface water drain to a common watercourse. This would help reduce flood risk and its impacts, whilst ensuring that development brought forward through allocations and planning applications takes advantage of local opportunities to reduce flood risk and increase resilience.

The lower-lying areas and river valleys in Hart are susceptible to flooding from a range of sources, including rivers, surface water, groundwater, sewers and artificial sources. Historic events of widespread surface water and fluvial (watercourse) flooding have affected homes, businesses, infrastructure and agricultural land across the district.

Hart-specific opportunities and requirements would be focused on local areas of greatest flood risk and informed by the analysis, priority areas, interventions and preventative measures in the Hampshire Catchment Prioritisation Loddon East Catchment Management Plan, the Environment Agency's latest flood mapping of the district, and emerging, more granular evidence specific to Hart. While Hampshire County Council, the Environment Agency and water companies each have specific responsibilities for managing flood risk, the Local Plan can take a broader view by requiring measures that address locally important flood risk issues and improve resilience.

This policy area is also proposed to link to our approach to and evidence on Green and Blue Infrastructure, other wider infrastructure, climate change and biodiversity, to maximise local opportunities for natural flood management and ensure development does not compromise the integrity or various functions of local reservoirs, canal embankments and other blue infrastructure.

8.10.2 What is already covered by the NPPF?

The NPPF, through Policies CC1, F1 and F2, requires Local Plans to:

- Be informed by an up-to-date Strategic Flood Risk Assessment that considers current and future flood risk from all sources;
- Take a risk-based approach to the allocation of land and the location of development;

- Apply the sequential approach, which directs development towards areas with the lowest probability of flooding, as part of site selection in the Land Availability Assessment supporting the Local Plan;
- Safeguard land required for current and future flood management;
- Use opportunities provided by development, green infrastructure and natural flood management techniques to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding;
- Consider the increasing impacts of climate change on flood risk; and
- Support the delivery of sustainable drainage systems and multifunctional water management measures.

National Decision Making Policies F4 to F9 within the NPPF set out detailed requirements for the assessment of planning applications in relation to flood risk, flood resilience, sustainable drainage, watercourses, the sequential test and the exception test.

8.10.3 Topics and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We propose that this policy area will cover:

- Identification of areas or features causing or most at risk of flooding in Hart taking account of the latest flood mapping, Hart's existing causal flood areas, Hampshire County Council's Priority Areas and further Hart-specific evidence;
- Locally derived requirements for managing the district's causes of and areas at risk of flooding, proportionate to the scale and nature of development and informed by local evidence;
- Requirements to ensure development does not compromise the integrity, function or effectiveness of Hart's reservoirs, canal embankments or other infrastructure that performs a flood risk management role;
- Recognition of the links, interactions and potential conflicts between flood risk management and other Local Plan policy areas, including biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure, infrastructure provision and climate change; and
- Allocation and / or safeguarding of land for local flood alleviation schemes where required.

8.10.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The principal evidence supporting this policy approach is Hart's emerging Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, the Hampshire County Council's Catchment Management Priority Areas and Catchment Management Plans, evidence of local flooding and historic flood events, Water Cycle Study, Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Land Availability Assessment and Climate Impact Site Assessment, alongside data and advice from the Environment Agency, Lead Local Flood Authority, water companies and other relevant stakeholders.

Alongside technical evidence, as we develop this policy we will also take into account evidence from engagement and consultation. Flood risk, drainage and water management were important themes in the representations we received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents frequently highlighted concerns relating to flood risk, surface water flooding, drainage capacity and the potential impacts of development on existing communities.

Development location and infrastructure provision were also frequently raised matters. Many respondents emphasised that flood risk and drainage capacity should be key considerations in deciding where development is located, with growth directed away from areas at risk of flooding where possible. Concerns were also raised regarding the cumulative impacts of development and the need for wastewater and surface water infrastructure to be provided before or alongside new development.

Sustainable water management and resilience were also recurring themes. Respondents supported the use of sustainable drainage systems, natural flood management measures and other approaches to reduce runoff and flood risk. Many also emphasised the importance of considering climate change, protecting watercourses, floodplains and other natural assets, and incorporating flood mitigation measures into development proposals from the outset.

Consultation Question

Q.17. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to flood risk, climate resilience, sustainable drainage and water management that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.11 Landscape

8.11.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area is intended to set out our proposed approach to landscape in the Plan. This means protecting the existing variation of landscape character in the district, promoting a landscape-led approach for new development and ensuring that we recognise where landscape is sensitive to certain types of development.

Hart is not covered by Protected Landscapes (previously known as National Parks) or national landscape designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, the district's countryside and landscape character is varied and highly valued by those who live and work in Hart. Hart includes areas which are more urban, as well as a range of villages of different sizes and clusters of dwellings in a countryside setting. In the latest Hart Landscape Character Assessment, seven character types have been identified, ranging from Downland, Plains, Wooded Commons, Heathland and Parkland, alongside seventeen character areas.

One important aspect of what makes Hart's landscape special is that it is shaped by history. Past human activity, land uses and earlier landscape form all remain either visible or at least influential in Hart's present landscape (a concept called 'time-depth'). Part of this is how the historic environment, such as Hart's registered parks and gardens, form part of the local landscape.

The Local Plan offers an opportunity to seek to protect and enhance these variations in landscape character and ensure development respects landscape character wherever possible. This will form part of our allocation policies for housing and other uses. Our landscape policy in turn will outline specific characteristics of landscape in Hart.

8.11.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

While the NPPF provides some directions on landscape at a national level, it leaves Local Plans the possibility of locally specific landscape policies. The NPPF provides direction for plan-making in relation to landscape through Policies S2, N1 and CC1. Local Plans are also required to identify the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance for protecting the existing variation of landscape character, their landscape, geological and biodiversity value, and to set out environmental opportunities and safeguards. Local Plans should also take a proactive approach to adapting to climate change taking into account implications on landscape.

The NPPF also contains National Decision Making Policies relevant to landscape in Hart, including Policy P3 protecting dark landscapes from light pollution and Policy N2 requiring development to consider landscape quality and identify opportunities for conservation and enhancement.

8.11.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy will:

- Add locally specific detail on the variation in landscape character, identified landscape character areas and landscape hierarchy within Hart;
- Make reference to key characteristics and guidelines associated with future landscape management and development;
- Recognise landscape sensitivity for certain development typologies in defined areas;
- Identify opportunities for conservation and / or enhancement of landscape;
- Acknowledge the relationship between heritage and landscape;
- Link to the recommendations of Hart's Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, including on forces for change, landscape management and development management.

8.11.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

Existing and emerging evidence supporting this approach includes Hart's latest Landscape Character Assessment, Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, Climate Impact Site Assessment, Settlement Boundary Hierarchy and Gaps Studies, Land Availability Assessment and Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, as well as Hampshire's Integrated Character Assessment.

Alongside technical evidence, as we develop this policy we will also take into account evidence from engagement and consultation. Landscape and countryside were important themes in the representations we received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents valued Hart's countryside, rural character, farmland and distinctive landscapes, and generally supported their protection as part of maintaining the area's identity and quality of life.

Development location and design were also frequently raised matters. Many respondents emphasised the need for development to respect landscape character, settlement setting and local capacity. Concerns were voiced on matters including the cumulative effects of development and the loss of open countryside.

Settlement identity and evidence-based planning were also recurring themes. Respondents supported protecting important views and landscape features, and using up-to-date landscape evidence to inform decisions. Many emphasised the importance of considering landscape impacts early in the planning process and incorporating mitigation measures into development proposals from the outset.

Consultation Question

Q.18. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on Landscape that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.12 Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

8.12.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area is intended to set out the approach to protecting the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA), as required by law through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). A Special Protection Area or SPA is a legally designated site aimed at protecting rare, vulnerable or regularly occurring bird species and their habitats. This policy intends to ensure that planned growth in Hart does not adversely affect the integrity of the TBHSPA.

