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Addendum to Cherwell Green Belt Study

**Response to the Council's suggested Green Belt changes
subsequent to the Partial Review Plan Inspector's Post-Hearings
Advice Note**

Prepared by LUC
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Project Title: Response to the Council's Suggested Green Belt Changes subsequent to the Partial Review Plan Inspector's Post-Hearings Advice Note

Client: Cherwell District Council

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by Director
1	16.9.19	Draft	Richard Swann	Sarah Young	Sarah Young
2	19.9.19	Final	Richard Swann	Sarah Young	Sarah Young
3	26.9.19	Amendment to PR7a	Richard Swann	Sarah Young	Sarah Young



Context

- 1.1 Informed by the Cherwell Green Belt Study (LUC, April 2017), Addendum to Cherwell Green Belt Study (LUC, June 2017), and other evidence – including material relating to sustainability, environmental effects and housing need – Cherwell District Council published a Proposed Submission Local Plan in July 2017. This document, which constitutes a Partial Review of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan, identified proposals for the release of Green Belt land to accommodate housing need associated with the City of Oxford. The Submission Local Plan also included a document issued in February 2018 setting out Focused Changes and Minor Modifications to the July 2017 issue.
- 1.2 An Examination on the Local Plan Partial Review (Oxford's Unmet Housing Need) took place in February 2019. The Local Plan Examination Inspector's Post-Hearings Advice Note, issued in July 2019, accepted that Oxford's housing need provides the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify alterations to Green Belt boundaries; however, the proposed allocation for 410 homes to the south east of Woodstock (policy PR10) was found to be unsound. This has given rise to a necessity to assess the potential for alternative provision for these homes elsewhere.
- 1.3 Cherwell District Council has commissioned LUC to produce a further addendum to the Cherwell Green Belt Study, to comment on the positioning of revised Green Belt boundaries associated with three allocation policies:
 - PR7a – Land South East of Kidlington.
 - PR7b – Land at Stratfield Farm.
 - PR9 – Land West of Yarnton.
- 1.4 LUC was provided with draft plans identifying locations for development and for associated green infrastructure. Our comments on the boundaries for each of these proposed releases, with accompanying plans to show suggested boundary revisions, are set out in the following report.
- 1.5 The 'PR' references noted in brackets in the subheadings below are the reference numbers used for assessment parcels in the Cherwell Green Belt Study.

PR7a – South East of Kidlington (PR202 and part of PR178)

- 1.6 **Figure 1** below shows the proposed revised Green Belt boundaries which set out Cherwell District Council's suggested development area south-east of Kidlington, alongside those boundaries indicated in the Submission Local Plan.
- 1.7 The revised proposals suggest release of an additional hedged field to the south of the boundary indicated in the Submission Local Plan, together with a triangle of land to the west which forms part of the large field extending south to the Kidlington Roundabout. The hedged field was identified in the Green Belt Review as part of an area (within parcel PR178) which would, if released, result in *moderate-high* harm to the Green Belt purposes, whereas release of all the land down to the roundabout was assessed as *high* harm. The key consideration in identifying this reduced level of harm was that the impact on the settlement gap between Kidlington and Oxford would be lessened – i.e. by not extending the inset settlement any further south than the current edge of Kidlington. The hedgerow now proposed as the Green Belt boundary is no different in strength to the hedgerow proposed in the Submission Local Plan.
- 1.8 The triangle of land to the west was, along with the rest of the large field of which it forms part, rated at *high* harm, the boundary of the *high* harm area reflecting the presence of field boundaries. However it is recognised that if the hedged field to the east was released the triangle of land would be largely contained by inset development, and would therefore make a weaker contribution to the Green Belt purposes. The release of this area, with creation a new planted boundary, would not therefore significantly affect the remaining gap between Kidlington and Oxford.