The TBHSPA is an area of lowland heathland and managed plantation covering more than 8,000 hectares on separate sites located across Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire. Hart is one of eleven local authorities affected by the SPA. The TBHSPA comprises a mixture of heathland, scrub and woodland habitat that support important breeding populations of birds including nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler. These ground-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to recreational disturbance and predation. Natural England, the statutory body and national government's adviser for the natural environment, has identified that residential development and other forms of growth can have an adverse effect on the ecological integrity of the SPA.

Consequently, the New Hart Local Plan will need to demonstrate, through the Habitat Regulations Assessment process, that any potential adverse effects on integrity are appropriately avoided or mitigated such that adverse effects on the integrity of the Habitats site can be ruled out. One of the key mitigation measures is the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). SANG is recreational greenspace used to divert visitors from the SPA, to reduce harmful recreational pressure on the protected habitat.

8.12.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

NPPF Policy N6 (Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and geodiversity) is a National Decision Making Policy that supports the conservation of internationally important habitat sites. Where development may affect a habitats site, it must be demonstrated through an appropriate assessment that there will be no adverse effect on the site's integrity, either alone or in combination with other development, unless the relevant derogation tests are met and/or impact on the relevant protected features of the protected site is being addressed through an Environmental Delivery Plan and developer commitment to paying the nature restoration levy.

This national policy effectively restates that the Council must comply with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitats Regulations). Under these Regulations, the Council, as the competent authority, and the Inspector during examination of the Local Plan, must be satisfied that the Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the TBHSPA, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

8.12.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We propose that this policy will:

- Set out the well-established approach to protecting the TBHSPA through avoidance and mitigation measures, including, with regards to residential or similar development:
    - the ‘exclusion zone’ within 400m of the TBHSPA,
    - the ‘zone of influence’ between 400m and 5km of the TBHSPA where mitigation is required,
    - the approach to larger developments (50 or more net new homes) between 5km and 7km of the TBHSPA i.e. on a case-by-case basis,
    - that mitigation takes the form of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and a payment to the TBHSPA Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project (SAMM),
    - standards for the quantum of SANG required to mitigate the impact of new homes
    - that developments of 10 or more homes that require TBHSPA mitigation must be within the catchment of a SANG.
- Set out how SANG requirements can be met whether on-site or via payments towards strategic SANG with spare mitigation capacity.
- Identify opportunities for the provision of SANG;
- Include SANG design criteria and management plan requirements;
- The Council’s approach to adoption of SANG and third party SANGs.
- The relationship with and connectivity to other local green spaces and green networks.

The policy is intended to be read alongside relevant Natural England guidance and tariffs for SANG and SAMM that are regularly updated.

8.12.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The policy intends to integrate relevant elements of current Council approaches to and guidance on SANG related developer requirements, the Thames Basin Heaths Mitigation Strategy, and Natural England guidance, tools, and mitigation tariffs into Local Plan policy. It proposes to build on evidence contained in our emerging Hart Climate Impact Site Assessment, Land Availability Assessment, Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment. It will also take into account representations received as part of public consultation and ongoing engagement with statutory stakeholders such as Natural England and neighbouring local planning authorities, including to understand the extent of any potential unmet SANG need arising across the wider area and to explore other connected matters raised such as air quality associated

with the Thames Basin Heaths and cumulative traffic impacts. The Council is also in the process of undertaking a SANG study to explore opportunities and locations for SANG provision, as well as requirements for management plans.

Thames Basin Heaths SPA and SANG were important themes represented in Scoping Consultation responses. Respondents generally supported protecting the SPA and managing the impacts of development on sensitive habitats, with many highlighting the importance of considering ecological impacts when identifying locations for growth.

SANG was also mentioned in a number of representations. Some respondents supported SANG as an effective mitigation measure that can also provide recreational benefits, while others emphasised the need for high-quality design, long-term management and maintenance, and ensuring SANG complements rather than replaces existing countryside and natural habitats.

The need to balance growth and environmental protection was another recurring theme. Representations highlighted the need for clear evidence on how development, recreational pressure and mitigation measures will be managed, with differing views on the extent to which environmental constraints should influence the location and scale of future growth.

Consultation Question

Q.19. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.13 Sustainable Water Use

8.13.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area sets out how the Local Plan proposes to promote sustainable water use in Hart. To this effect, we need to promote a sustainable approach both to water supply and to waste water management and recycling. Both of these particular infrastructure areas have known issues within the district, which are relevant to the Local Plan. We are presently working to resolve these issues, alongside other partners including the water companies (South East Water for the water supply and Thames Water for waste water management), the Environment Agency as the regulator for water and Natural England where water abstraction has impacts on the natural environment, such as protected habitats.

In terms of water supply, Hart is located within a water-stressed area, with water supplies reliant on chalk aquifers and groundwater sources that are subject to increasing abstraction and environmental pressures. The western part of Hart falls within an area known as Water Resource Zone 4 – West or WRZ4-W. Potable water supply within this zone relies in part on water from Greywell and Itchel. Over-abstraction from these sources is negatively impacting water courses and habitats which are also fed from the same sources, including the Greywell Fen SSSI. The Environment Agency has refused to renew the licence for South East Water to continue water abstraction at Greywell Fen and South East Water has appealed this decision. The appeal is currently with the planning inspectorate for consideration.

Even with abstraction at Greywell and Itchel continuing, there is a risk of properties in WRZ4-W facing water shortages in prolonged dry weather without further sources of water being secured. Halting abstraction at Greywell and Itchel would increase the probability of this occurring. South East Water are proposing to bring in additional water through a project known as the Western Relief Scheme, which will pipe in water from the Surrey Hills. This is not expected to happen until at least 2030. South East Water are currently exploring a suite of shorter-term options to bridge this gap and to secure supply of potable water until the Western Relief Scheme is implemented. Other water supply schemes currently in train include the West Ham Nitrate Scheme providing a new nitrate removal facility due to be completed by 2027 and an upgrade to the Greywell Water Treatment Works with a connection to enable water transfer, due for completion in 2026.

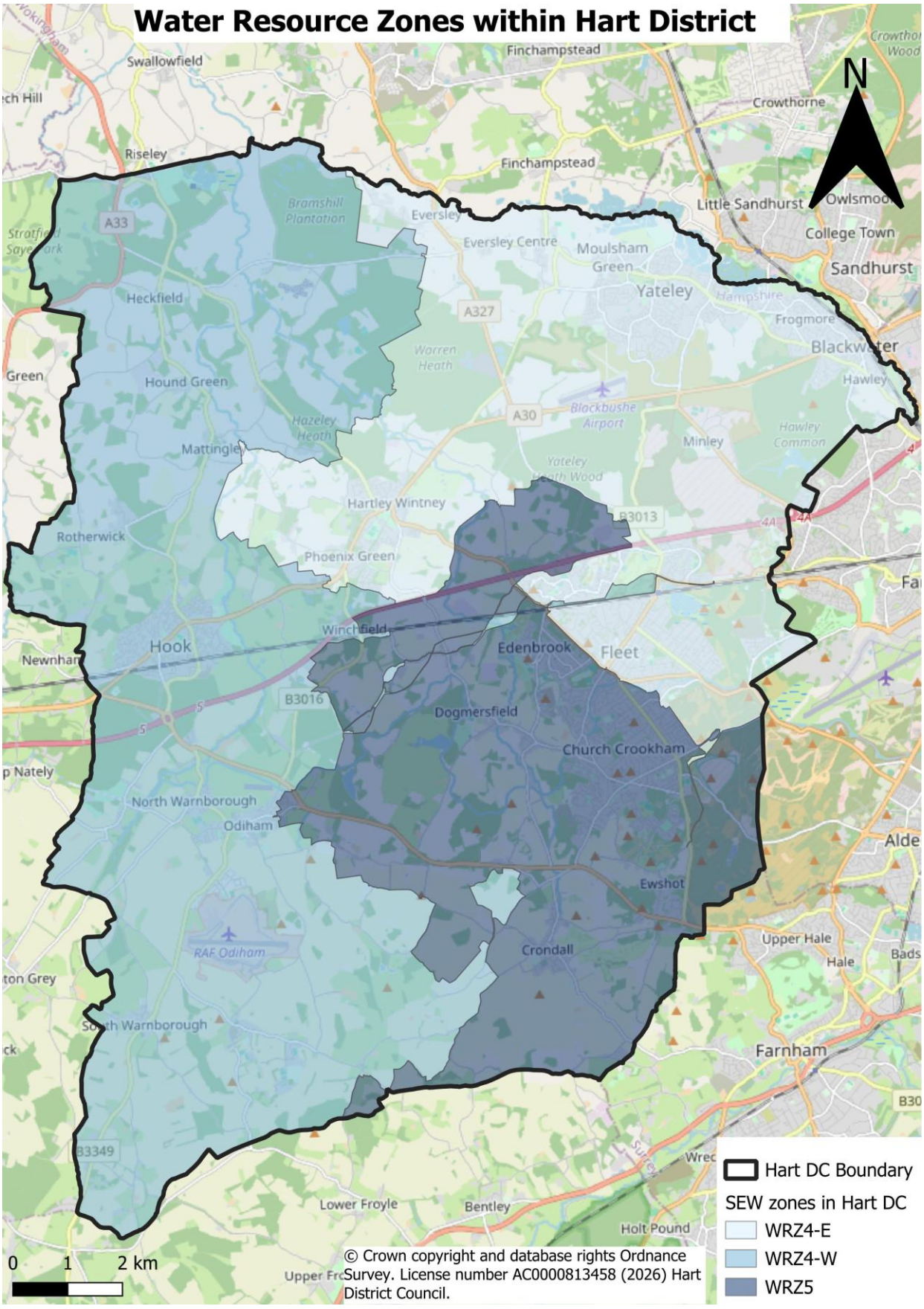


Figure 7: Water Resource Zones covering Hart District

In relation to wastewater, the Environment Agency and Thames Water have identified water quality issues in the River Blackwater and Fleet Brook. The sources of these issues have been identified as the Fleet and Camberley Sewage Treatment Works. Thames Water are responsible for these two sewage treatment works and the Environment Agency are responsible for monitoring water quality in the impacted watercourses. The Environment Agency have asked Hart District Council to strategically assess risks to the water environment based on future development which connects to these Sewage Treatment Works to inform a strategic solution. Thames Water have indicated that there is a programme of upgrades scheduled for the Treatment Works but those are still in early design stage. These upgrades are planned for four of the Sewage Treatment Works that serve the district, namely Fleet, Sandhurst, Camberley and Hartley Wintney, to increase the available future headroom at these sites.

The proactive intervention of the water companies is required to deliver the necessary infrastructure to resolve existing issues, in line with their statutory duties. However, having known water supply and wastewater issues also has implications for Hart District Council as the local authority and its Local Plan, as this affects the ability to bring forward new development. We will therefore work with partners to find solutions to these issues and also seek, through the Local Plan, to promote and enable sustainable water use to minimise future demand pressures.

8.13.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

Policy W1 of the NPPF specifies that our Plan should be informed by early engagement with utility providers and regulators to form a clear understanding of water supply, drainage and wastewater capacity, and associated requirements for additional infrastructure provision taking account of planned growth, changing consumption patterns and climate change. The Plan should reflect this in the location and phasing of planned growth and by making provision for development which is required for new or enhanced water supply, drainage and wastewater infrastructure.

National Decision Making Policy W4 in turn covers the criteria which need to be taken account when planning applications are received for new water Infrastructure. The Plan and its Infrastructure Delivery Plan should identify known water infrastructure requirements, which can then be used in applying that national policy when determining applications.

8.13.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy will:

- Identify water infrastructure requirements;
- Identify limitations to development related to water supply or waste water;
- Consider potential implications of these limitations in terms of phasing of development in different locations;
- Consider impacts of climate change on Hart's water resource demand and supply;
- Set water efficiency standards for WRZ4 – W, and the rest of the district beyond

building control standards as required to address identified water stress;
- Consider other measures to avoid constraints on future water resources including nature-based solutions (such as land management measures to retain water and minimise the risks of flooding and encourage percolation of water into aquifers); and
- Allocation and/ or safeguarding provisions if needed to meet specific water or waste water infrastructure requirements.

8.13.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

Key evidence informing the direction of this policy area includes Hart's emerging Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Water Cycle Study, and Climate Impact Site Assessment. Furthermore, the policy area is informed by ongoing discussions with and evidence prepared by the water companies, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and neighbouring authorities affected by the same water and wastewater issues.

In developing this policy, alongside technical evidence and engagement with infrastructure providers, regulators and neighbouring authorities, on specific aspects of providing sufficient water resource we will also take into account evidence from consultation. Water resources and supply were a key theme reflected in the representations we received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents highlighted concerns about whether existing and future water infrastructure can support planned growth and emphasised the importance of understanding water supply capacity when planning new development.

Infrastructure and water efficiency were frequently raised matters. Representations supported close coordination with water providers, appropriate infrastructure improvements, and measures to reduce water consumption in new development, including water-efficient design, rainwater harvesting and water reuse.

Environmental impacts were also an important consideration reflected in representations made. These highlighted the need to protect rivers, chalk streams, aquifers and water quality, and generally supported an approach that balances future growth with the sustainable management of water resources and the natural environment.

Consultation Question

Q.20. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on sustainable water use that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.14 Historic Environment

8.14.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

This policy area sets out our proposed approach to conserving and enhancing the historic environment in Hart. We propose that the policy will identify international, national and locally designated assets in the district, locally specific types of historic assets and any buildings identified to be at risk, as well as what issues these assets face, and what opportunities we see for development to enhance, safeguard, and integrate Hart's historic environment.

The district has a strong historic environment with over 1,000 listed buildings and 32 Conservation Areas contributing to Hart's distinctive character and identity.

8.14.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

The 2026 NPPF provides direction for plan-making on this topic through Policies HE1 on planning for the historic environment, HE2 on Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and HE3 on Historic Environment Records. In addition, the Council must have regard to its statutory duties under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 when exercising its planning functions. The NPPF also includes National Decision Making Policies HE4 to HE10, which set out requirements for development applications in relation to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment, which must not be duplicated nor contradicted without justification. Together, these national policies and statutory requirements already provide significant protection for heritage assets, thus reducing the scope for what can and needs to be covered in the Local Plan.

8.14.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We intend that this policy will:

- Identify local heritage assets including listed buildings, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens, locally specific types of assets and any assets at risk;
- Provide links to a Local List (to be updated) and criteria to identify local listed assets;
- Identify issues faced by local assets; and
- Recognise local opportunities for development to enhance, safeguard, and integrate historic assets, including in supporting sustainable development and in integrating the historic context of Hart and its buildings in locally specific design approaches.

8.14.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

The policy direction will be informed and supported by a range of technical evidence, including Hampshire's Historic Environment Record, Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register, the Hart Climate Impact Site Assessment, heritage site assessments,

Conservation Area appraisals, and evidence relating to designated and non-designated heritage assets, including within and supporting Neighbourhood Development Plans. We are also going to create a new local list for Hart.

This evidence will be supplemented by ongoing engagement with Historic England and consideration of relevant consultation responses.

Alongside technical evidence and engagement with statutory consultees, we will also take into account wider consultation evidence. Historic environment and heritage were important themes in the representations we received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents valued Hart's historic buildings, conservation areas, villages and wider heritage assets, and generally supported their protection as part of maintaining local settlement character and identity.

Development impacts and design were frequently raised matters. Many respondents emphasised that new development should respond positively to its historic context, with the scale, density, layout and design of schemes reflecting local settlement character and preserving the setting of heritage assets.

Heritage evidence and conservation were also recurring themes. Responses supported a strong evidence base to inform planning decisions, including assessments of heritage significance and impact. Many respondents also favoured the repair, maintenance and appropriate reuse of historic buildings, alongside the protection of archaeological remains and locally important heritage assets.