- 1.9 Our addendum of June 2017 noted that the strength of remaining open land in PR178 as Green Belt would be reduced by release of land to the east of Bicester Road (i.e. in PR202 and PR178), with containment by inset development and major roads limiting connectivity with the wider countryside. The additional release of land would further erode the size of this contained area of open land but would not represent a step-change in Green Belt harm. As also noted in the 2017 addendum, it would be important to maximise openness and minimise urbanising elements (such as high fences), and to consider use of landscaping to assist with this. Material changes in land use such as for outdoor sport and recreation are identified in the latest version of the NPPF (at paragraph 146) as “not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”.
- 1.10 Subsequent to producing our comments in relation to PR7a the Council considered an alternative boundary and produced a revised plan which shows a slightly altered course for the proposed Green Belt boundary to the west of the existing hedgerow (which would follow the alignment of a former field boundary, removed during the 20th century). The Council's plan is shown in **Figure 2** below - the pink shaded area represents land to be released, with the green shaded and hatched area remaining in the Green Belt. This represents some further incremental erosion of the remaining Green Belt in this area, but the additional expansion of the development area is too small to make any significant difference to the level of harm to Green Belt purposes that would result from the release shown on **Figure 1**.

PR7b – Stratfield Farm (PR49)

- 1.11 **Figure 3** below shows the proposed revised Green Belt boundaries which set out Cherwell District Council's suggested development area at Stratfield Farm, alongside those boundaries indicated in the Submission Local Plan.
- 1.12 The additional field proposed for Green Belt release is located in the central part of parcel PR49 that was rated at *low-moderate* for harm. The field boundary hedgerow would mark a clear Green Belt edge, and although the advancement of the inset settlement edge by c.70m would not lead to a significant change in harm, either in terms of impact on the Green Belt purposes or strength of the Green Belt boundary, increased containment of the small block of trees and grassland alongside Stratfield Farm would weaken its role as a boundary feature.
- 1.13 **Figure 4** indicates a suggested minor amendment to the proposed Green Belt boundary that reduces the degree to which the block of trees and grassland would be enclosed by inset development. Increasing connectivity between this area – which was identified in NERC Act S41 habitat data as a traditional orchard and possible priority grassland – and adjacent remaining open land in PR49 would also be beneficial in terms of biodiversity and would provide a buffer to the woodland edge.




PR9 – West of Yarnton (PR51a and PR51b)

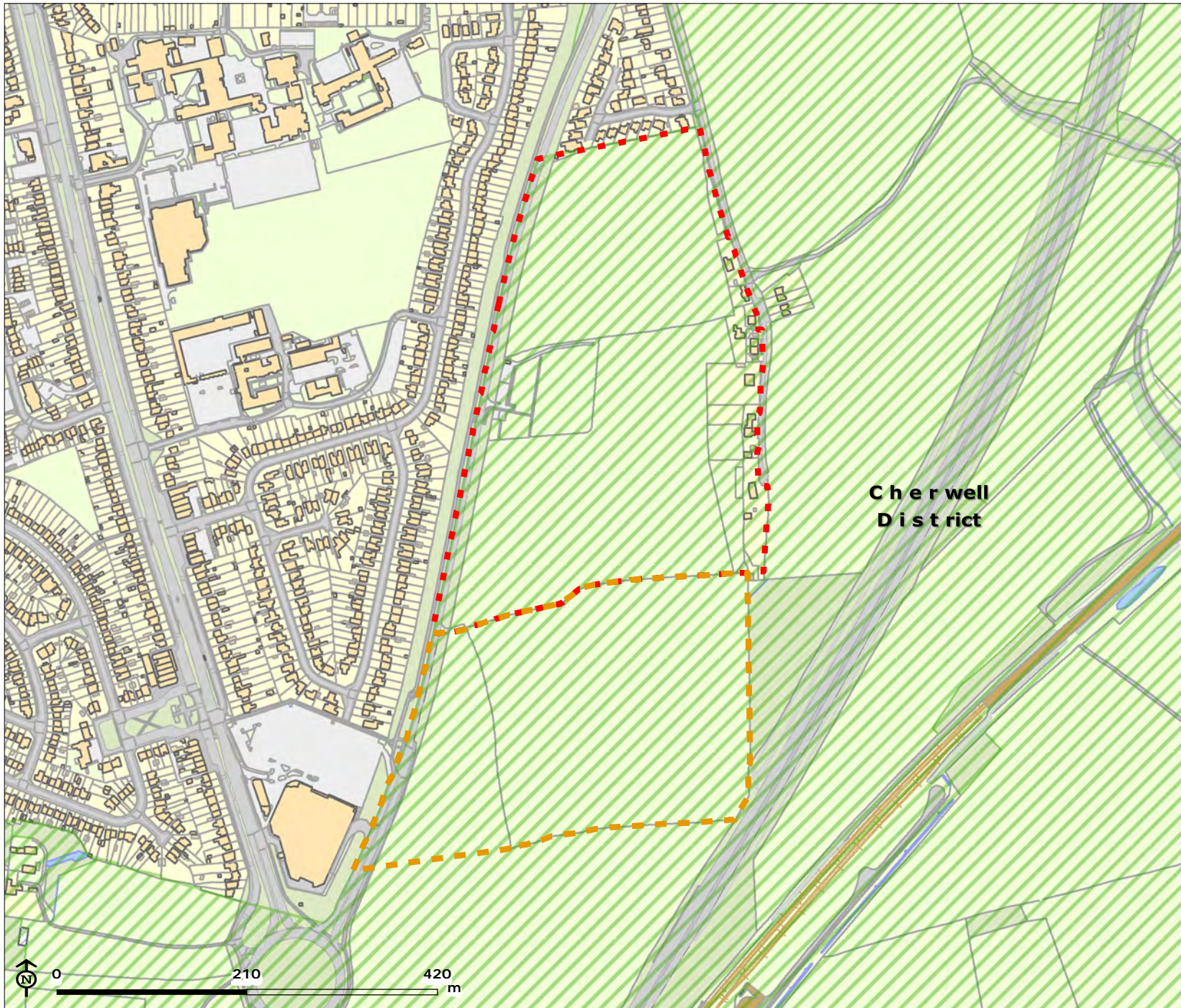
- 1.14 **Figure 5** below shows the boundary for PR9 indicated in the Submission Local Plan. **Figure 6** (supplied by Cherwell District Council) shows the Council's proposed amended boundary and also indicates an adjacent area to the east, proposed for retention in the Green Belt, which would form a zone of parkland between the urban edge and agricultural land beyond, and an area of woodland which would similarly provide a buffer to the north.
- 1.15 The Submission Local Plan's proposed western boundary for the PR9 Green Belt release followed existing field boundaries (other than a short stretch where a new school was proposed) contained between the more clearly defined area to the north and existing inset development to the south. Within PR51b, these boundaries also mark a distinction between areas closer to the inset settlement of Yarnton, rated at *moderate* and *moderate-high* harm, and land to the west which was rated at *high* harm.