Consultation Question

Q.21. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on the Historic Environment that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

8.15 Design

8.15.1 What is the key envisaged function and direction of this policy?

The purpose of this policy area is to set out the approach to local design expectations in the district, including desired design and placemaking outcomes, taking account of the Council's vision to support climate change mitigation, adaptation and protection of natural assets, infrastructure-led development, enabling healthy communities and upholding identity of the district as a place and the places within Hart.

8.15.2 What is already covered by the NPPF

The 2026 NPPF provides direction for plan-making in relation to design through Policies DP1, DP2, PM13, L1 and CC3. These policies require Local Plans to set out a local strategy for design with clear design expectations. They also give directions on what local design guides, design codes and masterplans should include and be based on. They further clarify that Local Plans can set out standards for design and specify what these standards may cover, which includes the implementation of nationally described space standards, and how standards should be justified. National policy further sets out directions for Local Plans on how to plan for an effective use of land, including in relation to scale and density, and on how to plan for the adaption to climate change.

The NPPF also contains a range of National Decision Making Policies relating to design including Policy DP3 on key principles for well-designed places, which requires development to consider liveability, climate, nature, movement, built form, public spaces and identity. National Decision Making Policy DP4 in turn sets out how design quality should be considered in development proposals. Finally, Policy L3 sets out the approach development proposals should take to achieving appropriate densities. National policies should not be repeated or contradicted by Local Plans.

8.15.3 Topic and issues proposed to be covered in the policy

We propose that this policy will specify:

- Local design expectations regarding desired design and placemaking outcomes;
- The impacts and relevance of our Local Plan’s focus on climate change, infrastructure, healthy communities and local identity, including in terms of integration of sustainable transport opportunities into design;
- Local character in relation to the built and natural environment of Hart’s settlements and landscapes, specifying locally relevant materials, architectural, design and landscape features, and planting to be reflected and integrated in design of new development;
- Locally appropriate design guides, design codes, masterplans, design reviews and/or other design processes and how they will integrate with this Local Plan

policy to deliver design and placemaking outcomes for site allocations and areas of change including triggers for when different requirements will apply;

- Design standards in response to particular issues and opportunities and our local vision (this could include climate focused design, capacity for secondary and recycled materials to contribute to local supply of building materials, and implementation of nationally described space standard); and
- Minimum density standards for town centres and well-connected locations.

8.15.4 Emerging evidence and justification to support this proposed approach

Our policy approach to design will be informed and supported by a range of technical evidence, including local design codes for significant site allocations and areas of change, our Urban Characterisation and Density Study 2010, Neighbourhood Plan Design codes, Neighbourhood Plan policies on design, Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, Climate Impact Site Assessment, the emerging Hampshire County Council guidance on layout of areas to promote sustainable transport, and Nationally Described Space Standard.

Alongside technical evidence, we will also take into account evidence from consultation and engagement. Design and placemaking were important themes in the representations we received in response to our Scoping Consultation. Respondents supported development that reflects Hart's local design character, with high-quality architecture, materials and design that respond to the area's rural and historic context.

The importance of layout and quality of place were also frequently highlighted. Respondents emphasised the significance of well-designed public spaces, green infrastructure, walkable neighbourhoods and community facilities, alongside appropriate consideration of landscape, density, building height, parking and the relationship between new and existing development.

Sustainable and inclusive design was also widely supported. Responses highlighted energy efficiency, climate resilience, biodiversity, water management and the need for homes and places to be accessible and adaptable for a range of users. Many respondents also supported the use of design codes and masterplans to help ensure a consistent standard of quality across new development.

8.15.5 Consultation Question

Q.22. Are there any additional important issues, opportunities or characteristics relating to our proposed policy on design that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

Any other comments

Finally, we welcome any additional comments on matters not covered by the previous questions.

Q.23. Do you have any other comments on the proposed Local Plan content and evidence?

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Hart SWOT analysis

Strengths

High Economic Productivity: Hart's economy is highly productive, generating £82,889 in Gross Value Added (GVA) per filled job, which is approximately 34% higher than the UK average. This is driven by strengths in high-value sectors such as professional services, digital technology, and defence**.**

Highly Skilled Workforce: Hart has a well-qualified resident population, with 54% of people aged 16–64 qualified to degree level (RQF4+), placing Hart in the top quartile of UK local authority districts.

Exceptional Quality of Life and Health: Residents enjoy high life expectancy and low mortality rates, with 87.8% reporting good or very good health. Hart is also among the least deprived in the country, with all neighbourhoods in the least deprived 30% nationally.

Valued Natural and Historic Assets: Hart contains a rich network of habitats and designated sites, including the internationally important Thames Basin Heaths SPA and 16 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The district also has a strong historic environment, including over 1,000 listed buildings and 32 Conservation Areas, contributing to the distinctive character and identity of our towns and villages.

Access to Countryside: Hart benefits from an extensive network of accessible natural assets, including Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGs) such as Bramshot Farm Country Park and extensive Public Rights of Way (PRoW). Over 90% of Hart's Open Space is natural or semi-natural green space, contributing to health and wellbeing, with over 92% of residents expressing satisfaction with local green and blue spaces.

Weaknesses

Housing Affordability: Median house prices in Hart reached £471,845 by 2025, representing a 70.1% increase since 2010. Prices are nearly 10 times median earnings, above the national average of 8.26.

Limited Public and Active Travel Offer: Hart comprises a number of distinct settlements separated by rural areas, creating challenges for sustainable travel. As a result, many residents remain reliant on private cars for access to employment, services and facilities.

Water Stress: Hart is located within a water-stressed area, with water supplies reliant on chalk aquifers and groundwater sources that are subject to increasing abstraction and environmental pressures.

Ageing Population: The number of residents aged 65-84 has increased by 28% and those aged 85+ by 45% over the last decade. This trend is expected to continue, with the population aged 75+ projected to increase by 27.1% by 2039 compared with

5.4% population growth overall. This demographic shift will increase demand for specialist housing, health services and adult social care provision in existing communities.

Fragmented Green Infrastructure Network: Although Hart has a good provision of green and blue infrastructure assets, the district has very few green corridors. This fragmentation restricts ecological connectivity, limiting species dispersal and reducing ecosystem resilience across Hart.

Opportunities

Integration into Leading Innovation Corridors: Hart's position within the North Hampshire M3 and Blackwater Valley technology corridor provides opportunities to attract inward investment, support innovation-led and knowledge-intensive businesses and strengthen Hart's role as a location for high value employment growth.

Coordinated Strategic Nature Recovery: The Local Plan provides an opportunity to support habitat restoration and nature recovery at a strategic scale, strengthening ecological networks, improving climate resilience and directing biodiversity net gain, SANG and other environmental enhancements to areas of greatest opportunity.

Net Zero Transition: The Local Plan provides an opportunity to support the Council's ambition for a carbon-neutral district by 2040 through enabling renewable and low-carbon energy generation, promoting energy-efficient development, supporting sustainable travel choices and strengthening climate resilience.

Town Centre Diversification and Regeneration: The Local Plan provides opportunities to support the vitality and viability of Hart's centres through a more diverse mix of retail, food and beverage, leisure, community and other complementary town centre uses, including the repurposing of existing premises and mixed-use development. This would help strengthen the role and attractiveness of centres, increase footfall and dwell time, and support the long-term resilience of Fleet and other District and Local Centres.

Threats

Substantial Increase in Housing Targets: The revised Standard Method identifies a Local Housing Need of 804 dwellings per annum, representing a 110% increase on the housing requirement in the adopted Local Plan. Meeting this stepped change in growth while maintaining infrastructure capacity, environmental quality and the distinctive character of Hart's settlements may present challenges. This also requires a significant increase in housing delivery rates. Neighbouring authorities may also face challenges in meeting their own development needs, creating potential cross-boundary planning pressures.

Water Resource and Wastewater Infrastructure Capacity Constraints: Hart is located within a seriously water-stressed area, with water resource pressures and environmental constraints limiting the availability of additional abstraction. Future growth will be dependent on timely investment in water supply infrastructure and

strategic measures to secure long-term water resources. Existing capacity and environmental performance issues at Fleet and Camberley Sewage Treatment Works, together with the need for network and treatment upgrades, may also constrain the location, scale and phasing of new development.

Environmental Disturbance and Recreational Pressure: Additional housing growth could increase recreational pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and other sensitive environmental assets, requiring continued avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures.

Increased Climate-Related Flood Risk: Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of fluvial, surface water and groundwater flooding, with communities including Fleet, Hook, Yateley, Blackwater and Hartley Wintney having experienced recurring flood events. Alongside wider risks associated with overheating, drought and pressure on critical infrastructure, this may increase infrastructure costs and constrain development in some locations.

Appendix 2 - Evidence base

Published evidence base reports are available on our New Hart Local Plan evidence page.

- Air Quality Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the potential air quality impacts of the spatial strategy on sensitive ecological sites and informs any mitigation measures required.

- Authority Monitoring Reports

  Published annually, these report on a range of issues including new development within the district, the implementation of current planning policies and progress on plan-making. These are published on our previous evidence page.

- Climate Impact Site Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the relative climate impacts, risks, opportunities and constraints associated with a long list of potential site options to inform site selection, policy development and site-specific mitigation measures.

- Ecological Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses ecological features of potential site options and the likely ecological impacts of development.

- Employment Land Review

  Assesses the quantity, quality and suitability of existing employment sites to inform the future role of existing employment areas and the need for additional employment land.

- Gaps Between Settlements Study (emerging)

  Assesses the contribution that land makes to maintaining the separate identity and physical separation of settlements and helps identify where designated gaps or other policy measures to avoid coalescence may be justified in the Local Plan.

- Green and Blue Infrastructure Study (emerging)

  Maps and assesses Hart's green and blue infrastructure network and identifies opportunities to protect, enhance and connect environmental, recreational and water-related assets. Green infrastructure needs to be delivered at all spatial scales from sub-regional to local level.

- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

  Assesses the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and identifies the level of pitch, plot and transit provision required across Hart.

- Habitats Regulations Assessment

  Hart benefits from a rich natural environment, including the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), which is internationally important for nature conservation.

  The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) set out the requirement to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of a Local Plan. The purpose of the HRA is to determine whether the Plan may result in any Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) on, or Adverse Effects on the Integrity of, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites (collectively known as Habitats Sites).

  A Habitats Regulations Assessment will assess whether the policies or proposals in the plan are likely to have a significant effect on any habitats or species protected under the Regulations, as well as to advise on appropriate policy mechanisms for delivering mitigation where adverse effects on site integrity may be identified. The findings of the assessment will inform future stages of Plan preparation and will be published alongside the next stage of the Local Plan.

- Heritage Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses potential site options to identify heritage assets and their significance, evaluate the potential impacts of development, and inform site selection and identification of site-specific mitigation measures.

- Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment

  Assesses Hart's future housing and employment needs, including affordable housing, specialist housing needs and employment land requirements.

- Indoor Built Facilities Assessment

  Assesses the quantity, quality, accessibility and future need for indoor sport and recreation facilities across Hart to identify future provision requirements and investment priorities.

- Infrastructure Delivery Plan Stage 1 (Stage 2 to follow)

  Stage 1 establishes a baseline understanding of existing infrastructure provision, planned investments, infrastructure constraints and opportunities across Hart. Stage 2 of the IDP will assess infrastructure requirements arising from the spatial strategy and identify delivery, funding and phasing requirements.

- Land Availability Assessment

  Identifies and assesses land that may be suitable, available and achievable for housing, employment and other forms of development, providing the starting point for further site selection and allocation decisions as the plan progresses. The Land availability assessment has itself drawn on other evidence including

the Brownfield Land Register and the Settlement Capacity and Intensification Study 2023.

- Landscape Character Assessment

  Identifies and describes variation in the character of the landscapes within Hart. This provides a framework to help protect and manage landscape character through identification of key characteristics, forces for change, landscape management guidelines and development guidelines for future decisions across the district.

- Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the landscape sensitivity of defined areas of land within the district to specific development typologies to inform future spatial planning and development management decisions.

- Open Space Study (emerging)

  Assesses the quantity, quality, accessibility and future need for parks, natural greenspaces, amenity greenspace, play provision, allotments and cemeteries across Hart to inform future open space standards, policy development and investment priorities.

- Parking standards (emerging)

  Revised/updated cycle and car parking standards to ensure alignment with national policy and up to date local evidence.

- Pitch Delivery Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the potential capacity of existing sites and other opportunities to help meet identified Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.

- Playing Pitch Strategy (emerging)

  Assesses the quantity, quality, capacity and future demand for playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities across Hart to identify priorities for future provision, enhancement and investment.

- Renewable Energy Study (emerging)

  Identifies and assesses opportunities for renewable and low-carbon energy development across Hart and identifies areas that may be suitable for future renewable energy generation and supporting infrastructure.

- Retail and Leisure Needs Study

  Assesses future retail and commercial leisure needs, reviews the hierarchy and boundaries of centres, and provides recommendations to support the future strategy and policy framework for Hart's centres.

- Self and Custom Build Register

  Records a register of individuals or associations looking for self and custom build housing in the district and informs our understanding of the potential demand for self and custom build housing in Hart. For information on Self and Custom Build see our Self-build and custom-build housing page and our Authority Monitoring Reports.

- Settlement Hierarchy and Boundary Review (Draft)

  Assesses the relative role, function, accessibility, service provision, growth opportunities and constraints of settlements across Hart. At the next stage it will review settlement boundaries to support further development of the spatial strategy.

- Strategic Environmental Assessment

  The New Hart Local Plan is supported by an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), which incorporates the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The purpose of the IIA is to assess the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the Local Plan and reasonable alternatives, helping to ensure that sustainability considerations are taken into account throughout plan preparation.

  The IIA is being undertaken in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and relevant Government Planning Practice Guidance. As required by the SEA Regulations, the Council consulted the statutory environmental bodies, namely Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, on the scope and level of detail of the assessment. The IIA Scoping Report was consulted upon between 30 June and 5 August 2026 and was also shared with neighbouring local authorities and other key stakeholders. Feedback received has informed the development of the assessment framework that will be used to assess the emerging Local Plan and reasonable alternatives.

  An Interim IIA Report has been published alongside this Local Plan content and evidence consultation. It provides an assessment of the draft vision, proposed spatial strategy and reasonable alternatives considered to date. The assessment will continue to evolve as the Local Plan progresses and will inform future stages of plan preparation.

- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the risk of flooding from rivers, surface water, groundwater, sewers and artificial sources across Hart to provide the evidence base for applying the Sequential Test and informing preparation of the new Local Plan. The Level 1 SFRA (2026) will provide a strategic assessment of flood risk across the district, whilst a future Level 2 SFRA will be prepared to undertake more detailed site-specific assessments and support application of the Exception Test where required.

- Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Study (emerging)

  Identifies and assesses potential Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) opportunities to support future growth and mitigate recreational impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).

- Strategic Transport Assessment

  Establishes a baseline understanding of transport conditions, accessibility, travel patterns and committed transport infrastructure across Hart. Future stages of the assessment will consider the transport impacts of planned growth, using transport modelling and site-specific assessments to identify mitigation measures and infrastructure requirements.

- Town Centre Health Check

  Assesses the current health of Hart's town, district and local centres, including their vitality, viability, occupancy levels.

- Water Cycle Study (emerging)

  Assesses the potential implications of planned growth on water resources, water supply, wastewater treatment, water quality and flood risk across Hart. The current Scoping Water Cycle Study provides a high-level assessment of constraints, opportunities and evidence gaps, whilst a Detailed Water Cycle Study will assess proposed development locations and growth options in greater detail to inform the Local Plan. With regards to a particular water supply issue affecting the west of Hart and into neighbouring areas, a separate joint study is being commissioned with Basingstoke and Deane and East Hampshire.