- 1.16 The rising landform and absence of field boundaries in the area into which further settlement expansion is proposed are the reason for the higher harm rating, but some gradation can be identified. There is a distinction between the more gentle lower slopes on which development is proposed and the steeper hillside beyond, which is more clearly countryside separate from the inset settlement edge. The Cherwell Green Belt Study also noted that higher ground in parcel PR51b formed part of the ring of hills that constitutes a key element in Oxford's historic setting, contributing to the preservation of the City's setting and special character (the 4th Green Belt purpose), but that the lower slopes were also significant in this respect.
- 1.17 The change in slope is not dramatic, so the precise location of a new boundary would make little difference in Green Belt terms, but a new Green Belt edge approximating to the lower end of this topography (at around the 75m contour) would nonetheless define an area in which harm to the Green Belt purposes, although greater than that associated with the formerly proposed release, would be lower than the harm associated with the release of the higher slopes.
- 1.18 Ideally the new Green Belt boundary should represent a clear distinction between the inset residential area and adjacent Green Belt land. It should lie outside of residential curtilages, so that it can be managed in a way that serves this purpose. It is appropriate that the proposed parkland and woodland areas should remain as Green Belt, where they have the potential to provide improvements to environmental quality and accessibility to help offset the impact of release of land (a requirement noted at paragraph 138 of the NPPF).
- 1.19 Any smaller areas of open land that lie between the suggested parkland and new built development, and which would be likely to have a stronger physical association with the developed area than with the wider countryside, could form part of the Green Belt release, in preference to the creation of a more convoluted boundary following property curtilages. Any proposed woodland blocks should remain within the Green Belt, so that their contribution to preventing countryside encroachment has greater protection. Any land identified for potential outdoor sports should also remain in the Green Belt, but urbanising elements should be minimised, so as to preserve Green Belt openness.