- Whole Plan Viability Assessment (emerging)

  Assesses the cumulative viability implications of the Local Plan's policies and development requirements to ensure that the Plan is deliverable and that contributions expected from development are appropriate and achievable.

Appendix 3 - Proposed Town, District & Local Centre Boundaries

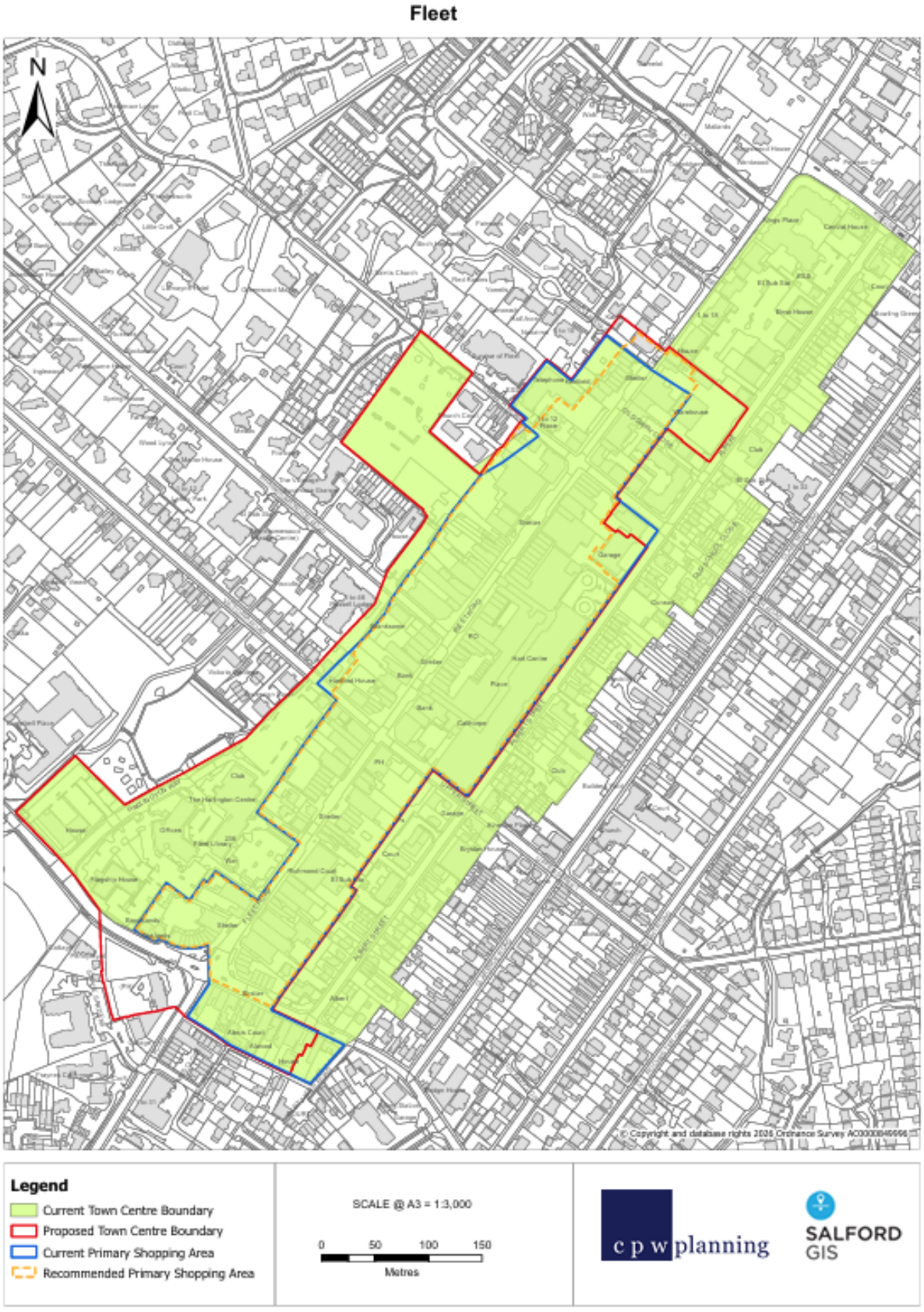


Figure 8: Fleet Town Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.

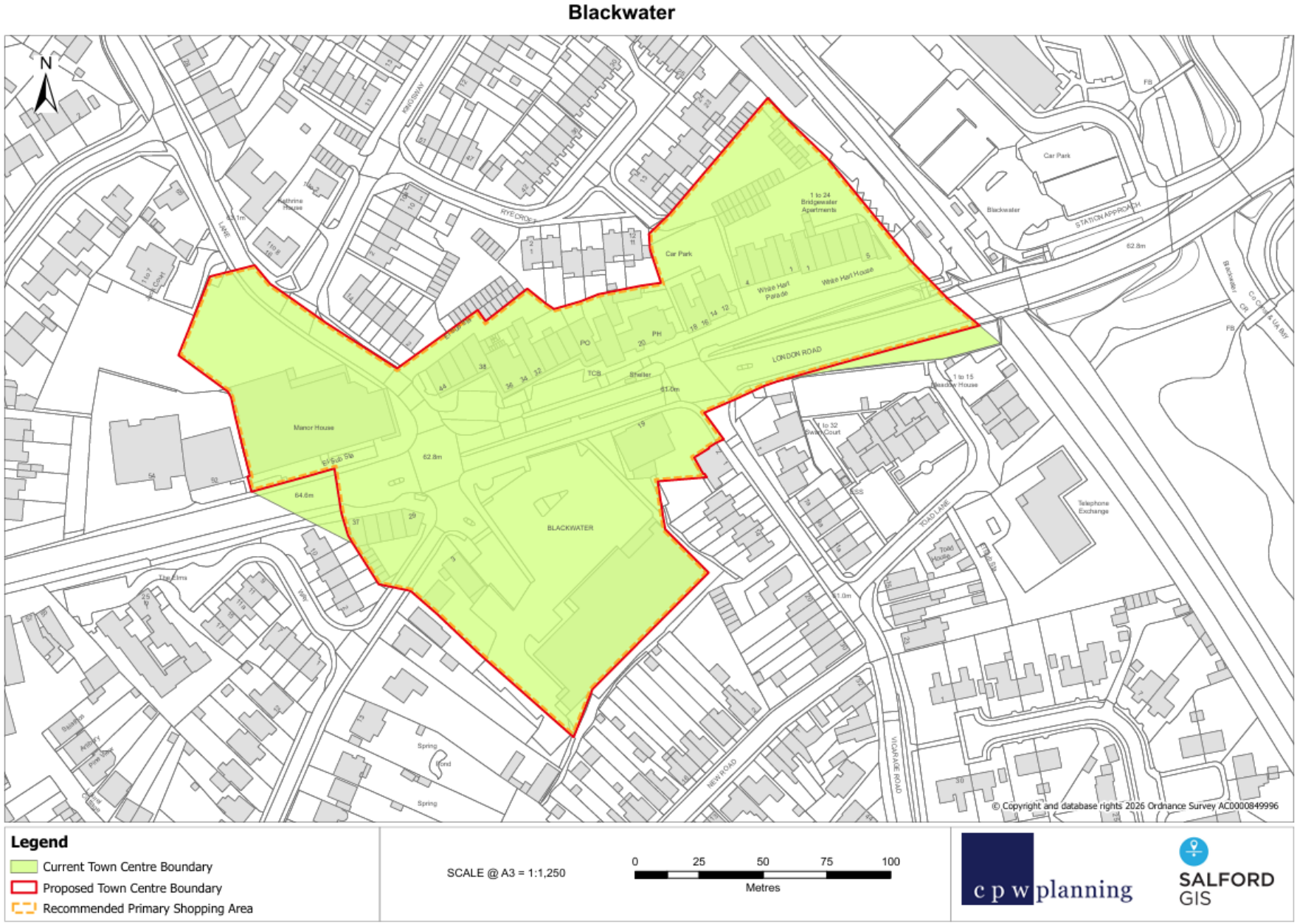


Figure 9: Blackwater District Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.

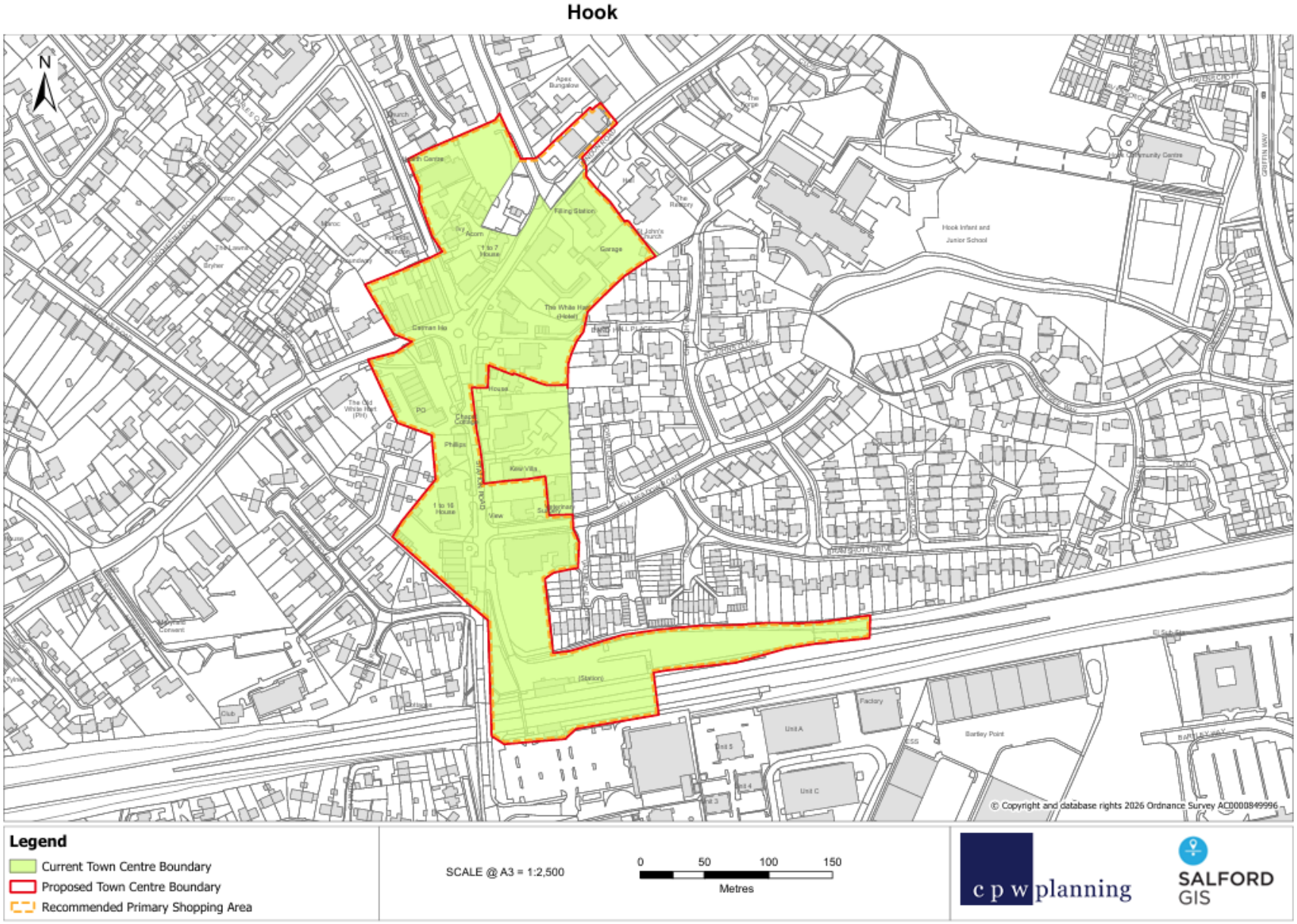


Figure 10: Hook District Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.

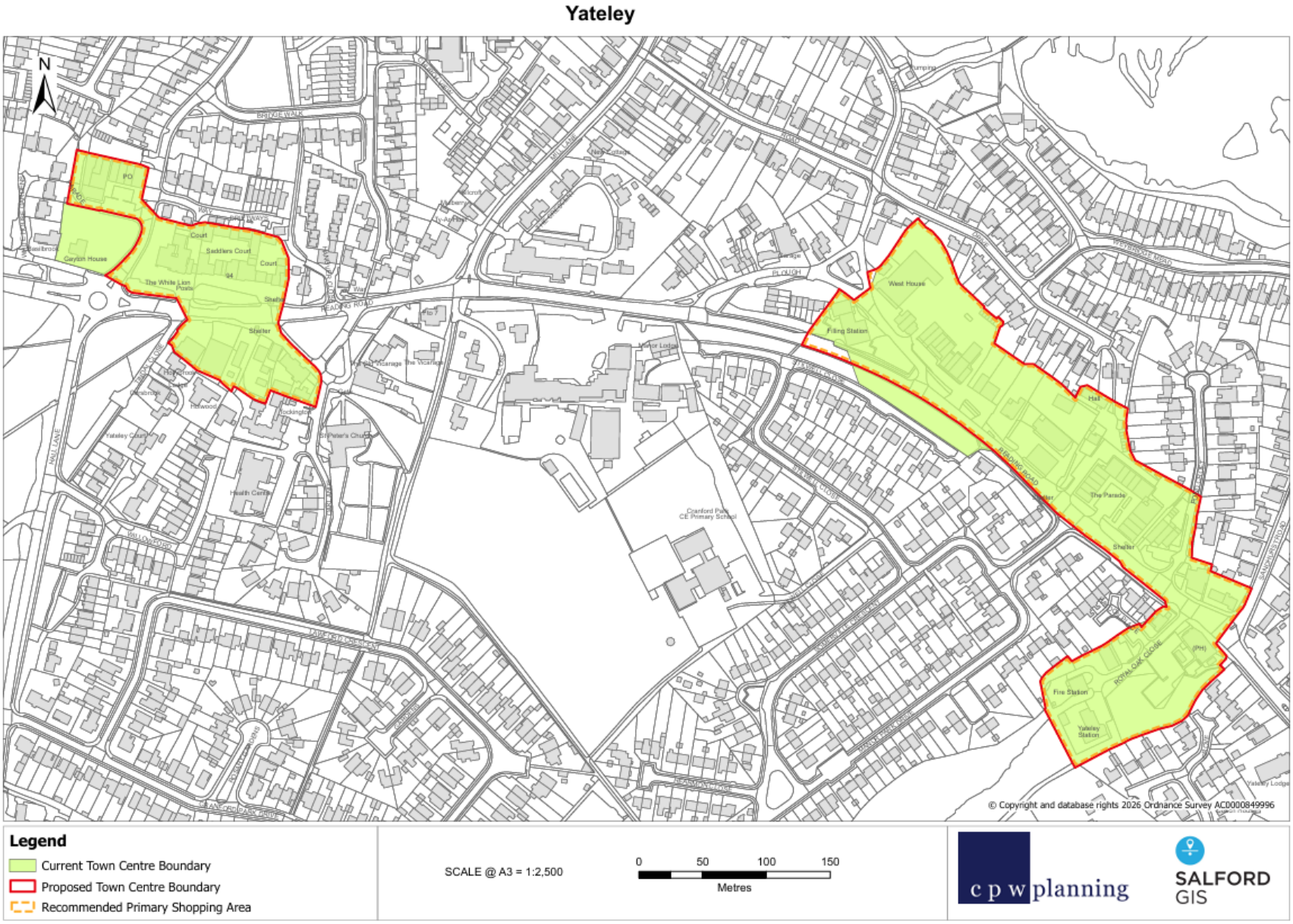


Figure 11: Yateley District Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.