Figure 1

South East Kidlington
Proposed Boundary

-  Green Belt
-  Potential removal from Green Belt – Submission Local Plan 2017
-  CDC potential additional removal from Green Belt



Source: OS, LUC,
Cherwell District Council

Map Scale @ A4: 1:6,000



Figure 2

South east Kidlington amended boundary proposal - supplied by Cherwell District Council

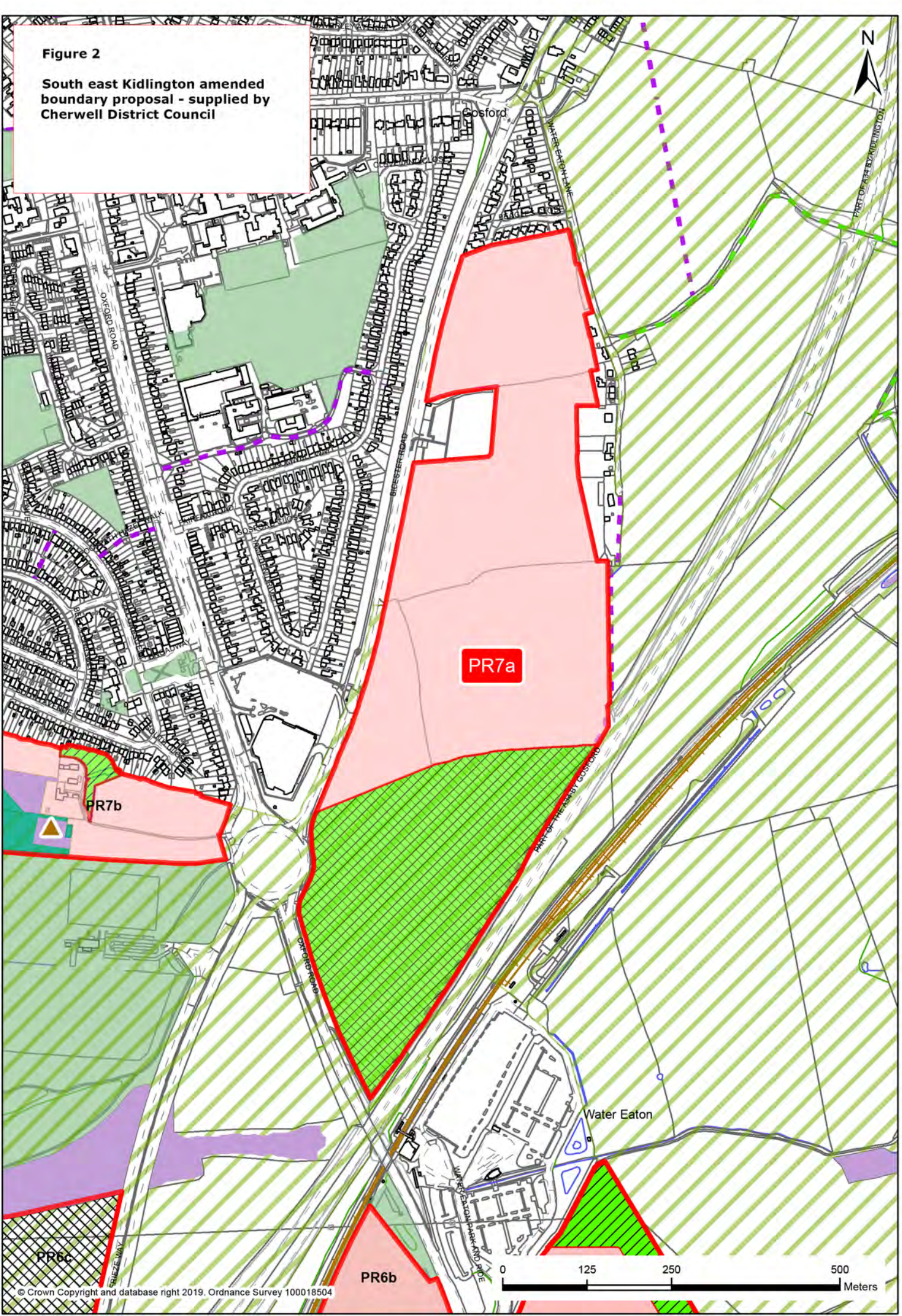



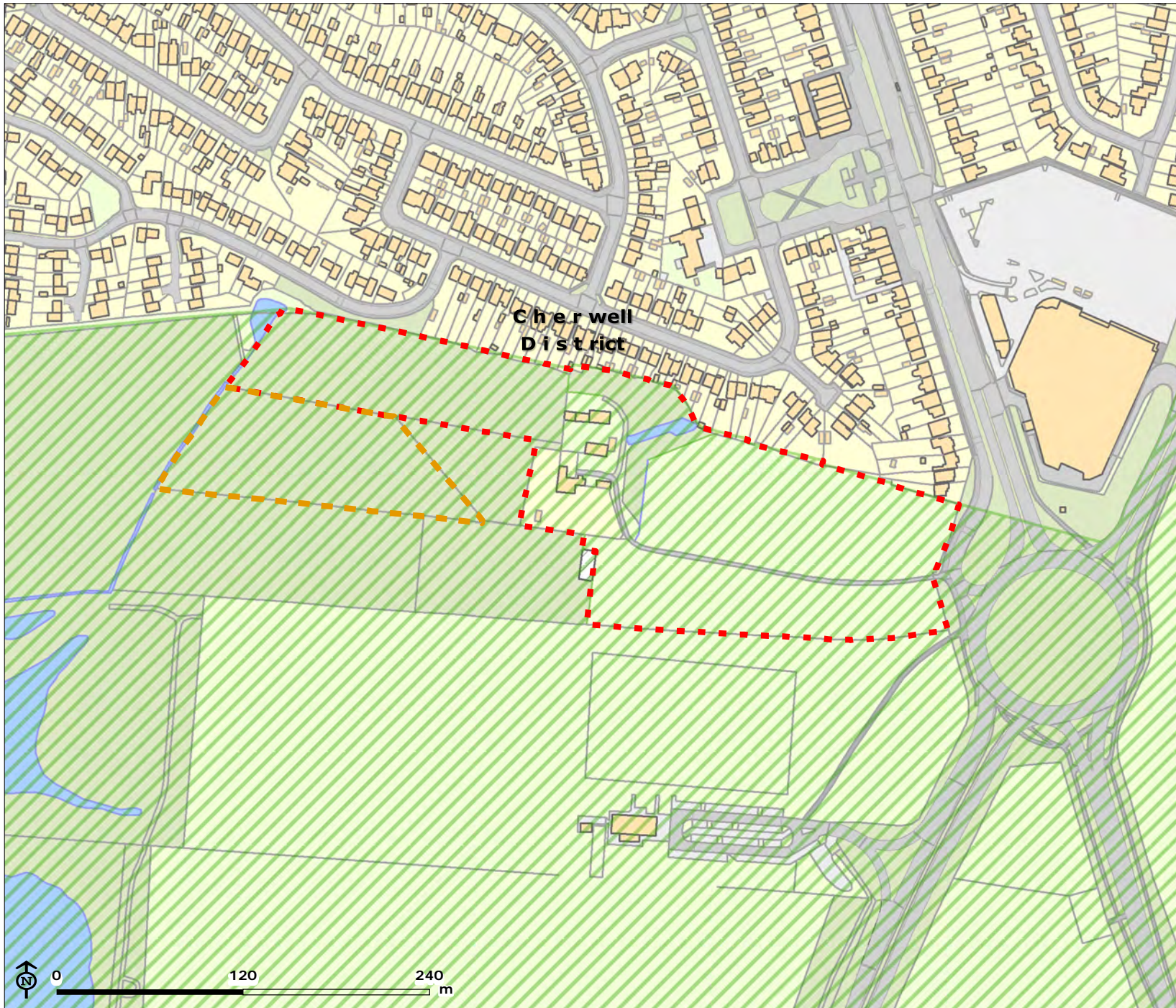


Figure 3

Stratfield Farm Proposed Boundary

-  Green Belt
-  Potential removal from Green Belt – Submission Local Plan 2017
-  CDC potential additional removal from Green Belt






Source: OS, LUC,
Cherwell District Council

Map Scale @ A4: 1:3,500



Figure 4

Stratfield Farm Proposed Boundary

-  Green Belt
-  Potential removal from Green Belt – Submission Local Plan 2017
-  LUC suggested Green Belt boundary






Source: OS, LUC,
Cherwell District Council

Map Scale @ A4: 1:3,500

Figure 5

Yarnton Proposed Boundary

-  Green Belt
-  Potential removal from Green Belt – Submission Local Plan 2017
-  CDC proposed built development



Source: OS, LUC, Cherwell District Council

Map Scale @ A4: 1:7,000