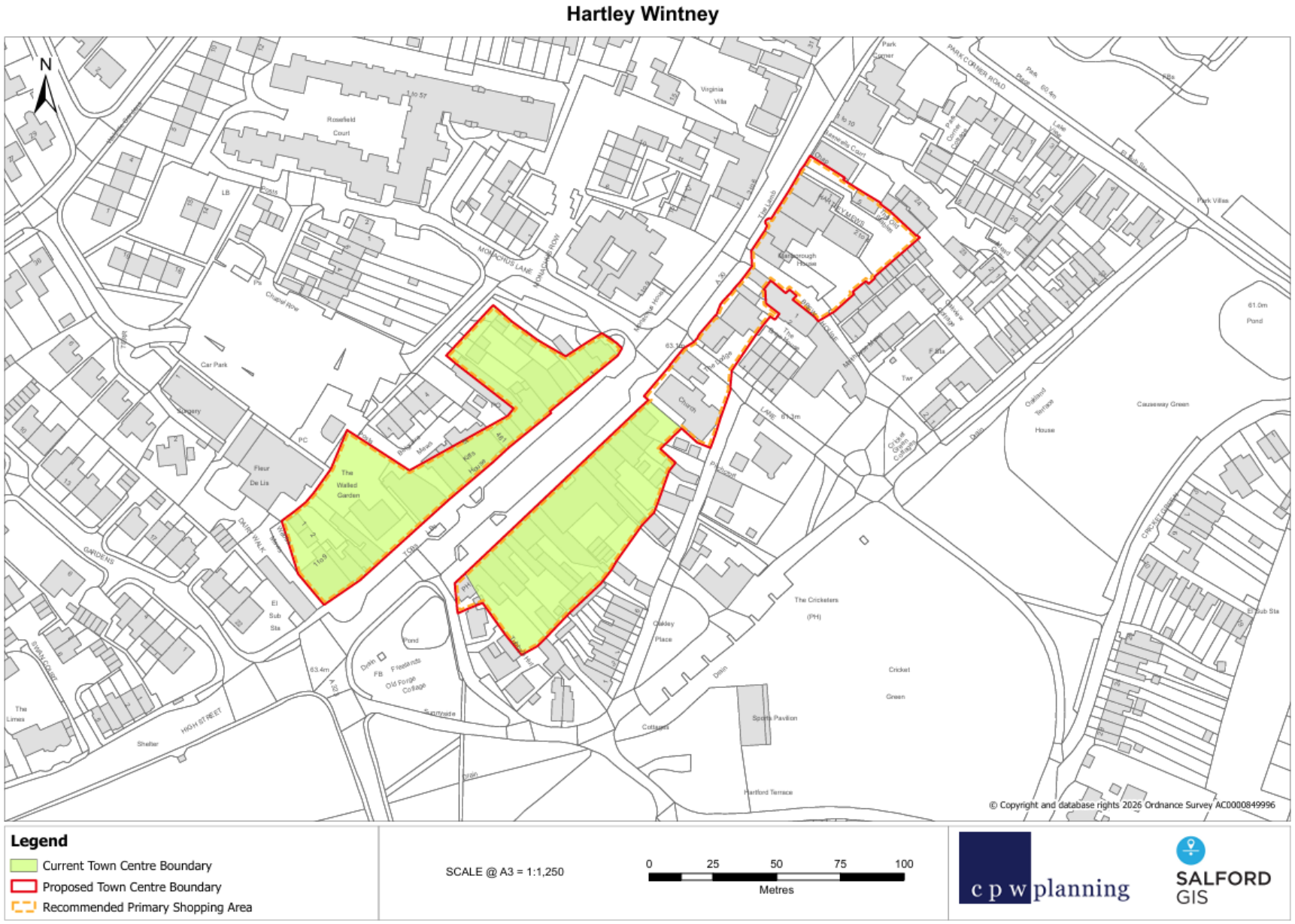


Figure 12: Hartley Wintney Local Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.

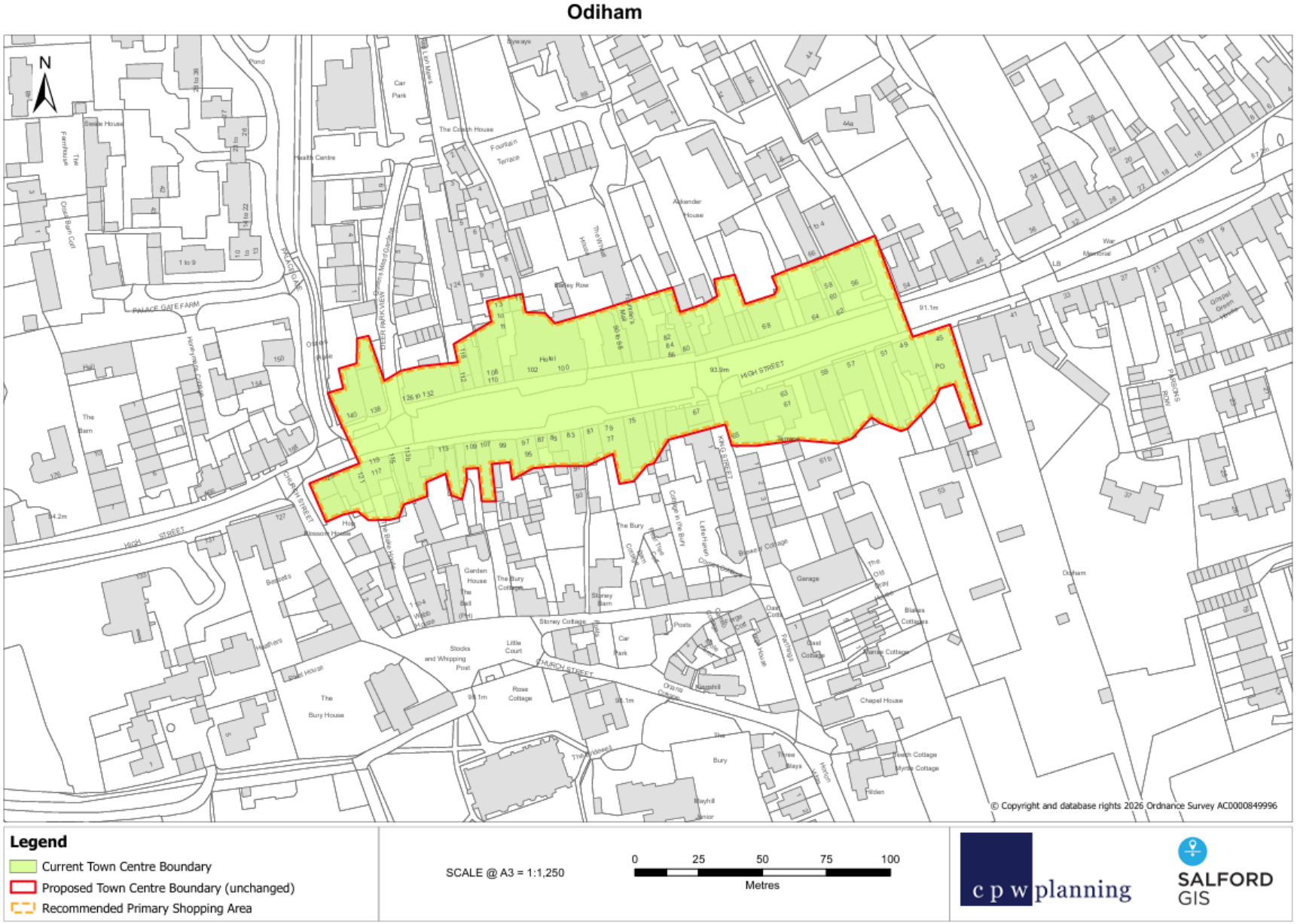


Figure 13: Odiham Local Centre: Proposed Boundaries Map.